INTERVENTION SOCIOLOGY : HISTORY AND FOUNDATIONS

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Abstract

Our intention is to state the main characteristics of intervention sociology, from its origins, the beginnings of which can be situated in Frédéric Le Play's monographic work carried out 150 years ago, till its present forms. Rather seldom mentioned in sociological literature or if so in the course of a paragraph or in methodological appendixes, intervention sociology, although widely practised outside the academic field, today still lacks legibility and institutional recognition. By proposing a thorough reading of the main theories and conceptions developed during the past two centuries, our article aims at explaining, through the sociological prism, the fundamental concepts of intervention sociology.

Keywords

Social demand – Sociology and monograph – Sociology and empiricism – Maieutics and self-analysis – Immersion and intersubjectivity.

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INTRODUCTION : THE POSTURES OF INTERVENTION

The sociological analysis of intervention may raise the usual questions to any scientific debate, yet clarifying the concrete ways of actually managing an intervention raises more reserves and interrogations. As far as legitimacy is concerned, the intervention posture should, in the opinion of some, be reserved for experts¹ and other real world professionals, leaving the primacy of the scientific interpretation of social phenomena to sociologists (Lapeyronnie, 2004²). For the supporters of this “*radical academism*”, sociology must be regarded first of all in the Durkheimian and Weberian manner, that is to say “*from its exteriority and its overhanging posture*” (Ibid, p.628) and less as the product of an intersubjective dialogue with the social actors. Intervention should thus be the prerogative of practitioners and should not be assimilated to Sociology, lest the latter might be dissolved in the former. Our posture as an intervention sociologist doesn't indeed retain this dichotomy.

¹ That is to say those who, when facing a problematic situation which cannot be overcome by the usual professional practice, resort to a specialist knowledge that leads to an advice given to the sponsors in order to help them in their decision taking (Trépos, 1996, p.15)

² For the author, an increasing part of the French Sociology would even be more and more marked by a kind of “*radical academism*”. In accordance with this standpoint, the sociologist should engage in a preliminary work of deconstruction and reflexivity, so that he will not have to “*submit to the common sense*” and to “*the illusion of instant knowledge*” (Lapeyronnie, 2004, p.623). The consequence of this radical posture is “*To see in the theory the source of an objective truth, whereas the actors' experience and speech can only be conceived as illusions, these illusions being destined to be refuted by the “sociological unveiling”*” (2004, p.624)

There is no ground for ideologically separating theory from practice, just as there is no ground for opposing the finalities of sociology, in the service of science and/or society (Montrache, 2010). Scientific posture and manner of conceiving the job of sociologist, intervention sociology is a science that cannot be reduced to a “*mere prolongation of a research practice, to a by-product*” (Osty, 2001, p.168). Our intention, in this article, is to state the main characteristics of this branch of sociology, from its origins, the beginnings of which can be situated in the monographic works achieved by Frederic Le Play 150 years ago, till its updated form of today. Rarely mentioned in the French sociological literature, or if so only in a paragraph or in methodological appendixes – when the sociologist evokes it, it is most of the time to specify an empirical or clinical posture (Crozier and Friedberg 1977, Friedberg 2007) – intervention sociology, although widely practised outside the academic field (Piriou, 2006), today lacks legibility and institutional recognition. On this account, the most recent works, particularly those by Herreros (2000 republished in 2009, 2008), by Vrancken and Kutty (2001³), by Gilbert (2009), or else by Bernardeau Moreau (2013) constitute a particularly useful scientific source. Before them, Antoine Savoye had written his doctoral thesis on this subject in 1979, and Rémi Hess a whole book published in 1981. In the sight of an obviously scarce literature, defining the outlines of this sociology is far from being easy. The most diverse theoretical currents can openly claim kinship with it, or end up, sometimes unknowingly, under the same banner⁴. But before going any further on the questions of concepts and postures, we ought to get back to the key moments likely to shed light on the origins of intervention sociology. Schematically, we can say, with Antoine Savoye (1979) and Rémi Hess (1981) that intervention sociology draws its foundations from three main theoretical currents – clinical sociology, psycho-sociology and micro-sociology – admittedly different in their concepts, but convergent in their methodological approaches. The idea of intervention and its first forms of theorization have been carried notably by the American clinical sociology, then by the French sociology, since the nineties, with authors such as Henriquez and De Gaulejac. Be it Alinsky with his very “intrusive”⁵ intervention methods, Dolci and his studies on the Sicilian people, Mc Clung Lee and his works on *humanist sociology*⁶, or else Paulo Freire, and after him Michel Segquier at the origin of the concept of “*consciousness arousing survey*”⁷, all these approaches call for a more concrete connection between the researchers and their objects/subjects in the aim of acting on the organization and striving for its change. In a more psycho-sociological approach, Kurt Lewin and his research-action method, Elliot Jacques and socio-analysis, Jacob Levy Moreno and sociometry, or else Carl Rogers and the non-directivity theory act as forerunners. In France, these works will get

³ It should be noted that Vrancken and Kutty’s work juxtaposes sociology and intervention more than it joins them into a unified concept.

⁴ On this subject, see the extremely wide and heterogeneous classification by Minguet (2001) and its criticism by Herreros (2009, p. 34-35) deploring the confusion of the classifications between the sociologies focusing on intervention analysis (analytical classification) and the sociologies focusing on intervention methods (methodological classification).

⁵ The sociologist should aim at creating agitation and let individuals believe that they cannot manage by themselves. In this somewhat perverse game, he tries to become indispensable. And to reach that goal, all is permitted, from self-triggered agitation to deliberately caused conflict, so that the sociologist will appear as the only possible solution to solve the problem: “*A problem is something one has a hold on*”, Alinsky writes, (...) *What does the organizer do ? He changes into a problem what was only a bad situation*” (Alinsky, 1978, p.173). The researcher is also a manipulator. Thus, his work consists in making use of this power on the organization to keep his position in it.

⁶ In “*Multi-valent Man*”, his book published in 1966, Lee distinguishes the classical sociologist from the intervention sociologist who directly takes part in the situations he studies. For him, some social objects can only be approached by the immersion of the sociologist.

⁷ This research, whose purpose remains mainly political (helping oppressed masses to free themselves from the capitalist yoke), intends to induce individuals to take part in their own awareness inducing process. By mobilizing the tools of self-reflectivity, the groups take part in the survey at each step of its development and hold the entire power of decision over its orientations (the main points of this approach are taken up in Humbert C. and Merlo J.’s book, 1978, *The awareness inducing survey. Problems and methods*, L’Harmattan, Inodep-Documents de travail).

an important response thanks to researchers such as Max Pagès, Vincent De Gaulejac, George Lapassade or else Jean Dubost⁸. For psycho-sociologists, intervening means acting in a social organization at the request of the latter, with the aim of facilitating its change (Lapassade, 2006, p.51). It is a matter of encouraging the group's self-management and helping them find solutions to their problems. The psycho-sociologist is first and foremost the one who, in his practice, attributes an essential role to the "*social speech*" (Ibid, p.63). Basically, all these clinical and psycho-sociological theories have a common base, which is specific to all intervention practices: their aim is, through method and some pragmatic posture, to induce the group to take responsibility for itself and develop self-awareness, in order to allow the development of its autonomy and of its ability to manage its conflicts.

By proposing a longitudinal reading of the main theories and conceptions developed during the past two centuries, our article aims at explaining, through the sociological prism, the fundamental concepts of intervention sociology. We shall therefore distinguish two parts. The first part intends to be first and foremost historical by chronologically recalling the main scientific sources that have fed the various currents attached to the intervention posture. Our intention is not so much as to criticize the considerable theoretical and paradigmatic contributions of the scientific approaches. In our reflexion on the historical foundations of sociological intervention, we shall principally deal with an analysis of the methods and postures claimed by these major sociological currents which give substance to the intervention. The outlines of the intervention posture will be specified in the second part of this article. There, by referring to the various sociological currents that found an echo in France (institutional analysis, sociological intervention and strategic analysis) and by convening sociologists whose work is based on life experience such as Dubet, Dubost, De Gaulejac, Hanique and Herreros, we shall state the main characteristic features of this intervention sociology. From the formulated request to the uncomfortable exercise of restitution, a set of criteria will allow it to be better defined and discussed. We think that this sociological approach, laden with an already long history, is destined to occupy a more and more important place in the coming years, as the questions on the professionalization of university courses find a wider echo among those who lead them and among all those who, questioning the social sciences, wish to find there answers to the difficulties of their everyday life. We shall conclude our article by discussing the propensity of intervention sociology to achieve a more general approach. If the knowledge induced by the immersion in situation should be useful primarily to the concerned individuals, it is however, as Schnapper points out, only one of the data on which the effort of intelligibility can be founded. Beyond this, one ought to be able to situate, as much as possible, the organization in a more general context.

ORIGINALLY, A MONOGRAPHIC AND EMPIRICAL SOCIOLOGY

We tend too often to consider, Vranken and Kutty wrote (2001, p.13), that intervention sociology rests on three currents : Lapassade and Loureau's institutionalism, Touraine's actionalism and Crozier's strategy. Yet, to understand intervention sociology, it is useful to go back further in time, to get back to its origins, to put it in perspective with the currents it partly stems from. As we have seen in the introduction, intervention sociology takes its inspiration from very diverse sources at the boundary between social and human sciences. On the sociological point of view, we can, with Savoye (1979) and Hess (1981), situate its beginnings in Le Play's monographic micro-sociology, taken over by the American empiricist sociologists, notably from the Chicago school, then re-energized in Europe by institutional

⁸ In this connection, one may read the synthesis of these works in the books by Jean Dubost, 1987, *The psycho-sociological intervention*, Paris, PUF – 2006, *Social analysis and intervention sociologies*, Paris, L'Harmattan, and by George Lapassade, 2006, *Groups Organizations Institutions*, Paris, Economica, Anthropos.

analysis, sociological interventionism and strategic analysis. All these approaches share the same preference for a micro-sociological reading, bearing their interest on the individual as subject, but also as actor, and giving greater place to direct observation from inside the social situations and restricted groups. For them, sociology should not be restrained to explaining and understanding, it should also allow action.

The family microcosm as the mirror of society

“Only the direct observation of facts can, in the scientific matter, lead to rigorous conclusions and make them accepted” (Le Play, 1862). A former professor at l’École des Mines, Le Play has left his mark on the world of engineering as well as the world of sociology in general, even though his work hasn’t always found the echo it deserved. All along his career as a professor and researcher, Le Play endeavoured to reconcile technological abilities with sociological reasoning. The engineer is a highly skilled technician, he asserts, but he must also be a thinker of the social matter⁹. To the scientific thinking of the technician, he joins the sociological sensibility of the pragmatist. If, in fact, Le Play can be considered as a precursor in intervention sociology, it is because he has conducted numerous monographic surveys with the utmost methodological rigour. At a time when sociology is built from social philosophy – Comtian positivism asserts itself in Europe while the academic recognition of sociology by Durkheim still has to come – this author breaks with the intellectual and overhanging thinking by multiplying micro-social studies. He wrote in 1848 “*It didn’t take long for me to recognize the inadequacy of the theoretical views which seemed to condemn workshop practice, and I owe the more accurate knowledge I could acquire almost exclusively to my relations with the workers*” (1848, p.12). Later, he adds : “*In order to acquire a thorough knowledge of the phenomena particular to each kind of workshop, I often had to stay in close contact with the workers for days and nights*” (1881, p.5-6). His monographic surveys focus on the social organization of the minors in high Harz, North Germany (in 1829, Le Play is then a student in engineering), on the Paris carpenters, some of them being members of the French guild “*Les compagnons du devoir*” (craftsmen touring France after their apprenticeship) (1856), on the roofers and glaziers of Savoie (1857) or else on the institutionalization of the Parisian bakers (1859) for whom Le Play advocates a vast policy of liberalization. In 1855, he publishes a widely praised book on the “*European workers*” and instils the progressive idea of a large-scale social reflection on the worker’s world in the industrial era. Armed with his usual inquiry tools (observation grids, counting and inventory forms, interviews and life accounts), Le Play becomes a master in the use of direct observation. In order to give a thorough statement of the social facts contained within a monograph, he writes, two requirements must be fulfilled : support and confidence. The members of a family will willingly lend themselves to observation and to a thorough survey “*provided they realize that the observer only tries to learn about the condition of the working classes to establish, by means of fact, the principles that will allow to improve it*” (1862, p.15). Contrary to other researchers of his time, such as Villermé observing the worker more than sharing his life¹⁰, Le Play enjoys mingling with the working class, with whom he shares every moment of his life. His hypothesis, as Savoye specifies (1981, p.316-317), is to assert that the state of a society can undergo an analysis from the direct study of a micro-social unit

⁹ With him arises the idea of “*The social engineer*”.

¹⁰ Villermé’s words describing his surveys show the difference of posture with Le Play. He is an observer witnessing the workers’ lives, but not really sharing their existence: “*I followed the worker from his workshop to his home. I went in with him, I studied him in the midst of his family; I attended his meals. I did more : I had seen him in his work and in his home, I wanted to see him in his entertainments, observe him in his meeting places. There, listening to his conversations, taking part in them sometimes, I was, without his knowing it, the confidant of his joys and his complaints, of its regrets and his hopes*”(1989, p.81-82 quoted by David, 2006, p.99).

provided the latter is thoroughly selected (the working family as far as he is concerned). The family microcosm is like a mirror, a reflection of the tensions and contradictions of the society as a whole. From then on, the point is to systematize the direct observation of singular social situations, and then go back to the society as a whole¹¹. At a time when workers' protest movements are increasing, Le Play and his successors' works will very quickly constitute, for the authorities, a useful source of information. But while they arouse interest, they also sustain mistrust, notably from the academic institutions. Some reproach the Le Playsian method its systematic use of too descriptive and singular monographic analyses¹². Sociologists, first and foremost Durkheim, but also Simiand and Bourgin, do not condemn it but question its relevance. By circumscribing analysis to case studies alone, they dispute a posture that prevents globalising scope. They reproach him with his describing without explaining. In short, with not doing science. If these criticisms¹³ are sometimes well founded, they can also be the source of a constructive debate¹⁴. Contrary to sociological positivism which advocates the objectification of knowledge in the study of social facts, Le Play advocates a qualitative and sensitive analysis of cases typically representative of the emerging working class. His work will be continued by sociologists working together within the International society of practical studies for social economy founded in 1856. Tourville, notably, carries out a nomenclature of social facts (1883) based on a large-scale monographic sociology. Cheysson mobilizes the monographic framework for the study of the community and of the workshop (1896)¹⁵. Even though resorting to monographic surveys is not entirely new (see Parent-Duchatelet on prostitution in 1836, Flora on the English proletariat in 1840, Focillon on soap factory workers in 1859), Le Play is the first to “*systematize his investigation approach*” (Savoye, 1994, p.54) by elaborating the monographic method. This is what makes Le Playsian sociology an interventionist sociology, because it studies social facts in the context of here and now (Hess, 1981, p.94). By intending to make a social worker of the engineer, Le Play claims the operational effectiveness of sociology and the subjectivity of the researcher. He advocates the qualitative approach by massively resorting to monographs. He achieves a sensitive sociology insofar as he positions himself close to the supposedly representative actors of the changing society. Le Play's sociology intends to be resolutely micro-logical by relying on the thorough study of concrete facts observed from within.

The American empiricism and the ambivalence of field sociology.

The genesis of intervention sociology indeed leads us to the Le Playsian conceptions, yet these are only “*links in a chain*” (Savoye, 1979, p.205) which starts with the first studies of the working-class. To follow the evolution of intervention sociology, Herreros stresses (2008, p.84), we ought to turn towards the Anglo-Saxon tradition, notably the American tradition. The continuation mostly resides in the forms of qualitative surveys which will be used by

¹¹ Le Play's scientific approach thus consists in building social indicators based on the home economy of workers' families (budget of expenditure and receipts, time spent in factory work, in house chores, in wood gathering etc...)

¹² It is the case of the statisticians Forville and Block, who consider the method too uncertain.

¹³ For Savoye and Audren, the reason for these criticisms is very contextual. Indeed, it comes from an overvaluing of the “*abstract theorization — characteristic of the traditional philosophical approach — to the detriment of the reflexion founded on a direct and sensitive knowledge of concrete facts especially observed for study purposes*” (2008, p.19). But another more political and probably more radical criticism also explains the poor echo Le Play's works will subsequently encounter. In the midst of the Republican surge, his ideas tainted with conservative catholicism and his call for a return to a traditional family are badly received (Le Play notably calls for the “Decalogue” explaining the ten moral and religious commandments, and longs for the return of the “*founding family*”).

¹⁴ See about it the analysis by Tarde and Worms who acknowledge the usefulness and the validity of monographic surveys.

¹⁵ Let us also cite William Berthault on the striking unionists in 1887, Lucien Fèvre on the Ruhr workers in the 1890's, Maurice Bellon on the glassworkers of Hirschberg in 1891, Jacques de Bellefond on the Labour crises in Montceau-les-Mines between 1899 and 1901.

researchers to approach and interpret the social world. Following Le Play, the empiricist current of the American sociologists of the Chicago School will notably win renown. From its very beginning, the latter cultivate a pragmatic posture and a strong interest for concrete society problems. Contrary to the European sociology of Comtian and Durkheimian influence whose essential reflexions revolve around the whole social system, the Americans are, from the beginning, gained by interpersonal relationships. They put side by side, as if it were obvious, disciplines such as philosophy, sociology and psychology. The disciplinary boundaries being less marked, more pervious, the perception of the sociologist as a social practitioner cultivating a proximity with the other social sciences, even human sciences, is widely accepted. Concerned with the racial and ethnical issues, the young American nation is building itself and doesn't have, like its European elder counterparts, a sufficiently long history to feed macro-sociological visions. If social philosophy, inspired by the thoughts of Montesquieu and Montaigne, and more generally by the spirit of the Enlightenment, become implanted on the American continent, it rapidly turns toward a more concrete and less speculative social thought. In 1892, Albion Small becomes the first professor at the head of the newly created sociological department of Chicago. He urges his students to carry out as many active researches as possible. The book he publishes in 1894 with George Vincent – “*An introduction to the study of society*” – comprises notably two chapters specifically dedicated to the empirical conducting of sociology. Cooley, who succeeds him, is convinced that society cannot be understood without taking into account the thinking subject interpreting the world. This view leads its author to question a scientific reading that would not also be psychological¹⁶. These authors¹⁷ will apply themselves to developing a micro-sociology by concentrating their researches on restricted groups (districts, small towns, communities) having great difficulties of integration due to immigration, alcoholism, drugs, poverty etc... The study of human beings must begin with observations and behaviourist description, and search for “*the meaning that the social actors give of their behaviours and of the situation they happen to be in*” (Simon, 1991, p.435). By positioning the researcher close to the actors, all these works have the same foundation : they attribute to individual experience an active place in the social evolution and in the sociological understanding. They thus mark the starting point of an empirical tradition which is characteristic of the origins of American sociology¹⁸. After the time of the founders comes the next generation, among which Thomas illustrates himself with his first mass studies. He publishes, with his associate Znaniecki, a five volume work containing numerous life stories and extremely precise interviews (“*The Polish farmer in Europe and America*” is published between 1918 and 1920). In 1921, Park publishes with Burgess a book “*Introduction to the science of sociology*”, which will be the reference for future generations of students eager to achieve what Park calls “*real field researches*”. These works will inspire a series of monographs achieved by his students, Stonequist on the “*marginal man*”, Anderson on the “*hobos*”, Wirth on Jews, Zorbaugh on residents of smart areas. But contrary to a more accomplished interventionist posture, the direct observation advocated by the Chicago School researchers doesn't at all imply a participating immersion of the sociologist. Indeed, very few sociologists will really take part

¹⁶ He will notably be at the origin of the *looking-glass self* concept, the idea that the image of oneself builds itself in a mirror which is the eye of the others.

¹⁷ With Dubois, first American black sociologist, who will publish in 1899 “*The Philadelphia Negro*”.

¹⁸ The aura of American sociology is not, however, only due to these first empiricists. Other authors, stemming from various intellectual and philosophical currents, will also add their contribution. For the pragmatist John Dewey, reality is to be sought in its real and measurable consequences in the social world. Must be considered as true what is considered as such by the individuals and has practical consequences on the evolution of society. For George Herbert Mead, relationships are built by means of the interpretations and the symbols that bring individuals closer, or move them away from one another. In order to understand this, inter-actionists consider that the researcher must become a social actor himself by taking an active part in the life of the groups he studies.

in the life of the groups they study¹⁹. In fact, the observation put into practice at the time is more active than participating. At a time when sociology must still assert its scientific nature, they fear that a too extensive interventionism might prejudice the academic legitimacy of American sociology. Thus, the sociologist's objectivity is claimed in order to protect him against a posture that would be considered as too journalistic and militant. Sociology must first and foremost appear as a science and not as a mere journalistic survey. It is only after the 1940's that the recourse to participating observation, besides the qualitative and quantitative methods, becomes more systematic. To carry out their respective studies on Marijuana smokers, the mentally disabled or medical circles in the 50's/60's, Becker, Goffman and Strauss will immerse themselves in concrete situations for long periods of time. Let us note that this long-term immersion technique will go on until today and can be found in more recent works by Wacquant, Beaud and Weber, Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot or else Schnapper. The latter uses the expression "*observing participation*" (2011) to characterize her positioning of "*indigenous sociologist*" in the Constitutional Council²⁰. Progressively, American empiricism becomes institutionalized thanks to the determination of those who led it for several decades to develop a practical sociology and to construct operative and concrete concepts. For all that, American sociology is not devoid of ambivalences and it is also suitable to moderate the real impact of its results, whose tendency to conformism of thought was criticized as soon as the 50's by many French sociologists, among whom Crozier, Touraine or Aron. In his article about *Human Engineering*, Michel Crozier thus denounces a kind of "science caricature" (1951, p.58) which, by dint of repeating that the solution is in participation, human relationships and the chiefs' listening to their employees, eventually established as an evidence that any form of rebellion and opposition is against nature, and that man desires only one thing : keep good relations with his fellows. It is not the methods of *Human Engineering* that we should consider, Crozier specifies, but rather the spirit that commands their use; a spirit which "*consists in treating the opposition as a neurosis or a disease*" (1951, p.65). Other reserves are put forward by sociologists such as Touraine and Aron who regret "*the poor taking into account of the historical dimension of social facts*" (Chapoulie, 1991, p.344). The social context external to the workshop and to the studied group seems to them insufficiently taken into account, leading American sociology to produce "*masses of surveys of descriptive nature, which seem devoid of explicit conceptual frames*" (Ibid). Moreover, the important financial support granted to sociologists across the Atlantic confirms yet once more the feeling that their studies are sponsored by the "*big business*" for the purpose of manipulation. As we can see, even if field surveys attest the capacity of American sociology to better understand individuals in situation, they do not succeed in suppressing its own internal contradictions, which the French sociologists, notably, will underline on many occasions. What poses problems, since the sociologist claims his attachment to empiricism, is indeed his aptitude to preserve his autonomy when faced with external and internal pressures, it is also his capacity to go beyond the phase of the singular analysis of a situation in order to adapt a more global vision. Even if these limits are indeed present, yet we may have to consider them as a necessary trouble on the way to understanding and explaining social situations and enabling actors to act accordingly.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTEMPORARY INTERVENTION SOCIOLOGY

¹⁹ It is however the case of Thrasher on gangs in 1927, of Cressey studying the *Taxi-dance Halls* in 1932, or else of Whyte immersing himself in the Italian district in 1943.

²⁰ She qualifies herself of indigenous as she sat at the Constitutional Council for nine years while analysing it from within.

This way of understanding the sociologist's job will have in France an admittedly more modest²¹ but quite real development. The aim of this article is not to present the main characteristics of the French intervention theories – which are abundantly explained and discussed elsewhere – our intention is much more to underline the theoretical and methodological converging points likely to give intervention sociology a common and unified frame.

Maieutics and collective principle of self-analysis :

Institutional analysis, supported by the Vincennes group composed of Loureau, Lapassade and Hess, proposes a political reading of the society. During forty years of activity, it will develop its own intervention method : socio-analysis. Defined by Lapassade as the “*method by which a group of analysts, at the request of a social organisation, institutes in the latter a collective process of self-analysis*” (Hess and Savoye, 1993, p.97), it attempts to bring to light the hidden institutional processes “*of occultation, scotomization and repression*” (Hess and Authier, 1994, p.78)²². Asserting the inescapable subjectivity of the researcher (what could be called “the Heisenberg effect”²³), socio-analysis aims at developing the self-management of the intervention by the group (the latter setting up his analysis programme, his own dates, schedules and work rates). This effort of clarification comes with the realization, by the authors themselves, of the real order that has been instituted. In this work, the institutionalist sociologist adopts the position of the translator, of the popularizer shaping the discourse and clarifying it. But it is also this excess of popularization and the more and more obvious lack of epistemological reflection which will ruin institutional analysis. In claiming a sort of “*ailleurs sociologique*” (outside the restricted field of academic sociology) keeping resolutely outside the academic system, the socio-analytical approach, according to Lapassade (1996), will eventually dissolve in a multitude of micro-sociologies unable to give it substance. What is revelation of the order instituted in Institutional analysis is revelation of the social movements in the Tourainian analysis. For the founder of sociological intervention, the role of the sociologist is to reveal the stakes of the conflicts which prove the existence of social movements, the latter constituting “*the highest meaning*” of collective behaviours (Touraine, 1978, p.301). For that, “*the intervention must be as close as possible to the action*” (Ibid., p.205). This leads the researcher to go beyond the ideological discourse in order to grasp the actors in the depth of their militant action. Thus, the actors constituting the analysis group are generally not the leaders but more certainly the grass-roots actors fighting against a system they dispute. For sociological intervention, the researcher acts intensely and personally to get the control group to become aware of the nature of these social relationships²⁴. This goes notably through confrontations of standpoints with external interlocutors skilfully chosen by the actors themselves and by the researchers whose “*first goal is to develop this actor's conscience*” (Touraine, 1984, p.206). The underlying maieutical

²¹ Chapoulie underlines the small number and “*a hardly explored orientation*” of field surveys in French sociology (2000, p.22).

²² According to the principle of the rule of “say everything” it is a matter of bringing to light the true life of the organization, with its own codes and its own operating rules (what the institutionalists call “*agoricism*” as opposed to “*crypticism*” or the art of secrecy).

²³ For the physicist Heisenberg, we cannot set aside the producer when producing a speech or an analysis. As a consequence specialists in human sciences are, willingly or not, subjective beings who, in the course of their research, try, without completely succeeding, to deconstruct the transfer and counter-transfer mechanisms of which they are actors.

²⁴ The somewhat artificial constitution of the analysis group will be widely criticized. How is it possible to create a system as close as possible to the action from an assembly of individuals who originally have no real links ? This decontextualization, Cousin and Riu underline, tends to “*substitute to effective action a situation of imaginary action*” (2010, p.96). Consequently, notes Martucelli, “*intervention may be only the result of the work of a group, a result the general impact of which cannot be known*” (1991, p.3).

principle therefore aims at persuading each individual to bring forth his/her consciousness (Cousin and Rui, 2010, p.9). As Touraine proclaims, this is only possible if the individuals fully participate in the interaction with the researchers. This interaction is particularly important during the various moments of restitution of the research interpretations and hypotheses. Contrary to other forms of intervention, the Tourainian intervention doesn't however aim at a better adaptation or at the way of leading to a change; it intends to essentially serve knowledge (1978, p.262 and p.278). Nonetheless, this knowledge may prove useful to the field actors. Like the intervention theories previously stated, the method developed by the Tourainian actionalism aims at arousing the auto-reflexive capacity of individuals : *"By means of the method, the actors are invited to undertake a reflection work, or indeed an introspection work, which places in its centre the analysis of the way they read and interpret the social world and which questions their capacity to act and intervene upon this world"* (Cousin and Rui, 2011, p.514). In organizing the permanent confrontation between the actors, the advisedly chosen interlocutors and the researchers, in seeking the auto-analysis of the group through a personal implication from the researcher, sociological intervention shows its similarities with all intervention sociological theories. As for the supporters of strategic analysis, their position is not totally different. The individual is a rational actor developing, for his own use, more or less elaborate strategies. The aim is to give an empirical account of the nature and the game rules which structure the relationships between the social actors. Scientific by its procedures²⁵, strategic analysis also asserts itself as interventionist. The method developed is *"clinical"* because, at the bedside of the organization, it aims at diagnosing its health condition and give account of it to the concerned actors. In the awareness of phenomena whose actors are also the authors, strategic analysis *"suggests "self-maintained loops" where everyone takes part in the production of what he complains about"* (Herrerros, 2009, p.65). Ensues from this, Friedberg specifies, an approach to theory very different from the academic standard insofar as theory draws its relevance essentially from its capacity to nourish a constant confrontation with the field : *"the theory itself becomes concrete only when related to an empirical situation"* (1997, p.300). It is essentially in the appendix of the founding book of 1977 and in two books written by Friedberg in 1988 and in 1993 (republished in 1997) that we can find a few methodological elements. When facing complex micro-situations, the authors thus identify three phases in the analysis. During a first phase, the sociologist must be able to *"conserve a posture of proper perspective and critical distance allowing him to break with the sensitive reality, with the categories of common sense"* (1977, p.455). But this very academic posture, as the authors acknowledge, is indeed very difficult to keep. Also (this is the second phase), the sociologist must know how to quickly *"leave his position of observer detached and external to the field, to achieve a detour via the actor's interiority"* (Ibid., p.456). As the deeper meaning of inter-individual relationships is not easily unveiled, we have to come straight into the situation and take the actors' place to understand their internal logics. The collected data aim at testifying *"the strategic perception that the various actors have of their respective situations and of their adjustment to a more or less conscious system of relationships"* (Ibid., p.474). In situation, individuals carry out a kind of *"implicit mediation"* between the environmental constraints imposed on them, each constituting a zone of uncertainty, and all the strategic perceptions they have of these constraints and according to which they conceive the possible reactions. This return towards the inside, Friedberg specifies, reveals an eminently clinical

²⁵ Strategic analysis is called "procedural science" (Friedberg, 1997, p.321) insofar as its scientificity doesn't stand in its internal logic but resides in the methodological procedures it mobilizes. For its authors, the scientific nature of the analyses in fact *"depends on the respect of a survey procedure which must guarantee that the data are collected and processed as openly, systematically and honestly as possible"* (Ibid.). The respect of this procedure must protect the researcher against the unrestrained, or even out-of-control, exercise of his subjectivity.

position, necessarily contingent and temporarily abolishing any distance between the sociologist and the actors in situation (1997, p.303)²⁶. It is only later (third phase) that the sociologist will again have to “*re-conquer his exteriority by confronting and comparing with one another the multiple rationalities or contingent strategies he will have observed*”(1977, p.457)²⁷. At this stage of his researches, he tries to measure the differences between what should “normally” happen and reality – the authors use the expression “*reasoning on the differences*” (Ibid., 1977, p.457). When he has the opportunity to do so, the researcher may attempt a progressive globalising scope, which is done notably by comparing the results of the various studies bearing on close fields. However, this globalising scope doesn’t constitute, strictly speaking, the finality of strategic analysis. As Friedberg mentions, it is not “*because we cannot easily extrapolate the results of a particular study that its interest is necessarily limited*” (1997, p.325). For strategic analysis, the essential doesn’t reside there.

In his 1979 thesis dedicated to the genesis of intervention sociology, Antoine Savoye usefully defines some of its outlines. The intervention posture shows its singularity by the immediate relationship it intends to build up with the studied population, this proximity serving the purpose of triggering an “*analysing effect*” (Savoye, 1979, p.2 et p.13). In this field sociology, what counts “*is the direct relationship instituted between the sociologist and the population he studies*” (Ibid., p.3). Making of the sociologist “*a subjective part of the process of change*” (Ibid., p.7), the author defines the intervention as the action of “*coming between*”, of achieving a kind of “*incursion*” in the social relationships (Ibid.). The sociologist is a person who “*occurs in relation to a pre-existing state*” (Dubost, 1987, p.152), by provoking the actors’ self-analysis and their total implication in the research of means of action. In the next part, we shall try to precise what can contribute to better singularize contemporary intervention sociology.

Sociology in the arena : from demand to restitution.

What is intervention sociology today ? How can we characterize it ? Will it develop in the future ? To answer these questions, a reference to the most recent works is necessary. In this part, we shall summon the knowledge brought by Dubet (2001), Vranken and Kutty (2001), Minguet (2001), Dubost (2006), Herreros (2008 and 2009). Intervention sociology, Guy Minguet explains, is a professional, epistemological, methodological, postural exercise which leads the practicing sociologist to position himself, on request, at the heart of a situation in order to improve it (Minguet, 2001, p.21). The sociologist must immerse himself into the situation he is analysing. By the word “intervention”, we ought to think the sociologist as a scientist able to make the actors subjects of the study, as well as the situations in which they interact, evolve in order to collectively alleviate the difficulties that they meet. In fact, we can assert that any sociology is an intervention insofar as it comes to confronting the conclusions of a survey to the standpoint of the actors (and this happens to any sociologist). However this confrontation may be of various natures : direct, subjacent or concealed. As François Dubet emphasizes, in the nature of the relationships between the researchers and the actors, “*everything is a matter of degree*” (2001, p.90). For the intervention sociologist, the confrontation of ideas with the actors is direct, permanent and generates knowledge aiming at improving the studied situation. By intervention sociology, we

²⁶ This return towards the inside constitutes all in all an “*abolition of the epistemological break*” between theory and practice (1997, p.306) because it aims at preventing the researcher’s compartmentalization in his discipline and in a supposed posture of knowledge objectivation.

²⁷ About agnosticism, Friedberg explains that the sociologist must, as much as possible, avoid taking sides and keep a certain equidistance in the interpretation of facts (1993, p.307). But can we really believe that the sociologist can so easily manage to recover his exteriority and adopt anew a total objectivity ?

must therefore understand “*a specific practice of the discipline leading the sociologist to immerse himself, upon (self)-solicitation, in a micro-situation, in order to propose a reading whose effects (of content or of process) could participate in a transformation of the aforementioned situation*” (Herreros, 2001, p.273). The sociologist’s position consists therefore in placing himself among the actors, with the intervention of bringing them “*a cognitive increase in value that can be summoned up for action*” (Ibid., p.273). The expected aim is to discover the social universes, the hidden dimensions of the social phenomena that quantitative, statistical, even qualitative perspective (resorting to interviews for instance) doesn’t enable to restore in its entirety. In this article, we do not intend to propose an exhaustive definition of intervention sociology. Even if we wished to do so, the polysemia of the terms and the diversity of the subjacent sensibilities would very quickly dissuade us to do so. This attempt to delimit and better characterize this sociological posture meets first and foremost the intention of contributing to its better acknowledgement in the academic and scientific field.

Displaying one’s preference for field sociology is not, as the example of socio-analysis shows, devoid of risks. The pitfall of a dilution of its foundations into a too descriptive micro-sociology is never far away. It must therefore compel itself to a permanent clarification and auto-reflexivity work. In the same manner as servitude supposes a minimum will of obeying, intervention finds its *raison d’être* in the existence of a social request. The latter is even, to our mind, a prerequisite, a condition for the intervention to take place. In order to put a situation into work, the sociologist must be sure that the actors here present, or at least a sufficient number of them, express a real intention to cooperate. The social request understood as “*the system of expectations from the society with regard to the everyday problems that solicit it nowadays*” (Castel, 2004, p.70) can come from the leaders – the sponsors – but also from employees confronted to situations of discontent, of tensions, even of conflicts. Moreover, undertaking work to clarify this request is often necessary before any intervention. As Monique Legrand and Didier Vranken emphasize (2004, p.155), the request may be admissible in its formulation but not necessarily in its subjacent expectations. Indeed the sociologist is not so rarely subject, in given circumstances, to forms of instrumentalisation which can come from the sponsors or from the field actors. This instrumentalisation can take the shape of a guarantee that the sociologist would constitute to legitimate, without his knowing it, the decisions taken by some of the actors, or even to disqualify the opponents²⁸. Intervention sociology also questions common sense. If it is customary, for the authors of the book on “*le métier de sociologue*”, to institute a real rupture with common sense²⁹, other authors such as Chazel (2011) are more moderate and advocate its progressive distancing. It is also a recommendation by Durkheim, inviting sociology to start from “*mundane notions*” (1999, p.34) to progressively achieve their distancing by means of scientific reasoning – “*the mundane concept is not useless or clever, in fact it is useful as an indicator*” (1999, p.37). For intervention sociology, common sense is considered as essential because it produces knowledge allowing an eventual improvement of the situation – what is called common sense or *doxa* in Bourdieu, is considered as knowledge in Schütz, a competence in Boltanski or else an aptitude for reflexivity in Giddens. For the latter, the relation between sociology and the individuals is a matter of “*double hermeneutic*” (1994, p.24). On the one hand, science provides knowledge and information on social life and questions the “*concepts of the lay person*” (Ibid.). On the other hand, this knowledge forged in the meta-language of social sciences is re-injected into society and re-appropriated by the actors. “*Sociological knowledge*

²⁸ In the first case, Pichault speaks of legitimization strategies, in the second case, of disqualification strategies (2006, p.78)

²⁹ For Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron, common sense is a matter of “*spontaneous sociology*” (1983, p.27) whose explanatory virtue is only “*naive wish*” and “*illusion*” (Ibid. p.32-33).

spirals in and out of the universe of social life, reconstructing both itself and that universe as an integral part of that process.” (Ibid.). Out in the field, the researcher refers to maieutics³⁰ in recommending to get people to bring forth the knowledge they have in them unconsciously. In fact, it is a matter of considering that *“nobody is only ignorance. The knowledge everyone possesses, be it almost apparent or deeply buried, only needs to be discovered”* (Herreros, 2009, p.145). In this way and contrary to the Bourdieusian conception – at least before *“la misère du monde”* – the maieutic approach refuses any *“asymmetry”* instituting a superiority of *scientific knowledge over common knowledge* (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, p.63). As Gilbert writes, the very essence of intervention sociology resides in the combination of the scientific and *“profane”* fields (2009, p.255-256), considering that the individual is reflexive – this reflexivity is in line with the *“practical consciousness”* if we follow Giddens (1987) and, at a more conceptual level, with the *“discursive consciousness”* – and detains, at various degrees, enough intelligence to identify the solution which is for him the least bad or the most acceptable (Dupuy, 2004, p.122). If it is advisable to consider with Schnapper that *“methods are only worth the results they allow to obtain”* (2011), it means that the sociological approach also tends to favour a form of methodological interbreeding and *“of trans-disciplinary indiscipline”*³¹ bringing the practicing sociologist to explore all the branches of sociology, from the most classical approaches to those using the psychological and clinical routes. Berthelot rightly underlines it: *“Any cutting-out is partially arbitrary”* adding that *“the boundaries between disciplines are, in the sight of their history, so porous and fluctuating that we pass from one to the other with no real threshold”* (Berthelot, 2001, p.203). Therefore, *“going as near to the actor’s actual life as possible leads to question the boundaries between psychology and sociology, exteriority and interiority, objectivity and subjectivity, reality and representation”* (De Gaulejac, Hanique and Roche, 2012, p.66)³². The interest of a multidisciplinary approach is to allow to open several drawers situated at different levels. Symbolic interactionism has shown for long that in situation, individuals never stop communicating, verbally or non verbally; which supposes transmitters, receivers and messages loaded with content and equipped with functions (those of imposing, asking questions, ordering, maintaining links...). The means of expression and transmission form a whole system of signs (looks, words, codes and gestures) and mobilize various relays on a dyadic, triadic or complex mode the sociologist cannot ignore. The communication codes specific to situations and their contexts (balances of power, pressures, compromises, coalitions) give information on the strategies and perceptions of individuals. Knowing looks, nonchalant gestures, pointed fingers or particular postures give information on the situation, the way it is lived, perceived and interpreted by the individuals. With clinical sociology, the aim, in fine, is not to redo sociology but to think it somewhat differently³³. This is what Ravon proposes when he advocates a clinical reading of social matters to understand the society and its unrest (Ravon, 2009, p.154). When the analysis is quite a long way on, or even completed, the restitution by the sociologist of his *“representation of reality”* (Uhalde, 2001, p.400) exposes him to the actors’ contesting – Vranken (1995) speaks of their *“intractability”*. In this indispensable debate, the researcher as well as the actor are entitled to have their say, the former having however the well-proven capacity of reading the field, which the latter

³⁰ In the Greek mythology, Maia, elder daughter of the Pleiades and mother of Hermes, was considered by the Greeks as the goddess of child birth and midwives.

³¹ In this plastic thought, *“what is half-breed is not lost or diluted, but comes in a new form”* (Herreros, 2008, p.269).

³² This psychological dimension in classic sociology is present from the very origins of social sciences. Reading Durkheim (notably in *“the elementary forms of religious life”*) or Mauss is sufficient to be convinced. Doesn’t the latter call for a *“psychological sociology”* (1988) which analyses the link between psychological facts and material facts in society, this link constituting, in his eyes, an essential part of sociology.

³³ Furthermore, it is by this recourse to the clinical study as a qualitative method that Friedberg intends to turn away from the standardization of the methods of quantitative surveys (1993, p.312)

doesn't have. Yet, his position is neither overhanging nor pre-eminent. It is with all the concerned actors and thanks to them that he manages to obtain better and tangible data from the studied situation.

Such a representation of the job of sociologist leads to questioning another fundamental point : the supposed objectivity of the intervention sociologist, immersed in the situation he is analysing. All the more so since the intervention puts the sociologist in "*Daniel's pit*", it makes it almost impossible to keep a position of real objectivity and distancing from the object³⁴. As Gilbert and Baldelli say, "*the myth of the objectivity of a researcher in social sciences must definitely be broken*" (2011, p.14). Being at the same time product and producer of the social world, each individual, De Gaulejac, Hanique and Roche (2012) add, has the society in himself. "*The sociologist cannot ignore that the distinctive feature of his standpoint is to be a standpoint on a standpoint*" (Bourdieu, 1993, p.1423) or else theoretical knowledge based on practical knowledge that the individuals have on their everyday actions³⁵. The sociologist almost inevitably projects, Paugam recalls, a part of himself in his researches (2008, p.19). In this subject-to-subject relationship, we therefore consider that the sociologist is never in complete distancing with his object. He cannot abandon his vision of the world, he "*always embraces a cause*" (Uhalde, 2001, p.400)³⁶. Yet this cause must not make him fall into blind subjectivism. To avoid this pitfall, the sociologist's ethics probably constitutes his main landmark, his "*essential buffer*" (Herreros, 2009, p.237). To take up Rorty's words, we shall say that his ethics consist in minimizing the petty specific things that separate the individuals with the aim of reaching a compromise and collective agreement³⁷. There resides a strong social usefulness of the sociologist which can be assessed according to the positive effects that his actions may produce with the actors in situation. Yet it cannot be denied that these "positive effects" assume, in the sociologist's estimation, a very subjective, even nominative, character which refers us to the criticisms expressed by Crozier on Human Engineering. As we can see, intervention sociology, if it wants to live and exist, must never spare on a critical reflexion about its epistemological foundations.

CONCLUSION : LOCAL USEFULNESS AND GENERALIZATION

As we have tried to demonstrate throughout this article, the sociological theories of intervention, though of sometimes very different sensibilities, rest nevertheless on a common conceptual and methodological basis. There are indeed slight differences of assessment on the social request, the sociologist's posture or else the purposes. Some authors intend to show their singularity. It is the case with Touraine for whom the demand is by no means a

³⁴ The question on the objectivity of the immersed researcher has been raised many times notably by those who most criticized the American empirical sociology, considering that the sociologist's proximity with his interlocutors would necessarily influence him to the point of questioning the scientificity of his analyses (see Chapoulie's article on this subject published in 2000).

³⁵ To neutralize the investigator's subjectivism, Bourdieu recommended, at a time, to resort to the system of social proximity (or geometry) (1993, p.1395). The idea is to place face to face (but with the risk, Hamel notes (2007, p.52), of creating between them a too strong familiarity novice to the production of knowledge) two individuals having a priori the same social and cultural capital. The two individuals, supposed to be on an equal footing, would bring each other knowledge by deciphering with the other, by means of the reflexive mirror, what is happening within themselves.

³⁶ Rejecting any objective thought which they judge impossible, some authors even adopt a very radical posture. It is the case with Richard Rorty who claims an assumed ethnocentrism, favouring his "own" group, his community, rather than pretending to pull away from it. It is even the fact he belongs to it that really enables him, the author insists, to analyse his community.

³⁷ What Rorty calls the "common humanity" (1994, p.126).

prerequisite to the sociological intervention, only the social movement matters. Others attempt to minimize the involvement of the sociologist who must, according to Friedberg, make use of agnosticism. Indeed, inter-disciplinarity isn't favoured by Touraine, nor is it by Friedberg. As for the finality of sociology, it differs somewhat from one author to the other. It is to underline the weight of history in the Tourainian mind, it is to better regulate power relations for the strategy sociologist, it is to free the actor from an alienating system for the institutional analysis. And it is to seek a better situation by means of an "*intervention sociology*" (Herreros, 2009). Yet, beyond all these divisions, all the sociologies previously explained share nevertheless the same way of approaching the social world. By claiming the same epistemological and postural principles, by calling for the renunciation of any epistemological rupture between various forms of knowledge, of any form of partitioning between the levels of reflexivity, they draw, for the sociologist of actual experience, outlines and an identity which confer it its consistency. Indeed, intervention sociology is a multiple relief landscape (Vranken, 2001, p.312) but the conception of the part the sociologist must play is resolutely in line with local action by aiming at offering the field actors a better intelligibility of their human behaviours. In this putting into debate of the situation, the sociologist reduces the distances with the actors in order to trigger their auto-reflexivity, by the questioning, the disturbance, even the annoyance he can generate during his immersion. All the theories of intervention are concerned with putting within everyone's reach, scientists as well as field actors, their theoretical concepts as well as their empirical results. Complementary to all the other sociological currents, excluding none of them, intervention sociology has for objective to propose a scientific reading of the society that is accessible to all and usable in situation. Inspired by the distinction made by Chris Argyris between applicable knowledge and usable knowledge, Michel Crozier explains that the former is the knowledge which allows to understand a situation and the behaviour of the individuals. In that respect, this knowledge is necessary for the latter to perceive the problems and difficulties they encounter daily. The usable knowledge is what is really put into practice in a quasi-experimental manner. It leads to the elaboration of tools and action plans immediately exploitable by the field actors. The problem, Michel Crozier explains, comes from the fact that "*the major part of research in social sciences is applicable, but not usable*" (Crozier, 2000, p.292). Intervention sociology attempts to find a solution to these facts. Nonetheless, it must not neglect, every time it is possible, generalization. If the sociologists of actual experience are frequently reproached a theoretical weakness insofar as they would go no further than the first sensitive impressions of the immediate experiment (Hanique, 2012, p.125), this reproach is however not justified. Practising intervention sociology doesn't lead de facto to the renunciation of conceptualization. From this point of view, the intervention sociologist can be qualified of "expert sociologist" aiming at conciliating the figure of the scholar/scientist and the figure of the expert (Javeau, 1995), going from one to the other according to the circumstances and the opportunities³⁸. If for him it is a matter of "*answering a precise question*", he must also try to "*displace it in order to link it to more fundamental problems*" (Trépos, 1996, p.44). Indeed the analysis cannot be restricted to the sole "*characteristics of the immediate situation, isolating oneself from all the general, structural and historical conditions in which these relations are established*" (Schnapper, 1999, p.10). The micro-social studies by Herreros and by Milly on hospital and medico-social organizations, those by Crozier, Felder and Uhalde on industrial and service companies, that of Bernardeau Moreau on sports and leisure organizations, show that it is possible to extract basic tendencies on the evolution of societies. If it is true that lights shed locally are as many

³⁸ If this figure of the expert sociologist tends to develop today, it is most certainly due to an increased pregnance of the "*problematics of urgency*" (Trépos, 1992) leading the sociologist to the obligation of giving immediate answers to the pressing demands from the society.

mirrors reflecting the societal transformations in the process, the fact remains that all these analyses aim at being, first and foremost, a source of enrichment for the individuals in situation who expect, from the sociologist, assistance for the improvement of their everyday life.

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