BEYOND THREE CONSTITUTIVE BELIEFS OF
CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGY
Globalization, post-modernity and reflexivity

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The progress of knowledge implies, in the case of a social science, a progress in the knowledge of the conditions of knowledge

Pierre Bourdieu, Le sens pratique, 1980

IDEAS AND BELIEFS: THREE CONSTITUTIVE LINES

The Spanish philosopher Zubiri said, with great acuity, that the Greeks are not our “classics”; the real truth is that we are Greeks, as we are Romans or enlightened or Christians (Zubiri, 1944; 332). Similarly, as sociologists, we are Marxist, Weberian or Durkheimians, whether we like it or not. Because Marx, Weber and Durkheim are our classics and sociology has been unable to follow Alfred North Whitehead’s advice: “A science which hesitates to forget its founders is lost” (1974; 115) (later we will see why). We think through all of them and, in a certain way, we are them thinking through ourselves. So the immediate question is: how do they make us think?

What I intend in this paper is to analyze our thoughts, and especially our beliefs as sociologists. Rather than viewing the progress of science as a slow accumulation of knowledge "on the shoulders of giants" as a Mertonian process of externalization, let’s analyze it as an internalization (literally an embodiment; “habits of thinking” was Durkheim’s expression) of concepts and ideas that end up being conditioned reflexes. And for that, let’s remember Ortega y Gasset’s thesis on Ideas and beliefs.

Ideas are what we think, he said. We can accept or reject ideas, play with them, mix them, we have them before us, we are aware of them, and we can list them, analyze them and eventually reject them. Beliefs, by contrast, is that from where we think our
ideas and "they already are on our depth when we start thinking about something".
Beliefs are the tools of our thought, not the objects of our thought, and thus they are the
blind spot of thinking. In this way, although I am aware of my thoughts, I ignore my
beliefs. And therefore men have ideas, but beliefs —says Ortega— have us. To re-flect on
our thinking (for example, doing sociology of knowledge of sociology) is to transform
beliefs (implicit or unconscious, “taken-for-granted”) into ideas (explicit and conscious)
so that we can be aware of them and accept or reject them (Ortega y Gasset, 1942, 17).
This is certainly what Gouldner called “reflexive sociology”, as developed first in The
Coming Crisis of Western Sociology (1970) and later in For Sociology (1975). But
more so what Bourdieu and Wacquant labeled reflexivity:

“Reflexivity is not to be achieved by reflections on post festum fieldwork nor
elaborations of the situation of the observer in relation to the observed. It is not
the individual unconscious of the researcher but the epistemological unconscious
of his discipline which must be unearthed” (1992: 41).

My idea is that, as sociologists, we drag many inherited beliefs that we must transform
in ideas. Beliefs that no doubt were ideas for classical sociologists (though not always),
but were later internalized by the sociological community, and today we sit on them
unaware of their hidden relevance.

What are these beliefs / ideas that think us? Let me try to identify some of the most
important.

Spencer-Brown pointed out that thinking is simply to draw a line on a homogeneous
space so as to be able to compare what remains on each side (Spencer Brown, 1994).
And as we draw lines and create more units of comparison our thinking progresses. We
think dividing, tracing lines. Well, what constitutive lines of sociology did the classics
drawn for us? I think three: a line in space, a line in time and a line in speech.

The first defines the space of sociology: "societies" as units of empirical analysis. The
second line defines our time for analysis: the "modern" as something different from
"traditional". Both together constitute the physical object of observation, the space-time
entity, the "thing" or "social fact" on whose study we engage. Finally the third line,
which separates the scientific discourse from ordinary discourse, defines the formal
object, the viewpoint from which we will analyze this "thing": the viewpoint of the
observer as different from that of the actor. The three lines together give us a specific
look and an object to look at, and are thus constitutive beliefs of the sociological project
itself.

As we will see the first two lines are, properly, beliefs, and have been with us almost
since the beginnings of sociology. So much so that they are not topics under discussion
and are, of course, “taken for granted”. The third, however, is idea and belief at the
same time. It was institutionalized as an idea, was reinforced later by positivism and
neo-positivism, and is already assumed as implicit belief by us. It is therefore rather
belief than idea, but carries elements of both.

And of course if today we can (and should) identify them as ideas, rescuing them from
oblivion (where they are beliefs), this is because we must discuss them, stop taking
them for granted and, eventually, go beyond them. This is like saying we probably
should go beyond our classics. It is frequently said that "anyone who ignores classics is in obvious danger" (S. Giner, 2001; 101). True. I could not agree more. But what dangers emerge from following them? As we know, along the risk of rejecting a true hypothesis lays the risk of accepting a false one.

THE SPACE OF SOCIOLOGY: ESTATE UNIFIED SOCIETIES AND GLOBALIZATION:

Remember the first of the "Eight Pernicious Postulates" of social science identified by Charles Tilly in *Big Structures*: "Society" is a thing apart; the world as a whole divides into distinct "societies", each having its more or less autonomous culture, government, economy, and solidarity" (Tilly, 1984; 11). Are we not yet trapped by this most "pernicious" postulate?

Indeed, what is “society”? The unspoken answer is always the same: state-organized, state-unified societies. When we consider the empirical reality subsumed under the word "society" we always think about "England" or "France" or "Spain", we think in terms of state-organized human groups. The “state”, rather than the “nation” or the “society” (and rather than “action” or “inter-action”) has articulated the object of empirical inquiry. As Ulrich Beck writes, "the dominant social paradigm is the nation-state ... the concept of society is applied only to the nation-state ... As a rule, sociology notes, measures and discusses its events in a national context rather than in the context of global society". We have here, as Beck sharply observes, a "Hegelian secret" that sees society as a derivative of the state (Beck, 2000; 90).

It must be noted that for a long time it was, however, a rather reasonable response. State-organized societies were autonomous units to a great extent, and certainly self-referenced. As Europe, after the Peace of Westphalia (1648), became a collection of sovereign States each with its own crowns, laws, religions, languages, cultures, economies, politics, and even empires *(un roi, une foi, une loi)*, the State symbolized and stood up for society. Indeed, that was the very beginning of sociological thought with Montesquieu: the diversity of European societies, customs and manners, *L’Esprit des Lois*, that is (Sic.), the diversity of European States. They were thought as units because they largely were so. And as a consequence (as argued by Göran Therbon), the statistical and sampling methods were based on the population of a State, and “statistics” was, and to a great extent still is, a science that has the State as its object. And finally, as expected, the institutionalization of sociology, which inevitably had a national character, reinforced this identification "society = State " (Therbon, 2000; 51). Social reality was organized around state-unified societies, and the look on those societies was also a “statist” gaze.

However, we know that this is no longer the case. And, of course, we also know that it was never entirely so and history is a graveyard of peoples, societies and states. Indeed, what will we find if we do a brief natural history of "societies”? A constant fusion and confusion of human groups.

It is estimated that around 10,000 a. C. there were little more than five million men in the world. They lived in small units of a few hundreds or a thousand people with little
knowledge of neighbors and none of the neighbor’s neighbors. Humanity was a scattered collection of isolated small groups strongly territorialized that, over thousands of years, had been spreading throughout the available land. After the so-called Neolithic revolution, at around 8,000 a. C., the Old Empires engaged in regional unifications in Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, China and few other places. Rome “globalized” the Mediterranean and southern Europe. That was a first wave of "globalization", a merger of societies under one political authority, although still regional in scope. But again all these empires knew their neighbors but rarely the neighbor’s neighbors. America, almost all of Africa and the Far East, were unknown to each other and to the West.

The second globalization started with the expansion of the “Iberian pioneers” (Toynbee, 1947, 124) after the XV century pushed by a new technology of blue-water sailing and later the railway and telegraph. And will move, as in the old empires, in two simultaneous directions: inwards and outwards. Homogenizing the territories of the emerging European States to lead to state-organized societies (and, in XIX the century, true “nations”), but also spreading homogeneity through imperial processes of "civilization" or colonization of the rest of the world. What was once a regional unit (one "society"), Europe, begin to generate a global society. Finally, as is well known, we see today a third and final globalization, this time truly global, based on TIC technologies and radically new.

Three conclusions then. First, societies are formed and re-constituted, and now they do merge into one increasingly global society. Second: as Toynbee saw, the "Universal States" and their societies are based on lines of communication as vectors through which a new political order is administered, whether we talk of Roman Vias, shipping lanes of the Royal Navy or Internet protocols. And a third conclusion: globalization is the very history of mankind; we have been "globalizing" ourselves for thousands of years.

But Toynbee’s vision teaches something else: if States need means of transport and communication to impose order, the logic is also reversed and the order generated by specific means of transport and communication creates their own State, which is as much as to say that the medium is (here too) the message (McLuhan). So the important thing now is to find out what is the "medium" that is imposed as a "message" on the new Universal State in the making. And I think that this new form is characterized by three features: its size, its depth and its lack of center.

First, the geographical extent of globalization, for the first time truly universal. The process of expansion of Western civilization reached its zenith on the eve of the Second World War. By then almost 80% of the land and 80% of the population was under the sovereignty of Western States. Post-war de-colonization was not a de-globalizing process, quite the opposite. It was the diffusion of Western forms (political, economic, social, cultural, even artistic) on former Western colonies, the transformation of cultures strongly based in their traditions in Westernized State-societies (and again, eventually into true “nations”). De-colonization was another de-traditionaling step, another step in the “modernization” process of acceptance of Western ways and, therefore, of globalization.

The second originality lies not in the extension, but in the depth of the phenomenon, because in addition to being universal (horizontally), it connects almost every activity
(vertically). By that I mean that the social networks that make up the various institutional areas (the economy of course, but also politics, security, science, art and culture, customs, law), which always had a strong territorial component, rather than close upon themselves, are open to other social networks, networks of networks, that jump over all kind of borders, geographical, of course, but also institutional. Thus, the economy (which is now global) connects with science (global) and technology (global), both with world politics, all with world public opinion, and so on. The different areas of institutional activity are connected horizontally across space, but also vertically across themselves. The economy is now global, but it is also politics; politics is global, but it’s also economy; science is universal, but it’s also economics and politics. And so we must reject the hypothesis of the isolation of social units, replaced by the assumption of a global system which increasingly leaves nothing out.

Finally, the third singularity, and perhaps the most important, is that globalization has no center anymore. The classical dynamics of globalization processes had a center, a hard core or hinterland, from which it spread out under the supervision of a State whose borders expanded and moved. The "frontier" was an essential part of the classical globalization process, not only in the USA (Turner). And the game of center-periphery has been central for the expansion of Empires and / or States in their process of implosion (inward) and expansion (outward). However, current globalization, being based not on the possession of the land (or sea or air, to secure the territory, remember Carl Schmitt), but in information, lacks a center or a rear, and its behavior is digital, not analytic. We are no longer "more or less" in the center or the periphery as a continuous variable, but we are connected or not, and if you are connected, you’re at the heart just like any other. Globalization no longer follows the patterns of an oil slick which extends from a geographic center to the peripheral border, but takes the form of a network that can connect what is distant jumping over what’s near. And the result is a progressive de-territorialization of institutional fields and of society at large.

In any case, the world is a unity, the only true subject of history is humanity as a whole, and the empirical reference to the word “society” is not (and never truly was) state-organized societies but the social world in all its depth and length. It never was truer what Terencio wrote: nihil humanum alienum a me puto. Nothing human is alien to us.

Thus, de-territorialization calls into question classical sociology based on unrealistic assumptions of a society / economy / state with clear borders. Not only because, as Therbon writes, it "means a decisive break with the Eurocentric perspective of the classics" (Therbon, 2000; 51), of course. But because, as adds Beck, "the cosmopolitan projects contradicts and replaces the project of the nation-state" (Beck, 2000; 90).

In short, maybe God’s wisdom distributed the whole Earth land between different cultures or ethnic groups with distinct and sharp boundaries, as Tilly mockingly said. But if He ever did so, mankind has distorted His original design and we now have only one subject, humanity, and the first challenge for social science is how to think the world as a whole. We need a Global History, as historians have recognized, but also a global sociology.

Global in space, but also in time.
THE TEMPORAL FRAME OF SOCIOLOGY: FROM TRADITIONAL TO MODERN

Because classical sociology was built around another clear “frontier” line: the one dividing the "traditional" from the "modern", a before and an after. Sociology described the triumph of modernity versus tradition, from agricultural, rural, static societies, to industrial, urban dynamic ones, it was designed to think that change and understand it. It was, ultimately, a theory of transition to modernity or, if preferred, a "theory of modernization." Classical dichotomies such as "metaphysical" and "positive" in Comte, "feudal mode of production" and "capitalist mode of production" in Marx, "military" and "industrial" in Spencer, "community" and "society" in Toennies, "status "and" contract "in Maine, "mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity" in Durkheim, and so on up to Parsons’ pattern-variables, "transitions to democracy" or “take off “ from underdevelopment, all were variants of processes of modernization. The perplexity at the emergence of a new European society from the eighteenth century on was the phenomenological constitutive experience of social inquiry, and so sociology has been a theory of modernization, a theory of de-tradicalization, a theory of transit.

However, with the stubborn use of the prefix "post" contemporary sociologists have produced a new line of demarcation, a new constitutive break, and so we now talk of post-capitalist, post-bourgeois, post-Fordist, post-emotional, post-urban, post-family and, of course, post-industrial and post-modern. A feeling of being after-something, and not before-something, seems to permeate most modern sociology.

It was Daniel Bell The coming of post-industrial society (1972) who opened up Pandora’s box, that since has had many followers: Risikogesellschaft of Ulrich Beck, in 1986, perhaps one of the most creative, The consequences of modernity of A. Giddens, 1990, Post-capitalist society by Peter F. Drucker, in 1993, perhaps the most unfocused, and the excellent summary of the Spanish Manuel Castells The Information Age, 1996. And, of course, The post-modern condition of Lyotard (1986).

What this language implies is that we are “beyond” modern societies facing a new and unexpected change that involves a second modernization, a modernization of an already modern society, and thus a “reflexive” modernization (Beck). As writes Gosta Esping-Andersen, "we can not prove it, but many are convinced that a new social order, qualitatively different, is being deployed" so that a sociology of "post-something" is emerging (Esping-Andersen, 2000; 60).

I was evident. We have not reached the "end of history" (Fukuyama), social change has not stopped (indeed, it’s accelerating) and modern societies are changing in the same way that traditional societies did a century ago. But changing not anymore "traditional traditions", but so-called “modern traditions”, the traditions of our own industrial societies. Social change changes what had already changed, and is therefore a change of change itself. And so we realize that institutions that were the essential architecture of classical bourgeois societies are undergoing dramatic transformations. The nuclear family, the fabric of intimacy and privacy, that constituted the vast majority of households, jumps in tatters; the job (and the factory), which binds the citizen with the community and gave a sense of identity in a long term professional career, is destroyed in individual biographies; the Nation-State, which breaks downwards (in the processes of devolution), upwards (on transnational political bodies) and inwards (in multicultural
societies); the international order, which stops being a collection of Hobbesian sovereign States while all sorts of new actors (multilateral institutions, multinational corporations, NGOs, international terrorism, etc.) emerge.

In summary, much of the institutional framework of “classical modern” society is undergoing deep changes that contemporary sociology attempts to capture by jumping from dichotomous models (traditional / modern) to trichotomous models: from traditional to the first modernity, an incomplete modernity, a transitional modernity still trapped by "traditional" traditions. And then to the “post”, a second triumphant modernity, which fulfills enlightened ideals and settles clearly in science and innovation, institutionalizing what for Kant was a novelty and a break, Sapere aude. “Dare to know” is no longer a challenge but a routine: the routine of systematic innovation, the routine of improving all kinds of routines (Lamo de Espinosa, 2002). Or to put it in a more classic jargon, we jumped from agrarian societies to industrial societies, and now to knowledge or information societies. We are not so much in a post-modern society, but rather in a fully radicalized modernity so that what emerges in the horizon is precisely a utopian post-modern skyline. If we can think in post-modernity is precisely because our reality is now fully modern. And vice versa: as Wallerstein says "suddenly modernity seems to be the past, no future" (Wallerstein, 2000; 28). As said by Lyotard, post-modernism is not “the end of modernism” but its “initial stage” (Lyotard, 1987, 23). “Post-modernity, writes Jameson, is more modern than modernity itself” (Jameson, 1998, 232).

But the fact that we have not yet found a label to replaces the "post" prefix indicates that, while there is wide agreement that we are "beyond" modern societies (and, indeed beyond industrial societies), we have not yet being able to identify the nuclear variable of these new societies. And so, if Bell (and after him, Dahrendorf and Touraine) defined the post- as the transit from industry to services due to the primacy of knowledge and innovation, others have highlighted information (rather than knowledge) as a central integrator (as Castells2), while other (as Beck), reviewing a critical tradition of rationality that goes back to the Frankfurt School, make the notion of risk the positive content of the post.

In any case the result is that, just as spatial lines are leapfrogged, so are temporary ones. Because while “modernity” becomes old, established, classic, and even conservative, “tradition” becomes new, modern, even fashionable and progressive. Nothing more clear, for example, that the blurring of traditional boundaries between anthropology and sociology to the extent that traditions are no longer outside the modern but inside, and to that extent, it is not really traditional any longer. The modern is understood as traditional and old traditions are the new modern. One example, as we move from the center of Sao Paulo or Johannesburg to the suburbs, and from them into the surrounding country, we also move from advanced urban knowledge or information societies to industrial belts (industrial societies), later to agrarian “traditional” landowners or farmers societies, and finally, even to the remains of Neolithic hunter-gatherers, all of them coexisting in the same time-space and indeed very much linked together. What

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2 See Manuel Castells, Materials for an Exploratory Theory of the Network Society en British Journal of Sociology 51, 1, 2000, p. 5-6.
was evolutionary schemes collapse today as structural models, time collapses into space. Again, only one humanity.

In short, the West had a space / time heart (Western Europe), and an external mobile border: the frontier. Today we have plenty of centers and no borders, there is neither an inside nor an outside, nor in spatial terms (nothing is outside the emerging Western-world civilization, and what appears to be outside is inside, but marginalized), nor in temporal terms (the Neolithic is here, just around the corner). The old Third World is already within the first (in the suburbs of metropolitan areas or in the villages of immigration) and the first world has jumped over the Third (in big cities).

But a society with borders (and more so if borders are mobile), can export its contradictions (whether surplus population, surplus capital or atomic waste), either in space (outside) or in time (to the future). But when there are no borders all is inside. And if nothing is outside, how to see societies from outside? Are we witnessing the end of the empirical social conditions that made possible the "epistemology through the key-hole of the door" (Adorno, 1975; 142)? This is the third and last line that disappears, the line separating science from the rest of discourses, perhaps the most important for the social sciences.

**IS SOCIOLOGY A SCIENCE? YES, BET LETS SEE HOW (OR THE PARADOXICAL TRIUMPH OF SOCIOLOGY)**

Because classical sociology (and us with them) drew a third line, perhaps the most important: that separating scientific discourse from all other speeches. Apparently social science reflects, models, photography reality, but does so from the outside, seeing the world as if looking from another room and through the key-hole of the door. Science becomes a meta-discourse, a discourse over the excitement of every day’s discourses, discourses that remains unchanged by science. Observations do not alter the observed. Is this realistic today (and I emphasize “today”)?

Let me begin by taking note of the existence of at least two forms of knowledge, probably the greatest discovery of Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967). First, of course, science, an esoteric knowledge produced by “experts”, with an idiosyncratic language acquired through formal training usually at universities. And second, the ethno-science (secular or “lay sociology” as called by Garfinkel), an exoteric knowledge, owned by the majority of the population, a product of experience acquired by simple informal acculturation.

And note also that these two forms of knowledge, formal and informal, are valid both for knowledge about nature and about society. In fact, that’s what natural languages are: a deposit of a group’s experience and knowledge about man, society and the environment. But with one important difference between ethnoscience on nature and etnosociology: while knowledge about nature does not constitute nature, knowledge about society is constitutive of social orders, is a performatve knowledge. This was

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I already developed this idea in Lamo de Espinosa ¿Para qué la ciencia social?, in Salvador Giner (coordinator), Teoría sociológica moderna, Ariel Sociología, Barcelona, 2003, pp. 25-40.
Garfinkel’s second major discovery: ethnosociology allows us to understand everyday social activities, but it also creates them while making them explicit. And this is very important: what we know about societies contributes powerfully to shape societies while what we know about plants or insects do not shape them.

And this is the problem.

In 1958, the Spanish political scientists Murillo Ferrol asked, "What will happen when men gradually replace their vulgar and intuitive ideas about life by others scientifically produced? What will happen when society, increasingly knowing itself, is penetrated by sociology? What about the reflexive knowledge of sociologists? (Murillo, 1987; 193). Deep intuition that time has updated. And so, a few years later, in a brilliant work, the late Robert K. Merton and Allan Wolfe jointly raised this issue as one of the most interesting of contemporary sociology:

"One of the lesser-known stages of development of science is the process by which scientific discoveries, concepts and ways of thinking leave behind the scientists who generated them and become part of culture and society in general. This process, which takes place in all sciences, is of particular relevance to sociologists. The terms and concepts of sociology, through a process that has been described as "cultural integration" can be disseminated through everyday language, often losing in the process its connection with the discipline that gave origin. Moreover, sociological knowledge and techniques can enjoy a parallel process of "social incorporation", whereby social institutions and social elements of the structure (both macro and micro) are supported (in a direct or indirect and unintentional way) in the discovery and methods of sociology" (Merton and Wolfe, 1995; 15).

What the elder but bright Merton was pointing is to a dual process resulting from the use of social science, from "how social knowledge is consumed" (Merton and Wolfe, 1995; 16). On one hand, the best known: how scientific language becomes everyday language, how science becomes ethno-science, an incorporation they call "cultural". The other, "social incorporation", is less known but certainly most important: how science (sociology in this case), through their processes, tools and products, becomes part of the fabric of life itself as a social structural component.

What interests me now is to emphasize that this phenomenon is no longer a strange or weird event but the rule as a consequence of changes in the object as well as in the subject of social knowledge.

Certainly the incorporation of sociology is the result of its development as applied science, its second institutionalization as a profession; changes therefore in the observer subject. But on the other hand, and most important (the part of the object), it’s also a consequence of the growing complexity of social life that cannot function without a systematic and routine self-observation and self-understanding, a constant reflection of society upon itself. Years ago I warned that modern societies were becoming "reflexive societies" (Lamo de Espinosa, 1991): to be able to manage the growing social complexity society has unfolded in two parts, one acting and another that observes the action, corrects his development and sends back information systematically. And the core of the observer part is made by the social sciences as a whole. So, we can say that
(post) modern reflexive societies are nothing but the result of an institutional coupling and linkage between the subject and the object of the social science, between the observer and the observed. The observed needs the observer more than ever. This may seem a little gibberish so let me clarify it.

It is worthwhile to examine how sociologists have studied relationships between science and society. Because when we speak of scientific or technological determinism (at least since Comte), we always think about the impact of the hard sciences and technologies (the steam engine, transport, quantum physics or computers, to name a few) on society. However, when dealing with the social sciences, the inquiry turned upwards to how society determines or distorts social knowledge, i.e. sociology, developing thus a sociology of prejudice and deceit (Condillac or Helvetius), theories of ideology (Marx) and, finally, a true sociology of knowledge (Mannheim). Our inquiry takes opposite directions when dealing with natural or social sciences, so that we have been working as if natural sciences were not affected by society, and as if social sciences had no social impact whatsoever.

Whatever the reasons for this imbalance (easily understood; hard sciences were the model of objectivity), this asymmetry is being corrected by modern sociology. On the one hand, the old Mertonian sociology of science as an institution has evolved into a true sociology of scientific knowledge because natural, hard, sciences, not just social ones, are also affected by society (by interests, prejudices or ideologies). But on the other hand, and through the bias of reflexivity and the "incorporation" of our knowledge, we also began to explore now how social sciences affect society.

And working in this direction what we discover is that social innovations are constituent elements of social orders not less than technological innovations. Fascinated as we were by the "hardware" (from the arrow and spears of the Bronze Age to the computer via the steam engine), we neglected the social "software". But the invention of the State, Law or markets, of parenthood or cities, up to the insurance systems, mortgages or double entry accounting, all of these innovations had no less social impact than the plow or the domestication of the horse or sheep. And similarly to how the invention of the steam engine brought the industrial society, could this exist without insurance, corporations, statistics, demography or economics? How to control the population without demography, cities without urban planning, the (real) economy without economy and societies at large without sociology? While the products of the hard sciences are changing society, the products of the soft sciences help manage and administer and are more and more necessary as complexity grows.

A process reinforced in the frame of modern knowledge societies, whose motor is precisely the general and growing application of science and technology (natural and social) to social life. Indeed what today's knowledge societies are doing is to accelerate this process of coupling and linking social science and ethnoscience. We spend huge amount of resources (in money and time) studying ourselves, and social science circulates throughout the social body and is, in fact, one of the most powerful producers of ethnoscience. As Thorstein Veblen pointed out in *The Place of Science in Modern Civilization*, science gives its character to modern culture (Veblen, 1919). Science in general, not only natural.

This is manifested, first of all, in the routine production of social knowledge by all
kinds of research centers and institutions (private and public, universities, think tanks, research units of major corporations, international organizations such as the FMI or the World Bank, NGO, etcetera) generating millions of statistics, data and models on all thinkable dimensions of social life. And this because States as well as regions, municipalities, large companies, international organizations, political parties, all are eager to acquire information about themselves and their social environment. And they produce it systematically, whether it be birth rates, migration flows, inflation rates, prices of products, drug addicts, battered women, orange consumption, or houses sold, a huge and constantly growing mass of data available (frequently through Internet) for whoever may be interested (see Thrift, 2005). Modern complex societies are consistently self-observing as a crucial part of the process of managing its social reproduction.

Manifested also in the diffusion of this knowledge through a thousand ways: newspapers, journals, magazines of general interest, specialized seminars, conferences, lectures. We know that any professional (such as a lawyer, a doctor or an economist or sociologist) must spend at least one or two hours daily to update his or her knowledge. And so we all are perpetually connected to sources of social information such as radios, television or newspapers. And of course the royal road to access this vast amount of information is the web, whose volume of pages (the true memory of mankind) doubles every three months.

Finally, if there is a growing supply of information, demand is growing too by both corporate and individual actors. Of course the former have produced observation units for themselves and their environment (markets, states) that pro-actively seek true and updated information, discuss its value and define their strategies (action lines) on the basis of such analysis and models. But also the individual actors, trained in the logic of science through many years of formal education in high schools and Universities, constituting a massive but educated and learned audience. More than 30% of the population in OECD area have post-secondary studies so that there are "masses" of intellectuals, scientists or engineers who know and appreciate the value of good information and good models, seek and select them and, of course, use them not only in their jobs, but also to address the many uncertainties of their daily lives.

In short, on the one hand, the observers of social life have multiplied but, on the other, actors are connected by a thousand ways with these observers. The main economic actors are economists themselves, and are certainly courted by famous economists. Political actors may not be political scientists but certainly their advisers are (and for a while the most powerful man in the U.S. after President Bush Jr. was Karl Rove, his political adviser). But the dissemination of knowledge is osmotic. NGOs working with migrants are advised by sociologists or anthropologists and design their strategies and messages based on models developed by social science, and the same applies to battered women or drug users, who see themselves as sociologists see them.

Take an example: if the Bank of Spain publishes tomorrow a rigorous and scientific report on the Spanish economy, all economic actors (entrepreneurs, bankers, investors, analysts) will be eager to read it, adjusting immediately their behavior to the forecasts of the report. We can then ask a question: are the economists of the Bank of Spain reflecting economic reality, or is reality being conducted by the Bank of Spain? Who reads whom, the Bank of Spain “reads” reality or reality reads what the Bank of Spain
The conclusion is obvious: what social scientists say about the world is part of the world. But we should move a step ahead: what social scientists say about the world is a variable that, more and more, constitute the world. Unrepentant narcissist as we are, we consider ourselves as observers of societies ignoring the obvious: that we are the instrument used by societies to observe themselves. We do not look at the world but the world relies on us to look at him. We do not look at society from outside; we are the instrument that societies use to look at themselves. Social science is the tool of ethnoscience, not vice versa. Well thought out, if it were not so, what would be the meaning of social science?

So, social science may progress or not. It’s a subject of debate for decades if social sciences are cumulative and can follow Whitehead’s advice of “forgetting the classics”, as natural sciences seem to do. But what it is certain is that the environment of the social sciences has changed. And that change of environment, today an avid consumer of information and science, means an ontological change on the parameters upon which sociology is rooted, introducing a deep contradiction between what we think we are and what we really are, between our epistemological self-understanding and the social conditions of our social epistemology. Like Marx or Freud or Keynes, we consider ourselves objective positive scientists detached from our object of research, but in fact (as it happened to them) we have been captured by the object, and we do not know who reads whom entering into a reflexive loop. The key question is the following: what would happen with biology, for example, if viruses were able to read biology books? What with geology if tectonic plates knew what geologists say about them? That’s the condition of the social sciences: we speak about viruses that speak about ourselves.

Finally, it’s a question of audiences: for whom do we speak? If we were isolated in our ivory towers speaking only among ourselves (as it happened in Durkheim’s times and before), then Adorno’s epistemology thorough the key-hole would had an adequate social environment, a social base. But this stopped being so long ago. And from the moment Marx decided to talk, not to other social scientists, but to society, the door separating subject and object was opened. Today that door is a flowing network of information that links observers and observed in a thousand ways. As Seeley noted decades ago, how to describe adequately an object when the description is part of the same object? (Seeley, 1963; 60). Should we describe previous descriptions too?

But since the audience is the media (as said by Florian Znaniecki, 1940) and the media is the message (as said by McLuhan, 1967), that shift of audience in social science, from the expert to the native, requires a different strategy. We should write so as to be understood not only by colleagues but by the educated mass audience. We must recover the “essay” in Ortega y Gasset’s sense: science, yes, but without its methodological paraphernalia. We should appear more in mass-media because if we do not do so, demand of light and transparency will be covered by others (journalists ignorant or poorly educated), as indeed is happening. We must cultivate a new style of thinking and new ways to express what we think. It is indeed pathetic to check how many social scientists, and certainly many of the most competent, working on social issues vital to their fellow citizens, have decided to write in English for foreign esoteric audiences, depriving their own citizens of the possibility of using that knowledge. Who do we work for? Frankly, I fail to understand the meaning of science for the sake of science if
that knowledge does not serve the same citizens whose problems, anxieties, fears or hopes we are studying.

"It is not enough for us to know ourselves -said my old teacher, Richard Flacks, commenting on the crisis of sociology more than thirty years ago-. What is needed is the creation of a world where everyone is able to understand social reality, and where, consequently, no one is a sociologist “(Flacks, 1972; 10).

A Utopia, certainly. But an unavoidable one. In the meanwhile let us be aware that at least some people sometimes are aware of social reality through us.

CONCLUSION: OLD AND NEW BELIEFS

I have tried to make explicit some basic ideas received form our classics, learned later through acculturation as sociologists, and becoming habits of thinking of a disciplinary culture, tools of our thinking more than topics of research. But the belief that societies are state-organized human groups, that our task is to understand modernization processes moving away from the traditional to the modern and, finally, that our knowledge does not modify the object, all three constitutive beliefs of classical social science, seem to be outdated. State-organized societies are no longer an autonomous object of research in a globalized world. We are moving from modern to post-modern societies, a map that has yet to be drawn. And our discourse is more and more mixed with native languages describing the world but changing it at the same time.

Are we substituting old beliefs with new ones? Probably so. Globalization, post-modernism and reflexivity are fast becoming new habits of thinking: we live in a global world, societies are fast changing again, sociological discourse has not epistemological superiority to common discourse. However, if this may be the case, it’s not completely, at least not yet. For the moment they are only ideas we use to overcome classical beliefs, and as such, are subject to scrutiny and are questioned and doubted. As they should be, avoiding the danger of rejecting a true hypothesis in favor of a false one.
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