

D I G I T H U M

A RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON CULTURE AND SOCIETY

No. 26 (July 2020)

ISSN 1575-2275

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>



UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA

D I G I T H U M

A RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON CULTURE AND SOCIETY

No. 26 (July 2020)

ISSN 1575-2275

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

SPECIAL SECTION: “The work of François Dépelteau (Guest Editor: Peeter Selg)”



UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA

Digithum, No. 26 (July 2020)

CONTENTS

SPECIAL SECTION: "The work of François Dépelteau (Guest Editor: Peeter Selg)"

A sociological imagination for a clumsy world: François Dépelteau's relational sociology

Peeter Selg p. 5-17

Relations-In-Process: In Honour of François Dépelteau

Nick Crossley p. 18-31

Friends of Relational Sociology? The Relational Current as a Space of Hospitality

Olli Pyyhtinen p. 32-43

The Field of Relational Sociology

Jan Fuhse p. 44-53

Relational Sociology of the Scientific Field: Communication, Identities, and Field Relations

Jan Fuhse p. 54-79

Are relational processes teleological or self-referential? What relational sociology can learn from systems theory

Jean-Sébastien Guy p. 68-79

François Dépelteau and the generation of a relational intellectual community

Scott Eacott p. 80-90

Reflexiones sobre la sociología relacional-procesual de François Dépelteau

Mariana Leoni Birriel, Marcia Grisotti p. 91-99

REFEREED ARTICLES

Westworld: "Los placeres violentos poseen ¡finales violentos"

Vicente Díaz Gandasegui p. 101-111

La emoción y el sentimiento: más allá de una diferencia de contenido

Daniel Buitrago p. 112-123

Post-demolición: memorias, afectos y cuerpos en conflicto

Yuzzel Alcantara Ceballos p. 124-136

Digithum, No. 26 (July 2020)

REVIEWS

Review of the book *Los sentidos del cuerpo: Un giro sensorial en la investigación social y los estudios de género*. Center for Gender Research and Studies, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Mexico City, 2019.

Einer Mosquera Acevedo p. 138-143

MATERIALS

La sociología relacional como modo de aprendizaje

Danilo Melo, Mariana Leoni Birriel, Carolina Monteiro de Castro Nascimento,

Nadya Emma Alvarez p. 145-147

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Special Section: “Special Issue guest-edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of François Dépelteau”

A sociological imagination for a clumsy world: François Dépelteau’s relational sociology

Peeter Selg
Tallin University

Date of submission: February 2021

Accepted in: June 2021

Published in: July 2021

Recommended citation:

SELG, Peeter (2021). “A sociological imagination for a clumsy world: François Dépelteau’s relational sociology”. In: “Special Issue guest edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of Francois Dépelteau”. [online article]. *Digithum*, no. 26, pp. 1-13. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and Universidad de Antioquia. [Retrieved in: dd/mm/yy]. <http://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.383829>



The texts published in this journal are – unless otherwise indicated – covered by the Creative Commons Spain Attribution 4.0 International licence. The full text of the licence can be consulted here: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Abstract

In this paper I introduce the special section on the work of the late François Dépelteau (1963-2018), by analyzing an essential tension within the relational sociology which I call the division between “clumsy” and “elegant” relationalism. “Clumsy” relationalism as exemplified most uncompromisingly by François is in a way an extreme perspective on social research, prescribing a certain “obsession” with change and unfolding of reality, rather than its stability or firm foundation. As François has put it in one of his last published works: “Everything is changing all the time, including ourselves. This is hard to accept since we are looking for some sort of stability often to reassure ourselves.” I ask why should we accept this perspective rather than continue with reassuring ourselves. I also point out that both “elegant” and “clumsy” relationalisms are useful for social research, but that the latter is increasingly pertinent for contemporary world inhabited by “wicked” social problems that have no elegant solutions or even definitions. I also analyse in more detail François’s critique of Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology that is the most eminent example of “elegant” relationalism, and the furthering of “clumsy” relational sociology in the contributions to the special section by Nick Crossley and Jean-Sebastien Guy.

Keywords

François Dépelteau, relational sociology, social processes, Pierre Bourdieu

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

A sociological imagination for a clumsy world: François Dépelteau's relational sociology

Imaginación sociológica para un mundo torpe: la sociología relacional de François Dépelteau

Resumen

En este artículo presento la sección especial sobre la obra de François Dépelteau (1963-2018), donde analizo la tensión fundamental dentro de la sociología relacional, que yo llamo la división entre el relacionalismo «torpe» y el «elegante». El relacionalismo «torpe», tal como lo ejemplifica François implacablemente, es en cierto modo una perspectiva extrema de la investigación social, y prescribe una cierta «obsesión» con el cambio y el desarrollo de la realidad, en lugar de su estabilidad o de una base sólida. Como dijo François en uno de sus últimos trabajos publicados: «Todo está en constante cambio, incluso nosotros mismos. Es difícil de aceptar, ya que siempre buscamos algún tipo de estabilidad que nos brinde seguridad». Yo cuestiono por qué deberíamos aceptar esta perspectiva en lugar de seguir brindándonos seguridad. También me permito indicar que los relacionalismos «elegante» y «torpe» son útiles para la investigación social, pero esta última es más apropiada para el mundo contemporáneo habitado por problemas sociales «retorcidos» que no tienen soluciones elegantes, ni siquiera definición. También analizo con más detalle la crítica de François Dépelteau a la sociología de Pierre Bourdieu, que es el ejemplo más eminente del relacionalismo «elegante»; y el avance de la sociología relacional «torpe» en los artículos de Nick Crossley y Jean-Sébastien Guy para la sección especial.

Palabras clave

François Dépelteau, sociología relacional, procesos sociales, Pierre Bourdieu

Introduction

Already long time ago Charles Wright Mills introduced the idea of “sociological imagination” in a book with the same title (2000 [1959]). Although it is hard to see it as a rigorously defined concept, one can definitely perceive it as indicating to a certain attitude towards the world or an ethos of research rather than a set of clear-cut methodological principles. Sociological imagination does not take neither micro- or macro-observations at face value, but tries to uncover their relations. This imagination was meant to reinvigorate the research ethos of classical social analyses (Durkheim, Weber, Marx and others) in the face of the new positivist tendencies of Mills' time that he referred to as “abstracted empiricism” with their “bureaucratic techniques” (Ch. 5), and the pretentious play with concepts “drunk on syntax, blind to semantics” (p. 34), which he saw as the tendency in “grand theory” (à la Parsons). Sociological imagination for him is

“the capacity to shift from one perspective to another—from the political to the psychological; from examination of a single family to comparative assessment of the national budgets of the world; from the theological school to the military establishment; from considerations of an oil industry to studies of contemporary poetry. It is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self—and to see *the relations between the two*.” (Mills 2000, p. 7, italics added)

Yet those relations seem to have gone lost. So much so, that roughly forty years later Mustafa Emirbayer deemed necessary to write a “Manifesto for a Relational Sociology” (1997) with the now famous opening words: “Sociologists today are faced with a fundamental dilemma: whether to conceive of the social world as consisting primarily in substances or in processes, in static “things” or in dynamic, unfolding relations.” (p. 281). Taking the second route – the processes-dynamic-unfolding-relations oriented path – is the one he proposes for relational sociology against what he calls “substantialism” or seeing the world in terms of substances or static “things”.

Yet another decade later François Dépelteau published a landmarking paper “Relational Thinking: A Critique of Co-Deterministic Theories of Structure and Agency” (2008). Both Emirbayer's Manifesto and his paper were provocative: not only did they try to articulate what relational thinking is, but also to dismiss as forms of substantialism various perspectives that more or less explicitly seem to be about studying social relations. As the title of François's paper indicates, not only does he propose a groundwork for relational thinking, but also a critique of what is sometimes referred to as co-determinism, variable-centered analysis or interactionalism in theoretical-methodological reflections over the “relational turn” in the social sciences (see also Dépelteau 2013a; 2015; 2018a; 2018b; Emirbayer 1997; Selg 2016a; 2016b; 2018; Selg and Ventsel 2020). In this paper the above-mentioned Mills is used as an example of co-determinism along with many other eminent social theorists including Pierre Bourdieu, Roy Bhaskar,

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

A sociological imagination for a clumsy world: François Dépelteau's relational sociology

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, and Margaret Archer. In the vocabulary of François, co-determinism means basically moving from reductive monism (in the form of voluntarism or structuralism) to the dualism of structure and agency: "*social universe is made by interactions between structures and agency*" (2013a, p. 177). Yet at the same time for François

"the main challenge posed by relational theories is to explain social phenomena without *any* total or partial causal relation from social structures to action. As a developing mode of perception, relational sociology is still a challenge in itself. It is also challenging an old, persistent habitus in social science: to see social actions as the effects of social things." (2008, p. 59)

In other words, co-determinism is not a relational approach at all. This points to certain creative or even agonistic tensions (see Selg 2013) within the "relational" movement, especially given that by the beginning of the third decade of this century, "relational" has become an increasingly positive catchword in the social sciences and no one wants to be dismissed from the "relational" camp very easily anymore. These tensions are alluded to in all of the contributions to the current special issue dedicated to François Dépelteau's work that all the contributors see as essential for the development of the movement into its current global reach over the last decade.

In his contribution, Olli Pyyhtinen points to controversy between ontological realists and constructivists: "Relational realists, to put the matter crudely, conceive relations as connecting previously unconnected bounded entities and having an emergent being of their own, whereas thinkers of a more constructivist pole consider relations as constitutive of entities." (Pyyhtinen 2021, p. 7). Those, he calls realists (e. g. Donati and Archer 2015) are basically what Dépelteau calls co-determinists. What Pyyhtinen calls constructivists, are what Dépelteau would call relationalists: besides himself, Emirbayer and Latour would probably be the most eminent names in this camp (see also in this section Leoni Birriel and Grisotti 2021). There are other controversies like those between structuralist-relational and process-relational approaches that are closely tied to the first controversy; between anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric approaches; between various understandings of relations (in terms of communication, translation, etc.). All in all, Pyyhtinen concludes: "these divisions and disagreements suggest that relational sociology presents no homogeneous space" (Pyyhtinen 2021, p. 7; see also in this section Eacott 2020, p. 10; Fuhse 2021a, p. 6; 2021b, pp. 3, 6). This point is reiterated by Jan Fuhse in his combination of a more general relational theory of social fields (2021a) and sketch of an analysis of the field of relational sociology (2021b). Scott Eacott (2020) takes up a relational analysis of François Dépelteau's role in embodying relational community by initiating creative controversies and not presuming one single understanding of "relational" approach.

All those brief references to François's work and to the contributions of this special section point to an essential division in the relational movement thus far which I would conceptualize as one between "clumsy" and "elegant" relational sociological imagination. The figures of "clumsiness" and "elegance" come from cultural theoretical approaches to governance and decision-making more generally. Important here are Mary Douglas's and Aaron Wildavsky's works (e. g. 1982) that see governance of societal problems in terms of different mixtures of hierarchical, egalitarian, individualist and fatalist tendencies in decision-making and communication (see Swedlow 2002; 2011). Among other things, this cultural theory has inspired various versions of addressing "wicked problems" through so-called "clumsy solutions" which would be a creative combination of different forms of decision-making cultures (individualist, egalitarian, hierarchical, fatalist) unlike "elegant solutions" in which there would be an overwhelming dominance of one form of decision-making (see Verveij and Thompson 2006). For "wicked problems" (see Rittel and Webber 1973; Peters 2017), of which the COVID-crisis is a new example, no "elegant solutions" exist and therefore their governing presumes providing "clumsy solutions" that do not reduce the problem to any permanent ground or singular form of decision-making. My insight is that there is an internal split within the relational movement between "elegant" relationalism and "clumsy" relationalism: the former (among the proponents of social network analysis [SNA], Bourdieusians, critical realists) is still presuming some elegant ground for analysis of the world. The latter (along the lines of Dewey and Bentley's trans-actionalism and Norbert Elias's process-relationalism that were the major sources for Dépelteau) are going to the end in denying that anything but dynamically and processually unfolding relations (trans-actions) are constituting the social world. Both forms of relationalism have legitimacy and relevance, since we cannot decide, in advance, on whether the world is either "elegant" or "clumsy." But when faced with contemporary "big issues" that are often wicked problems (e. g. climate change, global pandemics, migration) the relevance of clumsy relationalism is considerably growing. We have to start, however, with untangling the main sources of clumsy relationalism that inspired François through – the work of Emirbayer, who in turn based his argument on Dewey and Bentley.

On the difficulties with clumsy relationalism

It has proven to be very difficult to truly accept what is at stake in Dewey and Bentley's proposition that is often quoted as a source of relational thinking after Emirbayer used it in his Manifesto:

"systems of description and naming are employed to deal with aspects and phases of action, without final attribution to 'elements' or other presumptively detachable or independent

'entities,' 'essences,' or 'realities,' and without isolation of presumptively detachable 'relations' from such detachable 'elements'." (Dewey & Bentley 1949, p. 108)

This point of view, which Emirbayer calls "the perspective of *trans-action*" (1997, p. 286), and explicitly also "label[s] 'relational'" (*Ibid.*, 287) is confusing in a double sense. First of all, it is distinguished from the perspectives of *self-action* and *inter-action* in both Dewey and Bentley, as well as Emirbayer. Why is this confusing? Well, if one looks carefully how the perspective of trans-action is presented in Dewey and Bentley, one cannot help but notice that it is an *epistemological* or even *methodological* perspective and *not an ontological* outlook: it is not about how the world *is*, but how we employ or should employ our conceptual schemes (theories, models, frameworks, even observations, etc.) or "systems of description and naming". It is an epistemological/methodological call of not presuming any final "essences" or "realities" to "elements" we encounter when we try to conceptually grasp "aspects and phases of action". We should presume our conceptual schemes to be provisional and subject to change as we go along with our investigation of the world (see also Morgner 2020, p. 16). But besides that – and even more importantly for relational thinking – it is also a call not to treat those "elements" or "entities" as isolated from their relations or even not to presume that "entities" and "relations" are detachable from each other. In view of this, Emirbayer's equation of the relational perspective with the perspective of trans-action makes a lot of sense, and one can only wonder why this obvious fact is often ignored by his critics who claim, for instance, that he "never defines what he means by 'relation' and 'relational sociology,' but instead talks of a 'transactional sociology'" (Donati 2020: 184).¹ But, be it as it may, it is important, again, to highlight that this is not an analytical or descriptive statement of how the world *is* (ontology), but how we should treat our knowledge or systems of descriptions of the world (epistemology, methodology²). And here is where the first confusion lies. Namely the two forms of substantialism – perspectives of self-action and inter-action – to which Emirbayer opposes this relational perspective based on trans-action are presented in *ontological*, *not epistemological/methodological* terms.

First, self-action, in which "things... are viewed as acting under their own powers" (Dewey and Bentley 1949, p. 108). Next, the perspective of inter-action presumes a world where "thing is balanced against thing in causal interconnection" (*Ibid.*). These

are presumptions about how to view the world, not how to view our knowledge, or to put it in Dewey and Bentley's terms: these are views about "entities", not about "systems of description" of "entities". And this is related to the second confusion with the trans-actional view: namely Emirbayer claims that his "Manifesto," where he outlines the specificity of a relational sociology, "focuses throughout upon ontology, largely—but certainly not exclusively—bracketing associated questions regarding epistemology" (1997, p. 282). So, it seems that his essay is about how the "real is relational" (to borrow a slogan from Bourdieu [1998, p. 3]) – or on how reality really is. Here lies the reason why, again, he and his followers (e. g. the "trans-actional sociologists" like Dépelteau) are depicted as offering a "reductive vision of social reality" through reducing "relationships to pure flows, considering structures as purely contingent" (Donati 2020, p. 179). Emirbayer offers traps for such reading – by claiming that his essay is mostly about ontology and by presenting self- and inter-action in ontological terms.³ But, in fact, even in Emirbayer the exposition of the perspective of trans-action (that is, "relational perspective") is epistemological or methodological. He unpacks it in the following way:

"the very terms or units involved in a transaction derive their meaning, significance, and identity from the (changing) functional roles they play within that transaction. The latter, *seen as a dynamic, unfolding process*, becomes the *primary unit of analysis* rather than the constituent elements themselves." (1997, p. 287, italics added)

A researcher adopting processual-relational perspective "sees relations between terms or units [of analysis] as preeminently dynamic in nature, as unfolding, ongoing processes rather than as static ties among inert substances" (*Ibid.*, 289, italics added). Thus, the "unit" of social analysis should also be seen as a "complex joint activity, in which it *makes no sense to envision* constituent elements apart from the flows within which they are involved (and vice versa)" (*Ibid.*, italics added). So, it is about "seeing" and "envisioning" of the proper "unit of analysis," not the "object" of analysis itself. And this seeing and envisioning is presumed to be in terms of unfolding processes that are primary to "constituent elements" (agents, structures, individuals, identities, families, wars, marriages, etc.). Those elements are seen as processes too. So, this perspective prescribes, epistemologically and methodologically, avoiding as much as possible what Elias (1978) calls "process-reduction" that is characteristic of our languages (pp. 111-112; see

1. Just to add a basic-level erratum here to this quote: Emirbayer never even mentions "transactional sociology" in his "Manifesto".
2. In the context of (social) science the distinction between "epistemology" or "methodology" is a matter of degree: one could say that epistemological research is on the conditions of possibility of knowledge on what there is (ontologically), whereas methodological research is on the practices and techniques that are suitable for gaining this possible knowledge. Both are, of course, based on ontological commitments (presumptions about the being of the world) and all three tend, from time to time, be left tacit in actual social research (see Hay 2006; Bevir 2008 and Selg 2016a; 2016b on these distinctions).
3. I leave aside the issue here that the ontology/epistemology inconsistency is also present in Dewey and Bentley.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

A sociological imagination for a clumsy world: François Dépelteau's relational sociology

also Emirbayer 1997, p. 283). Social processes should be treated as unfolding and changing and it is this unfolding and changing that a researcher should investigate rather than presuming their givenness (which would be process-reduction). I will come to the details of process-reduction also below.

Now, in a way this is an extreme perspective on social research, prescribing a certain "obsession" with change and unfolding of reality, rather than its stability or firm foundation. As François has put it in one of his last published works: "Everything is changing all the time, including ourselves. This is hard to accept since we are looking for some sort of stability often to reassure ourselves." (2018b, p. 503). But why should we accept this perspective? Why not continue with reassuring ourselves? Why should we do away with obvious facts that we can see every day: that there are stable phenomena around us like people with proper names and identities, laws that structure our action, wars that have permanent, not only constantly changing consequences for many, etc.? First of all, a few specifications about social change and stability are in order regarding the consequences of this relational sociology we have been outlining based on the notion of trans-action. I will call it "trans-actional sociology" from now on.⁴ Trans-actional sociology does not in any way preclude studying stable social phenomena (most often termed "social structures"). All it prescribes is that we should not lose sight of the presumption that those stable phenomena are trans-actions as well. As Dépelteau explains: the "social universe is full of more or less continuous and similar trans-actions (or social structures) that we call market, wedding, war, genocide, racism, exploitation, domination, love, and so on" (Dépelteau 2008, p. 62). This is a crucial point to be reiterated again: trans-actional sociology does not preclude analysis of social objects like social structures. Trans-actional sociology only inverts the classical perspective of sociology regarding social change: not change, but the stability of social phenomena (structures, selves, identities, groups, etc.) is often the puzzle that needs to be explained, and these social phenomena "should be studied as chains of trans-action" (*Ibid.*). This means de-reifying those phenomena (*Ibid.*, p. 63) or bringing to the fore that it is the dynamic relations – not some sort of essences of entities – that constitute social phenomena as "things". Analyzing the very constitution of such "things" within trans-actions is the task of trans-actional sociology. In other words what needs to be explained are the changing being of "things" like the following: "An individual is a soldier full of hate, a knife is a weapon, and a mountain is a defensive wall or an obstacle, etc. when there is a war. In another trans-action, the same individual

is a 'loving machine,' the mountain a romantic view, and the knife might become a gift" (*Ibid.*). This, of course, does not mean that mountains or knives do not exist "on their own", but rather "*sociologically speaking*, the 'properties' of mountains are deeply shaped by some contextualized trans-actions between social actors" (*Ibid.*, p. 66). Thus, in a war figuration mountains function as a defensive wall; in a market figuration they might function as some sort of tourist attraction, but in the figuration of chess game they do not have any relevance at all and consequently "action and its environment are interconnected. They 'trans-act'" (*Ibid.*; see also Dépelteau 2013a, pp. 177-178; 2018b). This way, both change and stability of social phenomena can be explained. What is altered compared to a traditional sociological perspective is that stability is viewed as a special case of change. The twist of perspective is analogous to that performed by complexity theory for which "simple behavior is a special case of complex behavior" (Richardson 2007, p. 194). There is no denial of the existence of structures in trans-actional sociology (although they are seen as certain forms of trans-actions), like there is no denial of simple behavior in complexity theory (although it is seen as a certain form of complex behavior). So, we do not lose the traditional concerns of sociology related to social structures and their role in social analysis and explanation. We might as well assure ourselves with the stability of structures if we want to, and in most cases of social research there are good reasons to want exactly this assurance. What are the reasons? And are there also good reasons not to want this assurance? Both questions – especially the latter one – could be responded through a deeper engagement with François Dépelteau's contribution to trans-actional sociology. In doing so I treat trans-actional sociology and the positions that it is distinguished from (like co-determinism) as certain "ontological commitments" to avoid the, in my view fruitless, ontological debate on how reality really is, and engage, rather on the issue on what kind of problems and research questions can we meaningfully raise with one or another theory.

The notion of "ontological commitment" comes from Quine (1951; 1953, pp. 1-19). Its canonical summary (given the outlet) reads as follows: "The ontological commitments of a theory are, roughly, what the theory says exists; a theory is ontologically committed to electrons, for example, if the truth of the theory requires that there be electrons" (Bricker, 2016). My use of this notion is in essence pragmatist: the question for me is basically what we can do with certain ontological commitments (e.g. trans-actional sociology) that we cannot do (at least not equally well) with others (e.g., co-determinism) rather than the question of

4. Note, again, that this was not the term used by Emirbayer, but was introduced later by Dépelteau (2013; 2015; 2018b). He, like Emirbayer, usually uses the non-hyphenated form "transactional". The inconsistency in this usage leads back to Dewey and Bentley (1949) who use both forms. In various writings (Selg 2016a; 2016b; 2018; Selg and Ventsel 2020) I have insisted on using the hyphenated form only in order to highlight the telling prefixes of the neologisms (self-, inter- and trans-action), especially given that transaction is widely used in economic literature where it actually refers to what can be conceptualized as self-action in Dewey and Bentley's sense.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

A sociological imagination for a clumsy world: François Dépelteau's relational sociology

which one of those commitments represents reality as it truly is. The adjudication between different frameworks is not based on their correspondence to reality, but their usefulness for certain purposes. This is pragmatism along the lines of Richard Rorty, according to whom “there is no such thing as ‘the best explanation’ of anything; there is just the explanation which best suits the purpose of some given explainer.” (2006, p. 60). He, in turn, sees justification of ontological commitments in Deweyan sense, that is, by their “functional or instrumental use in effecting the transition from a relatively conflicting experience to a relatively integrated one.” (Dewey, 2012, p. 75). The upside of pragmatism is pluralism: while I argue that certain ontological commitments are more useful for dealing with certain research problems, I am not arguing that other perspectives might not be more useful for other problems. Thus, for instance, I argue that while trans-actional sociology of François Dépelteau is of more use for conceptualizing what I refer to as “clumsy world” where social problems are seen as “wicked”, the co-determinism ranging from Marx and Bourdieu to Archer and Donati is, again a form of relational sociology that is more useful for “elegant world” inhabited with problems that are usually referred to as “complex” or “simple”, rather than “wicked” (see Selg and Ventsel 2020, chapter 3). Trans-actional sociology gives us relatively integrated experience (in Dewey’s sense) for a clumsy world. Here treating our “systems of description” as preliminary and subject to change, and without presuming any essences of phenomena that those descriptions refer to, and without presuming the phenomena to be detachable from the relations they are embedded in – here all this messy stuff makes a lot of sense. However, were we to access the elegant world in a similar manner, we would almost certainly mess it up unnecessarily.

But how exactly does elegant relational sociology differ from the clumsy relational sociology we have been articulating here through the notion of trans-action. We can clarify it by focusing on an important part of François’s work: his critical examination of the work of one of the biggest names associated with the relational movement, Pierre Bourdieu.

A critique of elegant relational sociology: Dépelteau on Bourdieu’s co-determinism

Jan Fuhse in his contribution to this special section has pointed out that

“Bourdieu is not really interested in social relationships of interaction between actors... Bourdieu’s relations run between positions in fields, and these have two sides: actors are positioned ‘objectively’ in a field by the field-relevant resources (economic, cultural, social capital and others) they possess, and by their symbolic practices (‘posi-tion-taking’). Generally, practices are supposed to follow the habitus of actors, and

these are determined by the objective positions in terms of the relative distribution of resources.” (Fuhse 2021a, p. 7)

François would second him on this. He points out that although in the last phase of his career (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), he presented his works as a relational theory compatible with the works of Ernst Cassirer and Norbert Elias, there is little doubt overall that Bourdieu is more co-deterministic than a relational. Why think that Bourdieu was a relational thinker in the first place, then? One way to approach it is to take his own words (or those of his disciples) as a starting point: “Against all forms of methodological monism that purport to assert the ontological priority of structure or agent, system or actor, the collective or the individual, Bourdieu affirms the *primacy of relations*.” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 15). According to François “this is taken to mean that in his work, social phenomena are perceived in a processual, fluid logic as ‘dynamic, unfolding relations’ rather than static “substances” (Dépelteau 2013b, p. 276, quoting Emirbayer 1997). There are sceptics however, most notably Jeffrey Alexander (1995, 2003) who see him as more or less structuralist, arguing that in the end social structures with their various positions determine the faiths of the actors and that notions like *habitus* Bourdieu introduces are meant to explain why the actors occupying those positions more or less automatically reproduce the underlying structures (Dépelteau 2013b, p. 276).

A comparison with Norbert Elias makes it clearer. There are some not so thorough, but still relatively obvious similarities between these two thinkers. They both reject classical dualisms in social research – those of objectivism vs. subjectivism and determinism vs. voluntarism. As François explains “both of them present relational perceptions of society or social structures. At first sight, their concepts of *field* (Bourdieu) and *figuration* (Elias) seem to be similar and relational (or processual) rather than being based on substantialism” (Dépelteau 2013b, p. 277). Yet there are certain limits to this processualism and dynamism in Bourdieu’s thinking. He proposes the notion of habitus for conceptualizing the connection between the field and the individual defining it as “mental structures” (Bourdieu 1989, p. 18) that is “both a system of schemes of production of practices and a system of perception and appreciation of practices” (*Ibid.*, p. 19). Usual indicators of habitus could be found “in tastes, preferences, perceptions, and other properties of ‘agents’” François explains, adding: “The habitus is a mode of perception and orientation through which agents comprehend and manage the social universe. It is also manifested in body postures, the choices of words, and so on” (Dépelteau 2013b, p. 278). Similar notion can be found in Elias: “In *The Civilizing Process*, the notion of habitus is related to the perceptions, feelings, and evaluations of various people regarding public practices such as nose-blowing, table manners, farting, and spitting” (Dépelteau 2013b, p. 278).

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

A sociological imagination for a clumsy world: François Dépelteau's relational sociology

Another seeming resemblance between Elias and Bourdieu could be found in their notions that describe the general makeup of the social world, "figuration" and "field". Elias figurations are "webs of interdependence" (1978, p. 15). Bourdieu's "relational mode of thinking" (1989, p. 16) presumes the notion of fields as "systems of relations" (1989, p. 16). Analytically a field is "a network, or a configuration of objective relations between positions" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 97); therefore, "to think in terms of field is to *think relationally*" (*Ibid.*, p. 96). François points out that "both Bourdieu and Elias use the game analogy to explain what are fields or figurations" and "both insist on the importance of social classes: in fields or figurations, social classes are involved in processes of imitation and distinction that shape the habitus of individuals throughout the evolution of society" (Dépelteau 2013b, pp. 278-279).

Nevertheless, crucial differences remain between Elias and Bourdieu:

"Elias studies how relations between interdependent actors produce social processes. Social phenomena are seen as fluid and more or less precarious social processes produced by interdependent individuals and groups. In contrast, by essentially thinking in a (co)deterministic way, Bourdieu explained in many important texts that structural positions influence our actions via the habitus, by adding that sometimes actors can have some agency." (Dépelteau 2013b, p. 279)

Thus, essentially Elias is attempting to grasp the *clumsy* world of "precarious social processes", while Bourdieu is opting for an *elegant* world of "structural positions". This is very close to structuralism – a position that is almost as elegant as it gets in social explanation. A key idea here is that

"structures are interiorized through the habitus. Put briefly, there are some structures that reproduce themselves through time and space with an amazing stability, and this phenomenon is not due to respect for some conscious or unconscious rules. These reproductive tendencies instead involve the use of 'strategies,' a 'practical sense of things,' and 'a feel for the game'". (Dépelteau 2013b, p. 280, quoting Lemaison and Bourdieu 1986, p. 111)

The "social *game*" here is an elegant site indeed, referring to "a field of forces" or "objective power relations" (Bourdieu 1985, p. 724), which are none other than "relations between objective positions that are not chosen by any actor" (Dépelteau 2013b, p. 280). François conclusion from here is clear: "There is little doubt that this type of mode of perception seriously limits the historical, processual, and fluid nature of the social to some extraordinary moments. ... For Bourdieu, the social universe is structured at first, and then actors start to move in predetermined ways (via their habitus)" (Dépelteau 2013b, p. 280). This is as elegant as it gets when it comes to perspectives that can in any sensible sense be

called "relational". Bourdieu's structuralist leaning is clear, since for him the "objective relations" are not empirically observable relations, "the relations between positions occupied within the distributions of the resources which are or may become active, effective, like aces in a game of cards, in the competition for the appropriation of scarce goods of which this social universe is the site" (Bourdieu 1989, p. 17). The contrast with Elias's clumsy relationalism is telling for François:

"Bourdieu's explanations are usually not about relations between specific, empirical actors like in Elias's reconstitution of the (Western European) *civilizing process*. Bourdieu's theory is more attuned to variable analysis, probability logic, and causal thinking based on how structural factors determine individual and collective behaviors. In *The Distinction*, for instance, the observation of empirical relations in real social processes is replaced by statistical analysis showing how some external factors (as independent variables) cause social actions. The same is true about a more recent text like *The State of Nobility*, in which, for instance, the class positions of the students affect the evaluation of their works made by their teachers. (Dépelteau 2013b, p. 281)

The problem for François is that Bourdieu-like analyses amount to structural analysis of positions rather than empirical analysis of relations. Often the notion of habitus in Bourdieu is seen as offering a missing link in his relationalism. But, again, it not unjustified – though not completely benevolent – reading of Bourdieu to see habitus as designating just another variable in his generally variable-centered approach:

"Adding the notion of habitus as an intermediate variable cannot transform a deterministic or co-deterministic theory into a relational one. According to Bourdieu, the habitus simply connects the external cause to its effect 'because the dispositions of agents, their habitus, that is, the mental structures through which they apprehend the social world, are essentially the product of the internalization of the structures of that world'." (Dépelteau 2013b, pp. 281-82, quoting Bourdieu 1989, p. 18).

In my recent work (e.g. Selg 2020; Selg and Ventsel 2020) I have argued that one of the cornerstones of relationalism of at least Emirbayer and Dépelteau who among others take Dewey and Bentley's notion of trans-action as their starting point is seeing social research in terms of constitutive explanation rather than variable-centered causal explanation, which is more in tune with inter-actionalism and in its very crude forms, also with self-actionalism. In these terms, Bourdieu's theory and methodology is inter-actionalist with a strong leaning towards self-actionalism, "a causal thinking where structures predetermined people, and where specific relations between people disappear and statistical calculations are emphasized instead." (Dépelteau 2013b, pp. 282).

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

A sociological imagination for a clumsy world: François Dépelteau's relational sociology

Dépelteau quotes Bourdieu's own words (in Wacquant 1993, p. 21) about his research program:

"The proper object of analysis is the objective relations that obtain between these various subspaces, and the mechanisms which tend to reproduce these relations by continually redistributing the agents who will occupy their positions, in such a way as to perpetuate the structures, and especially by inculcating the properties and dispositions appropriate to that end. In other words, by granting some not only the *right* of entry but also the *desire* to do so."

Finally, when it comes to the central notion of power, one cannot but agree with François (Dépelteau 2013b, p. 290) that Bourdieu's notion is inter-actionalist, seeing power essentially in terms of differences in amount of various capitals, differences that define the positions in "the field of power":

"I may mention that when I began this research in the 1960s, we knew very little about the field of power, i.e. about the system of positions occupied by the holders of the diverse forms of capital which circulate in the relatively autonomous fields which make up an advanced society." (Bourdieu quoted in Wacquant 1993, p. 20)

Therefore, in my view, François is not unjust in his overall diagnosis when it comes to Bourdieu: "In spite of subtitles such as 'The real is relational' ... this is soft determinism or co-determinism" (2013b, p. 281). Although relations are important for Bourdieusian analyses, they are safely contained in the elegant structure of the system of positions. Although Bourdieu is the most famous example of such elegant relationalism, various other perspectives can be analyzed in these terms. Instead of taking up these analyses here that François has done in his work, I point to a more general issue that is at stake in the division between elegant and clumsy relationalism: the issue of conceptualizing social processes (for a more elaborate account see also Selg and Ventsel 2020, chapter 2).

Clumsy and elegant relationalism on social processes

When it comes to social processes, the core of clumsy relationalism is the view that social reality is processual and should be treated as such. This amounts to the call for avoiding "process-reduction" (Elias 1978; Emirbayer 1997) as much as possible in their research. Process-reduction occurs in our natural languages constantly, making it difficult to adopt a truly processual perspective: we say things like "the wind blows" as if the wind were an instigator of the process of blowing and as if there could be a wind that did not blow (see Elias 1978, p. 111-112). Process-reduction is not problematic in itself – it is often quite useful for analysing simple and teleological social processes (see Guy 2021 in this special

section, and below). Process-reduction amounts to reducing a continuous process into discrete, tangible pieces of a puzzle with concrete parameters, measures, etc. But what does the opposite of process-reduction mean? What does it mean to treat processes as processes? This has been put forth in an early attempt to bring the insights of relational sociology to bear outside sociology, by Jackson and Nexon (1999) who draw on Dewey and Bentley's notion of trans-action via Emirbayer's Manifesto, as well as various approaches to process-philosophy (see Rescher 1996). Jackson and Nexon distinguish between two types of process, that they refer to as "owned" and "un-owned" (1999, p. 302): "Owned processes are 'doings' attributable to a particular 'doer'. Un-owned processes are 'doings' which are not attributable to a particular 'doer'. Processes in *substantialist* accounts are owned — *entities instigate processes, or processes are reified as entities.*" (Jackson and Nexon 1999, 302, italics added). What does it mean to view processes in a *substantialist* manner as *instigated* by entities or as being *reified* as entities?

What we called self-actionalism above is the first form of substantialism referred to by Jackson and Nexon: it views whichever processes in the world to be "owned" in the sense of being "instigated by entities" (individuals or structures). When it comes to social processes, it presumes them to be analyzable and solvable by dividing them into discrete, manageable units that can be addressed separately. Analyzing processes would mean asking for the instigators of them, more concretely, the persons, institutions, states and other entities responsible for them.

When it comes to inter-action then it is the "variable-based" approach (Emirbayer 1997, p. 286) that methodologically "detaches elements (substances with variable attributes) from their spatiotemporal contexts, analyzing them apart from their relations with other elements within fields of mutual determination and flux" (Emirbayer 1997, p. 288). Inter-actionalism involves the second form of substantialism in Jackson and Nexon's sense, the "reification of processes as entities": it amounts to seeing processes as "things" between or among other things (1999).

We could say that although self-actional and inter-actional approaches to research might be process-oriented, they are not *processual*, since their orientation is to either finding an *instigator* of the process or to *reifying* it. It is only the trans-actional approach that does not perform this kind of "process-reduction". This is because for Jackson and Nexon, trans-actionalism treats social phenomena as un-owned processes as "doings" which are not attributable to a particular "doer." *Trans-action*, as the prefix "trans-" indicates, refers to action that *transcends* the entities, which are seen as *constituted within* this action. This already implies that the constitutive social processes involved in such action cannot be treated as "owned" by the entities. To adopt for a moment an essentialist common-sense vocabulary: the actions that the entities are or have been involved in are defining parts of their very nature; they are what they are in virtue of being

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

A sociological imagination for a clumsy world: François Dépelteau's relational sociology

involved in various trans-actions. But to abandon this essentialist vocabulary now, we can say that those "essences" of entities are in constant change and motion and cannot be presumed to be fully constituted in any given moment. Thus, trans-actionalism presumes thoroughly non-essentialist perspective.

Based on my earlier reflections on power we can point to three features of trans-actional perspective, first two of which are "necessary but not sufficient elements of trans-actionalism" that the perspective shares with inter-actionalism (Selg 2016b, p. 188). A trans-actional approach to a social phenomenon (power, governance, democracy, equality etc.) presumes that the phenomenon is (1) "a *relation* that exists (2) in *practice* ... (3) whose elements can be considered *separately*, but *not as being separate*" (*Ibid.*). The third condition radicalizes the first two and it is the *differentia specifica* of trans-actional approaches. The figure of "separately, but not as being separate" itself comes from Elias (1978, p. 85), and entails that even if in some analytical steps we could talk about entities and their actions/relations separately we should view them all as parts of "unfolding, ongoing processes ... in which it makes no sense to envision constituent elements apart from the flows within which they are involved (and vice versa)" (Emirbayer 1997, p. 89).

This is the core of the trans-actional view of social reality: it views social processes as un-owned processes. Table 1 summarizes three approaches to social processes.

Table 1. Three approaches to problems as social processes

Name of the approach	Process as...	Approach to social processes
Self-actionalism	Owned	Processes reduced to their instigators (structures of actors)
Inter-actionalism	Owned	Processes reified as separate entities
Trans-actionalism	Un-owned	Processes treated as constitutive processes

Source: adapted from Selg and Ventsel 2020, p. 34.

Trans-actionalism is, of course, none other than a clumsy sociological imagination when it comes to social processes. In François's vocabulary this point is explicitly high-lighted in his principles of relational thinking, especially in principle of "primacy of process" and that of "dereification" (Dépelteau 2008, pp. 62-63). "The primacy of process" rejects the view of seeing individuals as "separated from the society as if they would be outside, beside, or prior to social relations. Social phenomena are fluid and moving like movies instead of being fixed like pictures." (Dépelteau 2008, p. 62). It is important to note here, again that

"it does not mean that there is no continuity in the social universe. The social universe is full of more or less continuous and similar trans-actions (or social structures) that we call market, wedding, war, genocide, racism, exploitation, domination, love, and so on. Their discovery and explanation

is one of the most important tasks in sociology. But these structures should be studied as chains of trans-action." (*Ibid.*)

When it comes to structures "relationists are not looking for the 'girders of the building', but for 'webs of interdependence or figurations of many kinds', that 'people make up', and that are 'characterized by power balances of many sorts, such as families, schools, towns, social strata, or states'." (Dépelteau 2008, p. 62, quoting Elias 1978, p. 15). And this is, of course, what "dereification" means:

"states, social classes, social movements, political parties, pressure groups, nations, firms, cultures, societies, gender, patriarchy, capitalism, etc. do not act, think, enable, nor constrain since they are neither people nor social things. They are evolutionary social processes made up by interdependent actors through their trans-actions (actor actor nation, social class, social movement, capitalism, etc.). In the same logic, and once again, the notion of agency cannot be seen as an individual 'property'." (Dépelteau 2008, p. 63)

This, in other words, is the relational sociological imagination for the clumsy world. In the current special section, the same imagination is more or less explicitly shared by all of the contributors. As a way of concluding my paper I highlight two contributions – those of Nick Crossley and Jean-Sebastien Guy – whose commitment to this imagination is most explicit.

A tribute to François's clumsy relational sociology in the special section

Both Nick Crossley and Jean-Sebastien Guy take on the important task of furthering our understanding of two points that were crucial for François throughout his writings on relational sociology: 1) why relations are essentially processual and dynamic; 2) and why relations as processes are not teleological but rather self-referential.

When discussing social network analysis [SNA] that is often presumed to be more or less structuralist or variable-centered approach (see Selg 2016a; 2016b; 2018) Crossley claims that "Networks are ever-evolving structures-in-process" and that "their key structural properties and configuration typically evolves slowly, such that a snapshot [of SNA] captures relatively enduring constraints and opportunities (for actors) whose significance extends beyond the immediate moment of the snapshot." (Crossley 2021, p. 4). Although in essence a snapshot methodology, nevertheless "SNA allows us to model those changes and their mechanisms. 'Structure' and 'process' are not opposing terms but rather two sides of a coin (structure-in-process)" (*Ibid.*)

This is organically related to Crossley's conceptualization of relations. Based on Kennedy he distinguishes between 1)

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

A sociological imagination for a clumsy world: François Dépelteau's relational sociology

"realist definition, in which a relation is 'something like a great stone bridge stretching between two cliffs ... [it] connects two particular things, but has some extra being of its own.'"; and 2) "juxtaposition definition, which centres upon comparative differences between 'objects'." (Crossley 2021, p. 5, quoting Kennedy 2003, pp. 99-100).⁵ The reified notion of relations found in realism is obviously not a candidate for relational view, but the juxtaposition view has shortcomings too, since it "does nothing to challenge the atomism of the individualist" (Ibid.). So, Crossley puts forth his definition of relations, showing, among other things, how "relations are perpetually in-process and whilst they may remain stable are always susceptible to evolution and change" (2021, p. 7):

"Human being entails 'doing', activity, which unfolds through time, and social relations form at the intersection of such 'doings', in interactions, which are similarly temporal. Relations are not 'things', extending across space like bridges, but rather processes extending through time. A relation is a 'state of play' within an ongoing interaction history. Our relation now is the cumulative effect of all that we have been through together, how it has affected us and what we anticipate in our shared future, all of which might be affected by what we do, in interaction, right now." (Ibid.)

While Crossley demonstrate how it is reasonable to view relations in processual terms, Jean-Sebastien Guy takes up equally important task of analyzing the nature of processes. I have already touched this issue here in terms of the distinction between "owned" and "un-owned" processes, but he takes even more specific steps with his recourse to Niklas Luhmann's work. Guy's starting point is the fact that although many sociologists (including relationalists) talk about the importance of grasping reality as process "the concept of process is in turn burdened with certain ambiguities that have not been properly addressed as of yet. Namely, a distinction must be made between *teleological* processes and *self-referential* processes." (2021, p. 1). His argument is that "the processes that best embody the ideals of relational sociology as François conceived it are self-referential processes" (Guy 2021, p. 1). What is a teleological process? Something that is similar to the process of boiling:

"most commentators would admit that boiling is a valid illustration of what a 'process' is supposed to be in principle. What causes confusion is that boiling water clearly implies a beginning and an end. It is that after moment that defines the process retrospectively for what it is (as opposed to any other processes, like freezing). This is potentially misleading because the processual thinking that François and other relational

sociologists advocate *needs not* imply such teleological projections." (Guy 2021, p. 2)

Turning to Luhmann's notion of social systems as self-referential systems, Guy points out that "social systems are not posed between an initial state and a final state [as in case of teleological processes]. This is to say that social systems are not moving toward a definite outcome located in the future and yet known ahead of time... In time, social systems just continue to react to themselves in a recursive fashion." (Guy 2021, p. 2). Consequently, he demonstrates convincingly that "that François' deep relationalism is strongly reminiscent of Luhmann's radical constructivism" (Ibid., p. 13) since both align with the understanding that social processes are essentially non-teleological or, to use Luhmann's notion: "self-referential". Although François used different vocabulary, he would probably have agreed with such a parallel and this is an important advancement of his argument.

Acknowledgements

Writing this paper was supported by the Estonian Research Council with a personal research grant "PUT1485 A Relational Approach to Governing Wicked Problems".

References

- ALEXANDER, Jeffrey (1995). *Fin de Siècle Social Theory: Relativism, Reduction, and the Problem of Reason*. New York: Verso.
- ALEXANDER, Jeffrey (2003). *Social Life. A Cultural Sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- BEVIR, M. (2008). "Meta-methodology: clearing the underbrush". In: BOX-STEFFENSMEIER, J.; BRADY, H.; COLLIER, D. (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political methodology*, pp. 48-70. Oxford University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199286546.003.0003>
- BOURDIEU, Pierre (1985). "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups". *Theory and Society*, 14 (6), pp. 723-44. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00174048>
- BOURDIEU, Pierre (1989). "Social Space and Symbolic Power". *Sociological Theory*, 7 (1), pp. 14-25. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/202060>
- BOURDIEU, Pierre (1998). *Practical Reason*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre; WACQUANT, Loic (1992). *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

5. Bourdieu and Rorty are for him examples of juxtaposition definition. I agree with the diagnosis about Bourdieu (given his notion of capital), but have doubts about Rorty, given his use of "number analogy" (see Rorty 1999, pp. 52-53).

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

A sociological imagination for a clumsy world: François Dépelteau's relational sociology

- CROSSLEY, Nick (2021). "Relations-In-Process: In Honour of François Dépelteau". In: SELG, Peeter. "Special Issue guest edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of François Dépelteau". [online article]. *Digithum*, no. 26. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.374139>
- DÉPELTEAU, F. (2008). "Relational thinking: A critique of co-deterministic theories of structure and agency". *Sociological Theory*, 26(1), pp. 51-73. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2008.00318.x>
- DÉPELTEAU, F. (2013a). "What Is the Direction of the Relational Turn?" In: POWELL, C.; DÉPELTEAU, F. (Eds.), *Conceptualizing Relational Sociology*, pp. 163-185. Basing-stoke: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137342652_10
- DÉPELTEAU, F. (2013b). "Comparing Elias and Bourdieu as relational thinkers". In: *Norbert Elias and social theory*, pp. 275-295. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137312112_17
- DÉPELTEAU, F. (2015). "Relational sociology, pragmatism, transactions and social fields". *International Review of Sociology*, 25(1), pp. 45-64. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2014.997966>
- DÉPELTEAU, F. (2018a). "Relational thinking in sociology: relevance, concurrence and dissonance". In: *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*, pp. 3-33. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_1
- DÉPELTEAU, F. (2018b). "From the Concept of 'Trans-Action' to a Process-Relational Sociology". In: *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*, pp. 499-519. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_25
- DEWEY, J. (2012). *Studies in Logical Theory. Project Gutenberg*. Retrieved from <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/40665/40665-h/40665-h.htm>
- DEWEY, J. & BENTLEY, A. (1949). *Knowing and the known*. Beacon Press.
- DONATI, Pierpaolo (2020). "Fluxes and Structures: Which Relational Gaze? A Comparison between Relational Sociologies". *Polish Sociological Review*, 2(210), pp. 179-197.
- DONATI, Pierpaolo; ARCHER, Margaret (2015). *The Relational Subject*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316226780>
- DOUGLAS, Mary; WILDAVSKY, Aaron (1982). *Risk and culture: An essay on the selection of technological and environmental dangers*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520907393>
- EACOTT, Scott (2020). "François Dépelteau and the generation of a relational intellectual community". *Digithum*, [online], no. 26. [View: 4-06-2021]. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.374154>
- ELIAS, N. (1978). *What Is Sociology?* New York: Columbia University Press.
- EMIRBAYER, M. (1997). "Manifesto for a relational sociology". *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(2), pp. 281-317. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/231209>
- FUHSE, Jan (2020). "Relational Sociology of the Scientific Field: Communication, Identities, and Field Relations". In: SELG, Peeter. "Special Issue guest-edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of François Dépelteau". [online article]. *Digithum*, no. 26 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.374144>
- FUHSE, Jan (2020). "The Field of Relational Sociology". In: SELG, Peeter. "Special Issue guest-edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of François Dépelteau". [online article]. *Digithum*, no. 26. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.374145>
- GUY, Jean-Sebastien (2021). "Are relational processes teleological or self-referential? What relational sociology can learn from systems theory". In: SELG, Peeter. "Special Issue guest-edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of François Dépelteau". [online article]. *Digithum*, no. 26 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.374159>
- HAY, C. (2006). "Political ontology". In: GOODIN, R.; TILLY, C. (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of contextual political analysis*, pp. 78-96. Oxford University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199270439.003.0004>
- JACKSON, P. T.; NEXON, D. H. (1999). "Relations before states: Substance, process and the study of world politics". *European Journal of International Relations*, 5(3), pp. 291-332. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066199005003002>
- KENNEDY, J.B. (2003). *Space, Time and Einstein*. Chesham: Acumen. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/UPO9781844653447>
- LEONI BIRRIEL, Mariana; GRISOTTI, Marcia (2021). "Reflexiones sobre la sociología relacional-procesual de François Dépelteau". (Reflections on F. Dépelteau's relational-processual sociology). In: SELG, Peeter. "Special Issue guest edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of François Dépelteau". [online article]. *Digithum*, no. 26, pp. 1-10. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and Universidad de Antioquia. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.383702>
- LEMAISON, Pierre; BOURDIEU, Pierre (1986). "From Rules to Strategies: An Interview with Pierre Bourdieu." *Cultural Anthropology*, 1 (1), pp. 110-120. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/can.1986.1.1.02a00060>
- MILLS, Charles Wright 2000 [1959]. *Sociological Imagination*. Fortieth Anniversary Edition. Oxford University Press.
- MORGNER, Christian (2020). "Reinventing Social Relations and Processes: John Dewey and Trans-Actions". In: MORGNER, C. (Eds.), *John Dewey and the Notion of Trans-action*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26380-5>
- Peters, GB. (2017). "What is so Wicked about Wicked Problems? A Conceptual Analysis and a Research Program". *Policy and Society*, 36(3), pp. 385-396. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14494035.2017.1361633>

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

A sociological imagination for a clumsy world: François Dépelteau's relational sociology

- PYYHTINEN, Olli (2020). "Friends of Relational Sociology? The Relational Current as a Space of Hospitality". In: SELG, Peeter. "Special Issue guest edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of François Dépelteau". [online article]. *Digithum*, no. 26 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.3199>
- QUINE, W. (1951). "Ontology and ideology". *Philosophical Studies* 2, pp. 11-15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02198233>
- QUINE, W. (1953). *From a logical point of view*. Harper.
- RESCHER, Nicholas. (1996). *Process metaphysics: An introduction to process philosophy*. SUNY Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5840/process1996252>
- RICHARDSON, Kurt (2007). "Complex Systems Thinking and Its Implications for Policy Analysis". In: MORCÖL, Gögtug (Ed.), *Handbook of Decision Making*. CRC Press, pp. 189-221. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781420016918.ch11>
- RITTEL, H. W. J.; WEBBER, M. M. (1973). "Dilemmas in a general theory of planning". *Policy Sciences*, 4(2), pp. 155-169. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01405730>
- RORTY, Richard (1999). *Philosophy and social hope*. UK: Penguin.
- RORTY, R. (2006). "Is Natural Science a Natural Kind?" In: RORTY, R., *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*, pp. 46-62. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- SELG, P. (2013). "The politics of theory and the constitution of meaning". *Sociological Theory*, 31(1), pp. 1-23. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275113479933>
- SELG, P. (2016a). "Two faces of the 'Relational Turn'". *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 49(1), pp. 7-31. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096515001195>
- SELG, P. (2016b). "'The Fable of the Bs': between substantialism and deep relational thinking about power". *Journal of Political Power*, 9(2), pp. 183-205. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2016.1191163>
- SELG, P. (2018). "Power and relational sociology". In: DÉPELTEAU, F. (Ed.), *The Palgrave handbook of relational sociology*, pp. 539-557. Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_27
- SELG, P. (2020). "Causation is not everything: On constitution and trans-actional view of social science methodology". In: MORGNER, C. (Ed.), *John Dewey and the notion of trans-action. A sociological reply on rethinking relations and social processes*, pp. 31-53. Palgrave. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26380-5_2
- SELG, P. & VENTSEL, A. (2020). *Introducing relational political analysis: Political semiotics as a theory and method*. Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-48780-5>
- SWEDLOW, B. (2002). "Toward cultural analysis in policy analysis: Picking up where Aaron Wildavsky left off". *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 4(3), pp. 267-285. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13876980208412683>
- SWEDLOW, B. (2011). "A Cultural Theory of Politics: Editor's Introduction: *Cultural Theory's Contributions to Political Science*". *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 44(4), pp. 703-710. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096511001314>
- VERWEIJ, M., & THOMPSON, M. (Eds.) (2006). *Clumsy Solutions for a Complex World: Governance, Politics and Plural Perceptions*. London: Palgrave MacMillan. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230624887>
- WACQUANT, Loic (1993). "From Ruling Class to Field of Power: An Interview with Pierre Bourdieu on La Noblesse d'Etat." *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 10: pp. 19-44. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/026327693010003002>

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

A sociological imagination for a clumsy world: François Dépelteau's relational sociology

Peeter Selg

(peeter.selg@tlu.ee)

Professor of Political Theory

School of Governance, Law and Society

University of Tallinn, Estonia

Jean-Sébastien Guy is a sociologist interested in sociological theory in general, whether classical (Durkheim, Marx, Simmel, Peeter Selg is professor of political theory at Tallinn University, Estonia. His main research interests include theories of power, social science methodology, and relational social sciences. His work has appeared in journals such as *Sociological Theory*, *PS: Political Science and Politics*, and *Journal of Political Power*. His book (with Andreas Ventsel) *Introducing Relational Political Analysis: Political Semiotics as a Theory and Method* (Palgrave Macmillan) is forthcoming in August 2020.

More information: <https://www.tlu.ee/en/node/106508>


**UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA**

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Special Section: “Special Issue guest-edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of François Dépelteau”

Relations-In-Process: In Honour of François Dépelteau

Nick Crossley
University of Manchester

Date of submission: February 2019
Accepted in: August 2020
Published in: December 2020

Recommended citation:

CROSSLEY, Nick (2020). “Relations-In-Process: In Honour of François Dépelteau”. In: SELG, Peeter. “Special Issue guest-edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of François Dépelteau”. [online article]. *Digithum*, no. 26, pp. 1-14. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and Universidad de Antioquia. [Accessed: dd/mm/yy]. <http://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.374139>



Los textos publicados en esta revista están sujetos –si no se indica lo contrario– a una licencia de Reconocimiento 4.0 Internacional de Creative Commons. La licencia completa se puede consultar en <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.es>

Abstract

In this paper, reflecting the twin interests of François Dépelteau, I draw together the themes of ‘relationality’ and ‘process’. Having argued that the concept of ‘relations’ is central to sociology (and *a fortiori* ‘relational’ sociology), I discuss some of the problems associated with the concept. In this context I propose a processual conception. A social relation, I argue, is the ‘state of play’ in an interaction history between two actors and, as such, is always ‘in process’. Relations do not exist in isolation, however. They concatenate in complex networks, which are themselves always ‘in process’. The later sections of the paper discuss such networks and the mechanisms which drive their evolution across time.

Keywords

social relations, process, networks, relational sociology, network dynamics

Relaciones en construcción: En homenaje a François Dépelteau

Resumen

En este artículo, en que se refleja el doble interés de François Dépelteau, reúno los temas de «relacionalidad» y «proceso». Se ha sostenido que el concepto de relaciones es fundamental para la sociología (y a fortiori para la sociología relacional), y trato algunos de los problemas relacionados con el concepto. En este contexto propongo una concepción procesual. Sostengo que una relación social es el «estado actual» en la historia de la interacción entre dos actores y, por tanto, siempre es «un proceso». Sin embargo, las relaciones no existen de manera aislada. Se concentran en redes complejas, que a su vez están siempre «en construcción». En las últimas secciones del artículo se habla de estas redes y de los mecanismos que las llevan a evolucionar en el tiempo.

Palabras clave

relaciones sociales, proceso, redes, sociología relacional, dinámica de redes

Relations-In-Process: In Honour of François Dépelteau

François Dépelteau devoted a huge proportion of what turned out to be the final decade of his life to the advancement of 'relational sociology': editing major works (Dépelteau 2018, Dépelteau and Powell 2013a,b), organising panels and symposia, and establishing a book series with a prestigious academic publisher¹. For Dépelteau, this interest in relationality was twinned with an interest in 'process' (on process see also Abbott 2016). The social world, as he envisaged it, is a relational process. There can be no better way of honouring his memory, therefore, than by exploring the intersection between these two themes: relationality and process. That is my intention. With the specific aim of contributing to the further development of relational sociology as I understand it, I want to reflect in detail upon the nature of 'social relations' and their concatenation in networks, arguing that both (relations and networks) are inherently processual and considering some of the mechanisms which affect their evolution across time (on my approach to relational sociology more generally see Crossley 2011, 2014).

Dépelteau's chief source of inspiration in his reflections upon relationality and process was Norbert Elias (e.g. 1978). I do not engage directly with Elias in this paper, but 'network', as I use it, drawing upon social network analysis (SNA), largely parallels the concept of 'figuration' which is foundational to his approach (a figuration is a network). More importantly, the SNA concept advances relational understanding by rendering figurational processes mappable, measurable and thus more amenable to empirical investigation. In addition, my focus on mechanisms of network evolution in this paper resonates with Elias' (1983, 1984)

analysis of mechanisms (e.g. 'the monopoly mechanism' and 'the royal mechanism') in *The Civilising Process* and *The Court Society*. Whether either Dépelteau or Elias would accept this comparison or find its results instructive we will never know but I would like to think so and in drawing this parallel I at least align what I have to say with the tradition of relational sociology to which Dépelteau was wedded.

I begin the paper with a brief reflection upon the sociological importance of 'relations' and the cognate concept of 'interaction'. This takes me, in the second section, to a discussion of the contested nature of the concept of relations and from there to my processual definition. Relations do not exist in isolation, however. They concatenate within networks and these 'relations between relations' themselves have an important impact. I discuss this in the third section of the paper. After a brief discussion of the boundaries of networks in the fourth section of the paper I return to process in the fifth, discussing a number of the mechanisms which underlie network evolution and dynamics. Like relations, I will argue, networks are always inprocess and the task of sociology is to identify the mechanisms which shape this process. Before I do any of this, however, it is necessary to define the scope of the paper with a few preliminary remarks.

Preliminary Remarks

For the sake of brevity, I restrict my focus to relations between human actors in this paper. A longer discussion would extend this to relations and networks involving 'corporate actors'; that is, organisational actors, such as governments, firms and trades unions, which are comprised of human actors but whose decisions,

1. Palgrave Studies in Relational Sociology, now edited by myself and Peeter Selg.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relations-In-Process: In Honour of François Dépelteau

actions, resources and often legal status are irreducible to those human actors (Axelrod 1997, Coleman 1990, Hindess 1988). Like human actors, corporate actors are always-already enmeshed in networks with both other corporate and sometimes human actors. I bracket them here, however, for reasons of brevity. The main claims of my argument apply to them but some of the details differ and including them would necessitate lengthy elaboration and digression which would detract from the primary purposes of the paper.

I also bracket out so-called 'non-human actors', as posited within actor-network theory (Latour 2005). However, in this case I am bracketing a discussion of the legitimacy of their inclusion, of which I am far from being persuaded. All manner of non-human objects and forces affect human societies. I am making the finishing touches to this paper in the midst of a global pandemic, for example, during which a virus (Covid-19) has had a huge impact on societies across the world. Likewise, it is clear that human activity and relations are embellished, enabled, extended etc. in many ways by our acquired capacity to harness non-human forces. In the latter case, however, the terms 'tool', 'resource', 'media' and 'environment' seem better suited to capture the role of the non-human than 'actor'. And in the former sociology is inevitably condemned to focus upon the human perspective in a way which precludes non-human objects from enjoying actor status. Actor-network theorists study non-human 'actors' insofar as they impinge upon the lives of human actors, from the point of view of and as conceptualised by those human actors. This does not amount to treating non-human objects as actors, at least in any meaningful sense. It is merely an acknowledgement of the fact that human actors exist within, are conscious of and must negotiate a physical environment whose forces they can to some extent harbour but which may impinge upon their projects and does not always or automatically bend to their will. I can consider the human impact of Covid-19; how humans have understood and responded to the virus, its spread and effects; but the virus has no point of view of its own, and if it did I would have no access to it. I can only grasp the virus as it exists for and affects human actors, which, it seems to me, falls short of treating it as an actor (even if that designation were correct). Moreover, because the virus has no awareness, let alone awareness of humans, of its impact upon them or of their various strategies for combatting its spread and effects, it is incapable of entering into social relationships of the sort which sociology studies, and therefore incapable of belonging to societies of the sort studied by sociologists. It may feel sometimes that we play cat and mouse with viruses, each taking our turn to outwit the other, but that is only true on the human side because viruses are entirely unaware of the obstacles obstructing their spread and incapable of strategically adjusting to such obstacles. A virus can have a causal relationship upon human beings and our societies, from the outside, making us ill and killing us, but that is not a social relationship. We can grasp

its mechanisms and seek thereby to avoid, ameliorate or even use (e.g. weaponise) its effects but we cannot, in any meaningful sense, be said to enter into a meaningful relationship with it. To reiterate, however, I am simply bracketing these considerations for present purposes.

Finally, I will bracket the distinction between different types of relation (e.g. economic exchange, sexual intimacy, warfare, friendship, labour etc.), focusing instead upon relations and networks in a more abstract sense. Variations between types of relation are important and are entirely compatible with my arguments but consideration of them would add considerable complexity (not to mention length) to the discussion. My purpose here is to establish a few basic principles by reference to a minimal and generic conception of social relations. This would of course need to be fleshed out and elaborated for analyses of specific networks.

It will be observed that I use the term 'interaction' in this paper where others might use 'transaction'. Some relational sociologists, following Dewey and Bentley (1949), distinguish between 'interactions', which they define as exchanges between pre-constituted entities whose constitution remains unaffected by their exchange, and 'transactions', which they define as exchanges between parties who are in some part constituted in and by way of their exchange (Morgner 2020). I agree that many (though not all) human exchanges conform to this definition of transaction and have written at length elsewhere about some of the many ways in which human actors are formed in and modified by way of interaction (e.g. Crossley 2011). I do not further explore this issue here, however, for reasons of space, and I stick to the term 'interaction' to designate both 'interaction' and 'transaction', as understood by Dewey and Bentley. I do this because Dewey and Bentley's distinction is not widely known in sociology and 'transaction', on account of its more usual usage, is likely to be misunderstood as designating an exchange of resources (an economic transaction) between actors who are otherwise unaffected by it - the very opposite of what is intended by relational sociologists who use the term. 'Interaction', by contrast, at least for sociologists versed in symbolic interactionism, following Mead (1967), and the work of Simmel (e.g. 1955, 1971), will be understood in exactly the sense my colleagues hope to capture with 'transaction'.

My conception of networks, as noted above, is taken from formal social network analysis (SNA), a methodological toolbox formed at the intersection of sociology and mathematics (Scott 2000, Wasserman and Faust 1994). This is not the place to elaborate upon SNA. It must suffice to say that it defines networks, minimally, as a set of nodes, some pairs of which are connected by a set (or sets) of relations. Smaller networks can be visualised, as in Figure One, with nodes represented by small coloured shapes ('vertices') and relations by lines connecting them ('edges'). Defined thus, networks have mathematically defined properties

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relations-In-Process: In Honour of François Dépelteau

and the argument of SNA, which I endorse, is that these properties often have sociologically significant effects. How the members of a population are 'wired up' makes a difference and that is why SNA, as a set of methods for mapping and measuring this 'wiring', is sociologically important.

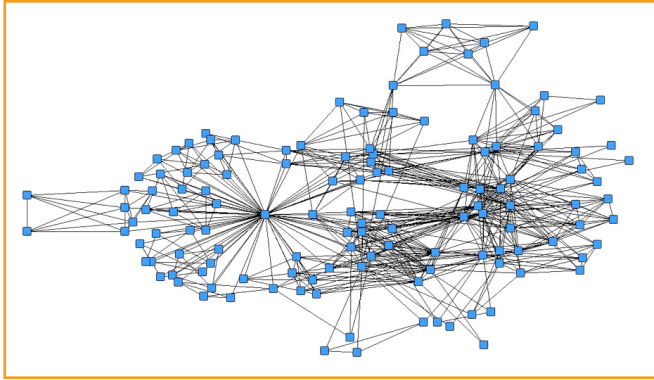


Figure 1. Visualisation of a Network

SNA allows us to capture a snapshot of network structure at a particular point in time. However, this does not preclude a consideration of process. Networks are ever-evolving structures-in-process but, as Elias (1983) observes, their key structural properties and configuration typically evolves slowly, such that a snapshot captures relatively enduring constraints and opportunities (for actors) whose significance extends beyond the immediate moment of the snapshot. Furthermore, if by 'process' we intend to suggest change, and a fortiori cumulative change in a particular direction, such as is involved in 'the civilising process', 'the monopolisation of taxation and the means of violence' and the rise and fall of 'court society', as detailed by Elias (1983, 1984), then 'before' and 'after' snapshots are necessary to demonstrate and measure that change. As I discuss below, SNA allows us to model those changes and their mechanisms. 'Structure' and 'process' are not opposing terms but rather two sides of a coin (structure-in-process); at least that is what I intend to show.

Relations in Sociology

'Relations' and the cognate concept of 'interaction' are central to the definitions of society posited by many sociological pioneers. Blumer (1992), for example, defines society as symbolic interaction, building upon Mead (1967), who argues that 'mind, self and society' are each emergent properties of such interaction. Likewise Simmel, who argues that 'Society exists where a number of individuals enter into interaction' (1971, 23). Marx argues that 'Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of their interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand.' (1973, 265). And Durkheim observes that:

Society has for its substratum the mass of associated individuals. The system which they form by uniting together, and which varies according to their geographical disposition and the nature and number of their channels of communication is the basis from which social life is raised. The representations which form the network of social life arise from the relations between individuals (1974, 24)

Weber (1978), who tended towards methodological individualism, is a possible exception to this tendency. However, even he defines his key unit of analysis, 'social action', by reference to actors taking account of and orienting to one another's actions. This, I suggest, is a minimal definition of interaction.

Durkheim and Marx are often attributed the view that society is more than the sum of its parts. The above quotations provide a crucial key to understanding what that means and why it is so. If human individuals are society's 'parts' then society is more than them because they interact and form relations, and because these interactions and relations make a difference. They affect how individuals act and shape them in relatively enduring ways, as Durkheim's (1973) arguments regarding 'second nature', Marx's (1959) claims about the historicity of human nature and Mead's (1967) analyses of mind and self each suggest. We become who and what we are within social relations and interactions. Furthermore, relations lend society a structure. Each individual interacts and forms relations with a small number of others and the resulting pattern (who interacts with whom) constitutes a structure which impacts upon those caught up in it.

It might be suggested, following this, that 'relational sociology' is a tautology. If sociology is, as its pioneers envisaged, a science of social relations then what is added by the notion of 'relational sociology'? In response, relational sociologists argue that, notwithstanding the centrality claimed for them, relations are often squeezed out of sociology. This happens at a theoretical level in one of two ways. In one way, the relational 'substrate' of society, as Durkheim calls it, is supplanted by a reified and hypostatised conception of society as a singular, monolithic actor. The network of interacting individuals, constrained in many ways but active and agentive, which Durkheim posits, disappears from view. The whole replaces, overwhelms and/or determines the parts, as we observe in the classic functionalist paradigm and in historicist and teleological variants of Marxism. Alternatively, society is decomposed and reduced, whether for ontological or methodological purposes, to a mere aggregate of individuals, abstracted from the webs of relations in which they are concretely embedded. Relations, insofar as they are recognised at all, are reduced to the status of window dressing. Rational choice models are the most obvious contemporary example of this.

This is not only a matter of theory. Individualism is built into many of our methodologies. Survey research, as Abbott (1997, 2001), following Blumer (1986), has argued, for example, typically

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relations-In-Process: In Honour of François Dépelteau

explores relations and interactions between variables rather than actors. 'Social relations', insofar as they are captured at all, are reduced to individual level attributes (e.g. class, gender and race), losing their relational character (see also Wellman and Berkowitz 1997). Indeed, most mainstream statistical models and procedures explicitly assume independence of cases; their explanatory power only holds if respondents are independent. Social relations are thereby designed out of data analysis.

Similarly, qualitative interviews typically elicit information about the experiences, perceptions, attitudes etc. of individuals qua individuals, presenting their findings in terms of such individuals. Focus groups and participant observation overcome this to some extent but even in this work data on relations and interactions are seldom gathered or analysed in a systematic manner. In qualitative as in quantitative methodologies society is reduced to a mere aggregate of atomised individuals. There is very little discussion at all of how relations can be captured and analysed in the vast literature on method in the social sciences.

SNA is one amongst a small number of methodologies which tackles this deficit, enabling us to analyse relational structures. Before we turn to SNA, however, we must first consider a fundamental question begged by all of the above discussion; namely, what are social relations? Relations come in many forms, of course, including economic, friendship and sexual relations, but is there anything underlying these variations which affords a general definition? On this question even the classical sociological theorists have little to say.

The Problem with Relations

As a first step in addressing this question I will reflect briefly upon two problematic definitions of 'relations' which Kennedy (2003) identifies in the history of Western science and philosophy: (1) what he calls the realist definition, in which a relation is 'something like a great stone bridge stretching between two cliffs ... [it] connects two particular things, but has some extra being of its own.' (99-100); and (2) what I call the juxtaposition definition, which centres upon comparative differences between 'objects'. If John is taller than Jane, for example, then by this definition he is in a 'taller than' relation to her.

We find some evidence of the juxtaposition definition in both sociology and social philosophy. In Bourdieu's sociology, for example, 'relations' are defined as differences in the amounts of cultural and economic capital that individuals possess and in their respective ratios of cultural to economic capital (Crossley 2014). Some are wealthier than others (a 'wealthier than' relation), some more cultural than others, and some enjoy greater advantage than others in virtue of their combined economic and cultural resources. Relations between actors are differences in their levels and types of resourcing.

Similarly, Rorty's (1999) argument for a relational over a substantivist perspective rests upon an understanding of 'relations' (and identities) as comparative differences. Arguing against the ideas of 'substance' and 'essence', Rorty argues that all objects and qualities are relationally constituted: 'male' has no meaning in the absence of 'female', for example, 'black' has no meaning independently of 'white' and so on. Identity in each case rests upon a relation to something other and such relations comprise comparative differences.

Bourdieu and Rorty each raise important points. However, their relationalism is purely epistemological, suggesting or recommending that our knowledge of particular objects is achieved by comparative means. Ontologically the juxtaposition definition does nothing to challenge the atomism of the individualist, who will insist (correctly) that differences and contrasts between individuals do not in any way alter their status as discrete, individual beings. Defined in this way relations are not 'real'. They have no effect in the world, at least unless and until they are mobilised in concrete interactions between actors; a state of affairs which involves 'social relations' in a rather different sense, to which I return.

The realist conception is similarly flawed, according to Kennedy, or at least has been regarded as such historically. In defining a 'relation' between two objects as a third object which physically joins and thereby fuses them it impales the concept on the horns of a dilemma: objects are either fused, forming a new, singular object and thereby eliminating the plurality presupposed by the concept of relations, or they remain separate but we therefore have no basis upon which to say that they are related. In either case the concept of relations is redundant.

We find exactly this dilemma in sociology in the standoff described above between individualism and crude forms of holism. Holism precludes relations by defining society as a singular, monolithic entity. Individualism precludes relations by reducing society to an aggregate of discrete individuals. However, there is a third possibility.

Defining Social Relations

The source of the realist's difficulty is their assumption that a relationship between objects entails a fusion of them. This is counter-intuitive. 'Relation' suggests a state of affairs somewhere between the two scenarios described above. Objects which are related are not completely independent of one another but each retains a distinct identity and at least some independence. They are connected without being fused. What would this involve? My suggestion hinges upon four key concepts: (1) intentionality, (2) intersubjectivity, (3) interaction and (4) institution.

I take the concept of 'intentionality' from phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty's (1962) existential-phenomenology in particular. Consciousness is inherently intentional for the phenomenologists.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relations-In-Process: In Honour of François Dépelteau

It is necessarily consciousness-*of* something. Consciousness is a structure comprising two poles; the conscious being and that of which they are conscious. During the middle phase of his writing, phenomenology's founder, Husserl (1990), argued that the reality of consciousness' object should be 'bracketed' in order to better facilitate analysis of the intending act itself. This steered phenomenology towards idealism. Merleau-Ponty (1962) resists this move. Consciousness is not an inner representation of an outer world or object, for Merleau-Ponty, but rather an 'opening' onto the object or world; a connecting 'thread' or indeed 'relationship'. Consciousness connects me to the world. Indeed, it is connection to the world (Mead (1967) suggests something similar). Consciousness is not a 'substance', as it was for Descartes (1968) but rather a *relation* between the embodied, sensuous subject and objects which exist for them within the world. It forms *between* the conscious being and that of which they are conscious, like a magnetic, electrical or gravitational field.

This applies to all of embodied subjectivity for Merleau-Ponty. Consciousness involves perception (in all of its modalities), thought and emotion, and each is intentional. Emotions are 'about' particular objects or events, for example, and attach us to those objects or events. Moreover, beyond consciousness, narrowly defined, Merleau-Ponty identifies an 'operative intentionality' in our practical engagements in the world. The laptop that I see and hear exists 'for' my fingers, for example, as they find letters and type upon it.

The language of 'connection' is entirely appropriate here but intentionality does not entail fusion. To the contrary, it entails differentiation. I am connected to that of which I am conscious, in virtue of my consciousness of it, and yet my consciousness of it entails recognition of it as something distinct from myself. Intentional consciousness simultaneously connects and differentiates (separates) its subject and object.

There is more to a social relationship than intentionality. Intentional acts are generally short-lived, where relations may endure over decades (see below). Nevertheless, intentionality is important to human relations and affords us a sense both of what 'relations' might mean in the human context and of why and how they are possible. We enjoy relations with others because they exist for us. We are or can become conscious of them, a relation which, at that moment, is constitutive of our consciousness.

This situation is complicated when the intentional 'object' is another subject. Each intends the other, conscious of the other as a conscious being and of their own existence as an object within the consciousness of the other. This is not the place for a detailed discussion of such 'intersubjectivity' (see Crossley 1996). However, a few brief observations are necessary.

As many writers from different philosophical traditions have recognised, intersubjectivity forms the basis for a developed sense of self and individuality. Consciousness of self presupposes consciousness of 'not self' and of other perspectives upon the

world than one's own, which lend one's own its specificity (Schutz 1970). Furthermore, it requires, as Mead (1967) in particular stresses, that one learns to assume the 'role' of the other in relation to oneself; to perceive one's self as other (see also Cooley 1982, Merleau-Ponty 1962, Smith 2000). The significance of this is that, like intentionality, intersubjectivity simultaneously connects social actors whilst differentiating and thereby separating them. Actors are connected but simultaneously differentiated and therefore not merged.

Such differentiation entails a developed sense of 'self'. However, as Mead (1967) emphasises, this is coupled with a sense of 'the other' and indeed of particular others. Interaction sensitises us to the perspectives of others. Where others become significant to us we form an internalised sense of their 'perspective' which influences our subjective life even in their (physical) absence (ibid.). This idea is important for many reasons but for present purposes it is important because it points to an important aspect of 'social relations'. Forging a relation with another involves forming and being influenced by an internalised sense of their perspective (upon us, themselves and the world).

As this suggests, intersubjectivity entails interaction and more specifically communication between social actors; exchanges of meaning and negotiation of a 'definition of the situation'. This negotiation may be one-sided, involving threats, power (see below) and even perhaps physical violence but insofar as it is an intersubjective relation it necessarily results in some form of agreement (perhaps tacit) between those party to it about their standing and respective roles and/or identities vis-à-vis one another; what is allowed and expected between them. Interactors negotiate a relationship and their relationship is structured by whatever they 'agree'.

Within the context of interaction, moreover, actors often form interdependencies. Each becomes dependent upon the other. Such interdependencies might be material, as when one depends upon the other for money, food or other such goods and services. They may equally be emotional, however, involving exchanges of love, recognition or friendship. Such interdependency embellishes the 'agreement' between individuals, adding further weight and content to their relationship. Moreover, it introduces a balance of 'power' (Blau 1986, Elias 1978). Depending upon the other for something, whether that be love or money, creates an incentive for one to comply with their wishes. Such power relations might be balanced, with each side in a relationship equally dependent upon the other, but they might be imbalanced to the advantage of one party. Equally, dependence and thus power might be weak but it can be strong. Whatever the case, however, this power balance, like the interdependency upon which it is based, further embellishes the relationship between those involved.

Social relations as I am defining them here are emergent outcomes of interaction between those party to them; agreements, galvanised by interdependence, which modify the intentional

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relations-In-Process: In Honour of François Dépelteau

thread connecting each to the other. Consciousness of the other is embellished by accumulated experience, the expectations it generates, internalisation of their perspective and often affect.

Merleau-Ponty's (2010) concept of 'institution', though only briefly sketched, is useful here. The concept is intended to capture the manner in which aspects of our experience endure; the past shaping the present, whilst at the same time inviting future actions which build upon and modify what has been achieved. We do not repeat what we have done in the past, at least not exactly, but the past endures within the present, forming the tacit context for our actions. Social relations are institutions in this sense. Interactions are discrete events, usually brief and with an identifiable beginning and end, but they are enduring in their effect. First meetings institute a relation between two actors which subsequent and successive interactions return to and build upon. The institution is carried within each party but it is not reducible to them qua individuals because what is instituted intends and connects each to the other. It is important to add, moreover, that relations typically involve anticipation of future interaction and that this too may shape interaction in the present. Actors are mindful that how they act now might have repercussions later and shape their actions accordingly.

'Social interaction' is integral to 'social relations' on this account. However, an interaction is not a relationship. To say that two actors are 'in a relationship' is not to say that they are interacting right at this moment. Like-wise, whilst it makes perfect sense to say that two actors were in a relationship for five years this does not imply that they were in a state of perpetual interaction over that time. Relations are emergent properties of interaction, institutions arising from and, when activated, acting back upon it. A relation is a state of play within an interaction history. Interaction in the present is shaped by the relations between those party to it, at the same time having the potential to modify that relationship and thus influence future interaction. As such *relations are perpetually in-process* and whilst they may remain stable are always susceptible to evolution and change.

We have come a long way from Kennedy's 'realist' definition of relations. This definition treats relations in purely spatial terms. Objects are either joined or not. I have stepped back from this definition, in some part, by exploring conscious intention; a property which the objects discussed by Kennedy lack. No less importantly, however, by discussing social interaction I have brought time and process into the picture. Human being entails 'doing', activity, which unfolds through time, and social relations form at the intersection of such 'doings', in interactions, which are similarly temporal. Relations are not 'things', extending across space like bridges, but rather processes extending through time. A relation is a 'state of play' within an ongoing interaction history. Our relation now is the cumulative effect of all that we have been through together, how it has affected us and what we anticipate

in our shared future, all of which might be affected by what we do, in interaction, right now.

Relations in Networks

Relations, as I have defined them, are inherently processual; a relation is a state of play in an unfolding interaction history. Relations do not exist in isolation, however. Actors are involved in multiple relations simultaneously, within vast networks. These networks and their structural properties are important for many reasons. For present purposes I want to briefly focus upon some of the ways in which the combination of relations within a network can impact back upon them. Any relation $i \rightarrow j$ is shaped not only by the history of interaction between i and j , or rather not by that history in isolation but also by the other relations in which i and j are respectively involved. A few examples will illustrate this.

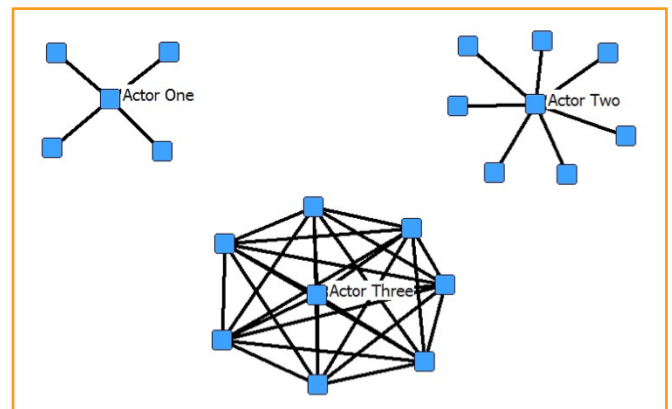


Figure 2. Three Ego-Nets

In Figure Two Actor One is connected to 4 others (in the language of SNA she has a 'degree' of 4). Actor Two, by contrast, has a degree of 7. Other things being equal, this will create a different balance of constraints and opportunities for each. Actor Two has more people to draw upon for help, for example, which may give her a relative advantage over Actor One. However, she may have to invest more of her resources (including time and energy) into maintaining her contacts, which may be constraining. Moreover, she may have less time and energy to devote to each of her alters because there are more of them. Each of her relations will be weakened by her need to spread herself thinly across them all.

Actor Three also has a degree of 7. In contrast to Actor Two, however, most of her contacts are connected to one another. Her 'ego-net' has a higher 'density', to invoke the language of SNA again (Crossley et.al 2015). Density is defined within SNA as the number of ties within a network (or subnetwork) expressed as a proportion of the number that are possible, given the number of nodes. There are $\frac{7*6}{2} = 21$ potential ties in a network of 7

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relations-In-Process: In Honour of François Dépelteau

nodes², for example, so if we observe 10 ties the network has a density of $\frac{10}{21}=0.48$.

As with degree, variations in density, all things being equal, afford different opportunities and constraints. Coleman (1990), for example, argues that higher ego-net density is a mechanism of social control. If my friends are friends with one another then consensus over appropriate behaviour is more easily arrived at and I am less likely to get away with a violation of these norms. If I am uncooperative, breach trust or fail to support one of my friends then all of the others are likely to find out and punish me. This gives me an incentive to cooperate, support others and honour my word. I cannot get away with what I might get away with if my contacts were unknown to one another.

This constrains me but it is also enabling because my alters are similarly constrained, putting me in a trusting, cooperative and supportive environment. We are each constrained to help one another. Coleman equates this with 'social capital' and argues that it enables forms of action, both individual and collective, which would not otherwise be possible. Constraint creates opportunity.

Burt (1992, 2005) offers a different perspective upon this. Conceptualising relations as channels along which resources, including information, flow and paralleling Granovetter's (1973, 1982) celebrated work on 'the strength of weak ties', he argues that there are high levels of redundancy in dense ego-nets. Actors expend resources maintaining multiple relations to alters who, because connected to one another, provide them with exactly the same information. One could maintain a tie to one of those alters and have access to the same information gleaned by maintaining relations with all of them. It is more useful, in Burt's view, to forge ties with alters whose own alters are different to one's own, affording oneself access to different pools of information (and other resources).

Related to this are Burt's (1992, 2005) ideas of 'structural holes' and 'brokerage'. A 'structural hole' is a gap in a network separating unconnected nodes. A broker is someone who plugs a structural hole, bridging between otherwise unconnected parties. Brokerage can be an advantage for both the broker and those whom they broker between, according to Burt. Brokers benefit because they are rewarded for serving as a gatekeeper for resources passing between otherwise disconnected parties and may, where innovations are involved, be credited as the source of ideas which they are actually only passing on. Brokered parties benefit because they enjoy access to resources which they would not otherwise enjoy. Of course the dynamics may not always play out like this. As I have suggested elsewhere, brokering between 'warring' parties who compete for an actor's loyalty and attention may prove draining and fruitless (Crossley 2008). The more basic

point, however, is that the value and meaning of any one tie is affected by its position within a network of such ties.

We could discuss these aspects of local network structure at length. For present purposes it must suffice to draw two lessons from them. Firstly, as we see if we compare Coleman and Burt, relations may assume different functions in social life. For Coleman, interactions and relations serve to generate, police and enforce norms. For Burt, by contrast, they are conduits through which resources, such as information, flow. These positions are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive; relations may play other roles in social life and the norms enforced in a dense ego-net may relate to resources flowing through that net. Nevertheless we get a sense of different ways in which relations matter in social life, and we are thereby reminded of their importance.

Secondly, whatever their differences Burt and Coleman both show that the value and meaning of any one relation is affected by the more general configuration of the network to which it belongs. A relation is more useful to both parties if they share other contacts in common, according to Coleman, because common ties to others will keep both honest and cooperative in their relations with one another. For Burt, by contrast, their ties will have more value if each can afford the other access to social circles they would not otherwise enjoy access to. Both accounts may be true in certain circumstances. Though they pull in opposite directions they do not directly contradict one another. More important than their relative merits for present purposes, however, is the argument common to both; namely, that we should not consider (dyadic) relations in abstraction from their embedding in wider networks, which affect their value, meaning and function.

— Networks or The Network?

We can extend this argument. Consider the small network in Figure Three. *l* is not directly connected to *i*. However, her ties to *j* and *k* impact upon *i*'s ties to *j* and *k* because they provide an alternative and equivalent path between *j* and *k*. *i* is not the exclusive broker between *j* and *k*. Moreover, *j* and *k* each broker between *i* and *l*. And they bring whatever goods or bads (e.g. information or viruses) *l* may command within *i*'s reach. The potential impact of *i*'s ties to *j* and *k* is modified.

Of course networks can be much bigger still (see Figure One for a still quite small example) and much more complex, taking on yet further structural properties and dynamics which generate opportunities and constraints for those enmeshed within them. Networks nest within networks, which nest within further networks and so on.

2. I am assuming here that a tie from one person to another is identical to any tie back from the second person to the first ($x_{ij} = x_{ji}$). If I distinguish between *i*'s relation with *j* and *j*'s with *i* then there are $7 \times 6 = 42$ possible relations.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relations-In-Process: In Honour of François Dépelteau

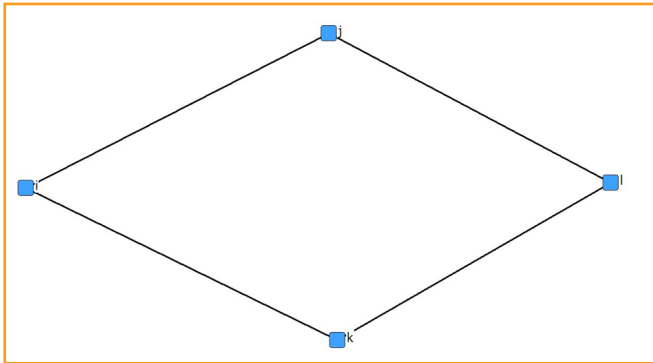


Figure 3. Beyond First-Order Neighbourhoods

Where does this process end? Does the social world comprise multiple (separate) networks or do its various networks merge in a single, global network? I suggest the latter. However, subnetworks can be meaningfully extracted from this whole, for purposes of analysis, and that is a good thing as it is well beyond our means currently to survey anything even approximating the network of global society (with its billions of nodes (human and corporate) and multitude of different types of relations). Drawing boundaries around a network for purposes of empirical analysis, by selecting specific nodes and types of relation for investigation, affects what that analysis will find but if the researcher is aware of this it need not invalidate their study. In what follows, therefore, I will continue to refer to social networks in the plural.

Structures-in-Process: Dynamics and Mechanisms

There is a danger with representations such as Figure One, which captures a snapshot of a network at a particular point in time, that we regard networks as static. Some network structures are relatively enduring. The sets of nodes and relations which constitute them remain stable over a relevant (to the sociological observer) timescale. However, stability and endurance depend upon relation-maintaining interactions within a network. More to the point, all social networks evolve over the longer term. Like the relations which in some part constitute them they are structures-in-process. Indeed, it is in some part because relations are in process that the networks they give rise to are too. Relations are formed, transformed and broken as an effect of interaction between nodes who themselves come and go, leaving or joining a network. Moreover, nodes sometimes change in significant ways as a consequence of their relations and interactions within a network. They too are in process.

SNA affords various ways of modelling these processes. Though static in and of themselves, for example, snapshots such as Figure One can be compared over successive time points and

changes in their properties observed, measured and explained (Snijders et.al. 2010). Alternatively, using 'relational event models' we can track and model network evolution on an interaction-by-interaction basis (Butts 2008). These modelling methods are important and merit discussion. For present purposes, however, another issue must take precedence.

What drives network evolution? There may be many factors; too many for me to fully discuss here. The interactional basis of social life is such that our lives are always in process, throwing up fresh demands and challenges, and exposing us to unexpected events which shunt our lives in different directions. The making, breaking and transforming of relations is often a consequence of this everyday turbulence and flux. New lines of action open up new relational opportunities whilst perhaps putting a strain upon existing relations. Having said this, in amongst the flux we find recurrent mechanisms which, though not responsible for the processual nature of social life as such, steer it in particular directions. In what follows I briefly discuss a number of mechanisms which have been widely observed in social network research. These mechanisms are stochastic rather than deterministic. They affect the probabilities of particular outcomes rather than guaranteeing them. However, they play an important role in shaping the changes and indeed the stability which we observe in social life over time.

'Homophily' affords a useful way in to this discussion. 'Homophily' refers to the widely observed tendency for social actors to link disproportionately to others who are similar to them in some way. Lazarsfeld and Merton (1964) divide this into two types: *status homophily*, in which actors connect disproportionately to others of a similar status (e.g. ethnicity, social class or gender) to themselves, and *value homophily*, in which they link disproportionately to others with whom they share particular attitudes, values or tastes. As status is relatively fixed, status homophily is usually assumed to be the outcome of a process of *selection*. Actors are in some way gravitating towards others of a similar status to themselves. Value homophily is sometimes a consequence of selection too but it may also be explained by (mutual) *influence*. That is, actors may be disproportionately linked to others with similar attitudes, values etc. to themselves because they have influenced and/or been influenced by them: imparting and taking on attitudes and tastes and/or forging new tastes jointly. My friends and I may have similar tastes in music, for example, because I have influenced their tastes and they have influenced mine.

Selection and influence are not mutually exclusive. Both may be in play simultaneously. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that influence may stabilise attitudes and tastes that would otherwise change. An inclination to contemplate new outlooks and likes may quickly wither if not shared with and especially if discouraged by significant others. Stasis is no less in need of explanation in a process ontology and influence may be

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relations-In-Process: In Honour of François Dépelteau

an important mechanism in relation to both. For present purposes, however, it must suffice to note that influence (which I have only sketched in the barest terms here) is a key mechanism in the relational process of social life, potentially accounting for both stasis and change at the node level.

Selection is not a mechanism in its own right, in my view, but rather a tendency which must be explained by recourse to mechanisms. Broadly these mechanisms may be divided into two types: structural and psychological. Feld's (1981) concept of 'foci' is a good example of a structural mechanism. Actors are often disproportionately linked to others with similar tastes and attitudes to themselves, according to Feld, because their tastes and attitudes draw them to particular events and spaces catering to those tastes and attitudes ('foci') where they meet others with those same attitudes and tastes. In my work on early punk and post-punk in the UK, for example, I noted how many of the pioneers of these musical styles first met and formed ties at particular shops, clubs and gigs which had become magnets in their local areas for young people with 'alternative' tastes in music and clothes (Crossley 2015). 'Alternative' youths converged on a small number of spaces and events catering to their minority tastes, where they met, forming ties and a (proto-punk) network wherein 'punk' was (collectively) invented (*ibid.*).

A similar process can be observed in relation to status homophily. Where status is linked to income and wealth, for example, which it often is, it will correspond to the neighbourhoods in which people live, where they work, the schools their children attend and so on; all of which are spaces where they are likely to meet others of a similar status to themselves. Who we form ties with is closely linked to what Giddens (1984) calls our time-space trajectories; the succession of spaces we frequent and the time at which we frequent them. These trajectories are strongly conditioned by our status and so too, therefore, are our opportunities for meeting others.

Foci explain the likelihood of our coming into contact with certain others and thus the opportunities we have for forging relations. I cannot form relations with others without first meeting them (at least virtually). Contact itself does not guarantee tie formation, however, leaving a gap which can be filled by psychological selection mechanisms. I will briefly mention two.

Status homophily is explained in some part by status consciousness: actors want to have their status recognised and this incentivises them to be seen amongst others of the same status and to avoid the questioning of status that might be occasioned by their being seen with others of a different and particularly a lower status (Veblen 1994). Something similar might occur in relation to value homophily where, for example, an actor's attitudes and/

or tastes form an important part of their identity and they want that identity to be recognised and validated by others. This would be enhanced, moreover, where tastes or identities form a basis for 'tribes'. Such collectives might make demands for in-group association amongst their members. In Alan Fletcher's (1979) *Quadrophenia*, for example, the central character, Jimmy, a mod, fears censure from his friends when he bumps into an old friend, who is a rocker (and who is subsequently beaten up by Jimmy's friends). He does not want to be seen with a rocker lest this calls his mod credentials into question.

Beyond these factors similarity typically eases interaction by furnishing it with a common ground. It can be hard work interacting with someone with whom one has 'nothing in common', creating a disincentive for further interaction. If exchange theorists are right in their claim that the likelihood of relationship formation is conditioned by cost-benefit considerations (Blau 1986), and I suggest that they are, then relations to others similar to ourselves are more likely because similarity reduces costs (communication is easier) and increases benefits (affording us an opportunity to affirm and/or indulge our interests).

A further mechanism of network evolution which has received considerable attention in recent years is what Albert and Barabási (2002) calls 'preferential attachment'. This mechanism was first identified in the context of debates on the so-called 'small world phenomenon' and more especially upon the related idea of 'scale-free networks' (and 'power law' distributions³). The 'small world phenomenon' refers to a situation in which nodes within very large networks (comprising millions of nodes) are linked by relatively short 'paths', even when those networks are not particularly dense. Most famously, to invoke the social psychological work which first demonstrated this phenomenon, any two people picked at random from the US population are, on average, at 'six degrees of separation'; that is to say, in a network of mutual acquaintances they are linked by a chain of only five intermediaries (Milgram 1967) (see Figure Four).



Figure 4. Six Degrees of Separation
(A path of six degrees between Johan and John)

This characteristic, which has been observed in many large complex systems, has posed a puzzle for mathematicians and physicists: how are short average path lengths possible in large networks? Two answers have been proposed and supported by empirical evidence, one of which is Albert and Barabási's scale-free model (see also Watts 1999). Albert and Barabási observe that some networks which manifest the small world phenomenon are

3. 'Scale free' and 'power law' have very technical statistical definitions. Loosely speaking, however, they refer to skewed distributions in which (in the case of degree distribution in a network) the vast majority of nodes have a very small degree and a tiny minority have an enormous degree.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relations-In-Process: In Honour of François Dépelteau

characterised by large hubs which are involved in a large proportion of the connections in the network. Many nodes connect to one or more of these hubs and the hubs consequently create short paths between them. This finding, in turn, prompted Albert and Barabási to hypothesise that such networks form through a process of what they call 'preferential attachment': nodes which acquire a relatively high number of connections, possibly by chance, become attractive to other nodes for this reason, thereby accumulating an even higher number of connections in an iterative process which generates their hub position. 'Popularity' breeds 'popularity'.

Preferential attachment is an example of a mechanism endogenous to a network: a node with a high degree becomes, in virtue of this, a target for others seeking to making contact, thereby achieving an even higher degree. Another frequently described endogenous mechanism or rather tendency is 'transitivity'; that is, where a node i has a tie to two further nodes, j and k , this increases the likelihood that j and k will enjoy a tie. As with homophily the mechanisms underlying this tendency partly concern opportunity; two actors with a mutual friend are more likely to hear about one another and meet at events organised by their mutual friend. Again like homophily, however, there may also be a psychological dimension; j and k may feel duty-bound, because of their shared friendship to i , to try to get on or, via a process of cognitive dissonance, may feel that as i likes the other and they like i they must also like the other. Often associated with Granovetter's (1973, 1982) celebrated work on 'weak ties', transitivity tends to produce the dense ego-nets that Coleman (1990) writes about and thereby to eliminate the structural holes and broke-rage opportunities that Burt (1992, 2005) writes about (see above).

Social networks are always in-process because they are constituted by social interactions, which are themselves processes, involving actors who are also always in-process. A process is not a random flux, however, but rather is shaped by mechanisms of various kinds which lend it shape and direction. The mechanisms that I have outlined above: influence, foci, status seeking, cost-benefit calculation, preferential attachment and the mechanisms underlying transitivity, are all important in this respect. They help us to capture and explain the processual dynamics of social relations.

Conclusion

There is a growing recognition in social science of the importance of both relationality and process. In this paper I have drawn these two themes together, showing in particular how and why a focus upon relations lends itself to or indeed necessitates a focus upon process. Specifically I have argued that relations are emergent properties of interaction and are always in process, as interaction itself is a process. Furthermore, I have argued that networks, which are emergent structures forged through the concatenation of social relations, are always in-process for the same reason.

Social life is inherently processual because it is constituted through interaction, which necessarily unfolds through time, and because the actors who engage in these interactions are themselves 'works in process'. As such process is a given, not something which we might seek to offer explanations for. However, the particular twists and turns of the social process are steered by mechanisms which we can seek to uncover and explore. In the final section of the paper I considered some of the mechanisms which social network analysts have unearthed in their attempt to explain the evolution and dynamics of social networks. The quest for an understanding of the social world that is both fully relational and fully processual is still very much in its infancy. We have much to learn but we are at least making a start.

Bibliografia

- ABBOTT, Andrew. Of Time and Space. In: *Social Forces*. 1997. Vol. 75, Issue 4, pages 1149-82. ISSN 0037-7732. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/75.4.1149>
- ABBOTT, Andrew. *Time Matters*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001. ISBN 10: 0226001024 ISBN 13: 978-0226001029.
- ABBOTT, Andrew. *Processual Sociology*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016. ISBN 10: 022633662X ISBN-13: 978-0226336626.
- ALBERT, Réka and BARABÁSI, Albert. Statistical Mechanics of Complex Networks. In: *Review of Modern Physics*. 2002. Vol. 74, Issue 1, pages 47-97. ISSN 0034-6861. <https://arxiv.org/ct?url=https%3A%2F%2Fdx.doi.org%2F10.1103%2FRevModPhys.74.47&v=d516ff43>
- AXELROD, Robert. *The Complexity of Cooperation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. ISBN 9780691015675.
- BLAU, Peter. *Exchange and Power in Social Life*. New York: Transaction, 1986. ISBN-10: 0887386288 ISBN-13: 978-0887386282. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203792643>
- BLUMER, Herbert. *Symbolic Interactionism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. ISBN 9780520056763.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Distinction*. London: Routledge, 1984. ISBN 9780415567886.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. What Makes a Social Class? *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*. 1987. Vol. 32, pages 1-17. ISSN 00675830.
- BORGATTI, Stephen, EVERETT, Martin G. and JOHNSON, Jeffrey. *Analyzing Social Networks*. London: Sage, 2013. ISBN-10: 1446247414 ISBN-13: 978-1446247419.
- BORGATTI, Stephen, EVERETT, Martin and FREEMAN, Lin. *Ucinet 6 for Windows: Software for Social Network Analysis*. Harvard, MA: Analytic Technologies, 2002.
- BURT, Ronald. *Structural Holes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992. ISBN-10: 0674843711 ISBN-13: 978-0674843714.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relations-In-Process: In Honour of François Dépelteau

- BURT, Ronald. *Brokerage and Closure*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. ISBN-10: 0199249156 ISBN-13: 978-0199249152.
- BUTTS, Carter. A Relational Event Model for Social Action. In: *Sociological Methodology*. 2008. Vol. 38, Issue 1, pages 155-200. ISSN 0081-1750. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111%2Fj.1467-9531.2008.00203.x>
- COLEMAN, James. *Foundations of Social Theory*. Harvard: Belknap, 1990. ISBN 9780674312265.
- COOLEY, Charles Horton. *Human Nature and Social Order*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902.
- CROSSLEY, Nick. *Networks of Sounds, Style and Subversion*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015. ISBN-10: 071908864X ISBN-13: 978-0719088643.
- CROSSLEY, Nick. Interactions and Juxtapositions: Conceptualising 'Relations' in Relational Sociology. In: POWELL, Christopher and DÉPELTEAU, François. *Relational Sociology: From Project to Paradigm*. New York: Palgrave, 2014. https://www.researchgate.net/deref/http%3A%2F%2Fdx.doi.org%2F10.1057%2F9781137342652_8
- CROSSLEY, Nick. *Towards Relational Sociology*. London: Routledge, 2011. ISBN-10: 0415534275 ISBN-13: 978-0415534277. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203887066>
- CROSSLEY, Nick. (Net)Working Out. In: *The British Journal of Sociology*. 2008. Vol. 59, Issue 3, pages 475-500. ISSN 0007-1315. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2008.00204.x>
- CROSSLEY, Nick. *Intersubjectivity*. London: Sage, 1996. ISBN-10: 0803979045 ISBN-13: 978-0803979048. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446250532>
- CROSSLEY, Nick, BELLOTTI, Elisa, EDWARDS, Gemma, EVERETT, Martin, KOSKINEN, Johan and TRANMER, Mark. *Social Network Analysis for Ego-Nets*. London: Sage, 2015. ISBN-10: 1446267768 ISBN-13: 978-1446267769. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781473911871>
- DÉPELTEAU, François and POWELL, Christopher. *Conceptualizing Relational Sociology*. London: Palgrave, 2013a. ISBN-10: 1137379901 ISBN-13: 978-1137379900.
- DÉPELTEAU, François and POWELL, Christopher. *Applying Relational Sociology*. London: Palgrave, 2013b. ISBN-10: 113737991X ISBN-13: 978-1137379917.
- DÉPELTEAU, François. *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. London: Palgrave, 2018. ISBN-10: 3319660047 ISBN-13: 978-3319660042. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9>
- DEWEY, John and BENTLEY, Arthur. *Knowing and the Known*. Boston: Beacon, 1949.
- DURKHEIM, Émile. The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions. In: *Emile Durkheim On Morality and Society*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1973. Pages 149-63. ISBN-10: 0226173364 ISBN-13: 978-0226173368. <https://www.researchgate.net/deref/http%3A%2F%2Fdx.doi.org%2F10.3167%2F175223005783472211>
- DURKHEIM, Émile. *Sociology and Philosophy*. New York: Free Press, 1974. ISBN-10: 0029085802 ISBN-13: 978-0029085806.
- ELIAS, Norbert. *What is Sociology?* London: Hutchinson, 1978. ISBN 978-1906359058.
- ELIAS, Norbert. *The Court Society*. New York: Pantheon, 1983. ISBN-10: 0631139311 ISBN-13: 978-0631139317.
- ELIAS, Norbert. *The Civilizing Process*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1984. ISBN-10: 0631135871 ISBN-13: 978-0631135876.
- FELD, Scott. The Focused Organization of Social Ties. In: *American Journal of Sociology*. 1981. Vol. 86, No. 5, pages 1015-1035. ISSN 0002-9602. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/227352>
- FLETCHER, Alan. *Quadrophenia*. London: Corgi, 1979. ISBN-10: 055211183X ISBN-13: 978-0552111836.
- GIDDENS, Anthony. *The Constitution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity, 1984. ISBN-10: 0745600077 ISBN-13: 978-0745600079.
- GRANOVETTER, Mark. The Strength of Weak Ties. In: *American Journal of Sociology*. 1973. Vol. 78, Issue 6, pages 1360-80. ISSN 0002-9602. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/225469>
- GRANOVETTER, Mark. The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited. In: MARSDEN, Peter and LIN, Nan. *Social Structure and Network Analysis*. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982. ISBN-10: 0803918895 ISBN-13: 978-0803918894. <https://philpapers.org/go.pl?id=GRATSO-3&proxylid=&u=http%3A%2F%2Fdx.doi.org%2F10.2307%2F202051>
- HINDESS, Barry. *Choice, Rationality and Social Theory*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1988. ISBN-10: 9998824486 ISBN-13: 978-9998824485. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315763729>
- HUSSERL, Edmund. *Cartesian Meditations*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1990. ISBN-10: 902470068X ISBN-13: 978-9024700684.
- KENNEDY, J.B. *Space, Time and Einstein*. Chesham: Acumen, 2003. ISBN-10: 1902683668 ISBN-13: 978-1902683669.
- LATOURE, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. ISBN-10: 0199256055 ISBN-13: 978-0199256051.
- LAZARSELD, Paul and MERTON, Robert. Friendship as Social Process. In: BERGER, Morroe, ABEL, Theodore and PAGE, Charles. *Freedom and Control in Modern Society*. New York: Octagon Books, 1964. Pages 18-66.
- MARX, Karl. *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959.
- MARX, Karl. *Grundrisse*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973. ISBN-10: 0140216677 ISBN-13: 9780140216677.
- MCPHERSON, Miller, SMITH-LOVIN, Lynn and COOK, James. Birds of Feather: Homophily in Social Networks. In: *Annual Review of Sociology*. 2001. Vol. 27, pages 415-44. ISSN 0360-

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relations-In-Process: In Honour of François Dépelteau

0572. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.415>
- MERLEAU-PONTY, Maurice. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge, 1962. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203981139>
- MERLEAU-PONTY, Maurice. *Institution and Passivity*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010. ISBN-10: 0810126893 ISBN-13: 978-0810126893.
- MILGRAM, Stanley. The Small World Problem. In: CARTER, Gregg. *Empirical Approaches to Sociology*. Boston: Pearson, 2004. Pages 111-8. ISBN 9780205394845.
- MORGNER, Christian (Ed.). *John Dewey and the Notion of Transaction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. ISBN 978-3030263805. <https://www.researchgate.net/deref/http%3A%2F%2Fdx.doi.org%2F10.1007%2F978-3-030-26380-5>
- RORTY, Richard. A World Without Substances or Essences. In: RORTY, Richard. *Philosophy and Social Hope*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999. Pages 47-72. ISBN 978-0140262889.
- SCHUTZ, Alfred. The Problem of Transcendental Intersubjectivity in Husserl. In: SCHUTZ, Alfred. *Collected Papers Vol 3*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970. Pages 51-84. ISBN-10: 9401522200 ISBN-13: 978-9401522205. <https://philpapers.org/go.pl?id=SCHTPO-60&proxyId=&u=http%3A%2F%2Fdx.doi.org%2F10.7761%2FSR.2.11>
- SCOTT, John. *Social Network Analysis: A Handbook*. London: Sage, 2000. ISBN-10: 0761963383 ISBN-13: 978-0761963387.
- DOI:<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0038038588022001007>
- SIMMEL, Georg. *Conflict and the Web of Group Affiliations*. New York: Free Press, 1955.
- SIMMEL, Georg. *On Individuality and Social Forms*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1971. ISBN 9780226757766. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7208/CHICAGO%2F9780226924694.001.0001>
- SMITH, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. New York: Prometheus, 2000. ISBN-10: 1573928003 ISBN-13: 9781573928007.
- SNIJDERS, Tom, VAN DE BUNT, Gerhard and STEGLICH, Christian. Introduction to stochastic actor-based models for network dynamics. In: *Social Networks*. 2010. Vol. 32, Issue 1, pages 44–60. ISSN 0378-8733. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2009.02.004>
- VEBLEN, Thorstein. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Dover, 1994. ISBN-10: 0486280624 ISBN-13: 978-0486280622. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315135373>
- WASSERMAN, Stanley and FAUST, Katherine. *Social Network Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. ISBN-10: 0521387078 ISBN-13: 978-0521387071.
- WATTS, Duncan. *Small Worlds*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999. ISBN 9780691117041.
- WEBER, Max. *Economy and Society*. New York: Bedminster Press, 1978.
- WELLMAN, Barry and BERKOWITZ, Stephen. *Social Structures*. Greenwich: JAI Press, 1997. ISBN-10: 1567503276 ISBN-13: 978-1567503272.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relations-In-Process: In Honour of François Dépelteau

Nick Crossley

(nick.crossley@manchester.ac.uk)

University of Manchester

Nick Crossley is a Professor in the Department of Sociology at University of Manchester and Co-Founder/Co-Director of the Mitchell Centre for Social Network Analysis. He has published on a range of topics, most notably, in recent years, on the topics of music, social networks and relational sociology. In 2011 he published a book on relational sociology (Towards Relational Sociology, Routledge). He has a forthcoming book arguing for a relational approach to music sociology (Connecting Sounds: The Social Life of Music, Manchester University Press, 2020).

UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Special Section: “Special Issue guest-edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of François Dépelteau”

Friends of Relational Sociology? The Relational Current as a Space of Hospitality

Olli Pyyhtinen
Tampere University

Date of submission: October 2019
Accepted in: May 2020
Published in: July 2020

RECOMMENDED CITATION

PYYHTINEN, Olli (2020). “Friends of Relational Sociology? The Relational Current as a Space of Hospitality”. In: SELG, Peeter. “Special Issue guest edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of Francois Dépelteau”. [online article]. Digithum, no. 26, pp. 1-12. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and Universidad de Antioquia. [Accessed: dd/mm/yy]. <http://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.3199>



The texts published in this journal are – unless otherwise indicated – covered by the Creative Commons Spain Attribution 4.0 International licence. The full text of the licence can be consulted here: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Abstract

The text considers the writings of François Dépelteau from the framework of hospitality, as an invitation for scholars to participate in specifying the key ideas and practices of the relational sociology movement. Thereby, instead of searching for cues where he would speak about hospitality, the text explores his thinking as hospitality. It examines how his writings performatively try out and expand the possibilities of creating hospitality within the relational sociology movement. The article suggests that the antinomy between what Jacques Derrida has called unconditional and conditional hospitality proves helpful when trying to explicate Dépelteau's views on keeping relational sociology alive as a project or intellectual movement. The difficulty of the community building, it will be maintained, comes down to finding a balance between embracing difference and protecting identity.

Keywords

community, friendship, hospitality, invitation, mourning, relational sociology

¿Amigos de la sociología relacional? La corriente relacional como espacio de hospitalidad

Resumen

El texto interpreta los escritos de François Dépelteau desde el punto de vista de la hospitalidad como una invitación para que los académicos participen concretando las ideas y prácticas clave del movimiento de la sociología relacional. De este modo, en lugar de buscar pistas sobre dónde hablaría sobre hospitalidad, el texto explora su pensamiento como hospitalidad. Estudia sus pensamientos sobre cómo la sociología relacional podría probarse y ampliar de manera performativa las posibilidades de crear hospitalidad dentro del movimiento de la sociología relacional. Además, el artículo sugiere que la antinomia entre lo que Jacques Derrida llama hospitalidad incondicional y condicional resulta útil cuando se trata de explicar las opiniones de Dépelteau sobre cómo mantener viva la sociología relacional como proyecto o movimiento intelectual. Así pues, se mantendrá la dificultad de la construcción de la comunidad, pero reducida a encontrar un equilibrio entre abrazar la diferencia y proteger la identidad.

Palabras clave

comunidad, amistad, hospitalidad, invitación, duelo, sociología relacional

“Whatever it is called, this is an invitation for an exploration by fellow travellers”
(Dépelteau, 2018c: 504)

To François: assuming responsibility to respond

This is a work of mourning. I am mourning a dead friend whom I never met in person, but with whom I shared an obsession for thinking all things relational. In his last email to me, my friend François (whom I am calling by his first name here) wrote me: “Then, we might meet. Just a delay. Will see.” Besides expressing hope at the moment when all hope was gone, his words hint how the existential certainty of death is conjoined with temporal indeterminacy. While in every single moment of our lives we are beings that will die, we need to live with the uncertainty and terror of not knowing when exactly this will happen. To me, the hope expressed in François’s words extends (and quite possibly against his own intention) even beyond life, thereby forcing us to reconfigure what it is to “meet” each other. In that regard, his words present a challenge for the relation between friends to survive death. This text is a response to that challenge; not as one

responds in a duel, when two men meet each other at dawn for showdown, but in friendship, where the one who survives must assume it as one’s responsibility to respond. As one friend must die before the other, the law of friendship is always also the law of surviving and mourning. One simply “does not survive without mourning”, and for this reason “[s]urviving [...] is the other name of [...] mourning”, as Jacques Derrida (2005: 13) has proposed. The imminent mourning accompanies and structures any relation between friends from the beginning.

The one who survives is always called upon to respond. How does one respond to such an unthinkable, unspeakable event – the death of a friend? On such an occasion, “[s]peaking is impossible, but so too would be silence or absence or a refusal to share one’s sadness” (Derrida 2001: 72). While in the first case, that of speaking, the impossibility refers more to a loss of words and thus to the difficulty of finding the right words or even uttering a single word, silence rather seems impossible due to the fact that saying nothing would simply be irresponsible and disrespectful, something completely out of the question. One cannot but do the impossible and speak. To recall the life of the friend and not let it pass into oblivion, one must break the silence and respond with words, uttered at the limit of life and death. And one may only hope that those words are fit for the friend in question and

bear witness to the unique relationship that one has had with the friend.¹

But to whom are such words addressed, actually? Obviously, in this case, they are *for* François. The expression “*for* François” suggests not only that I write about him and his work, but also that the words and thoughts are dedicated to him, given as a gift. They are intended as a token of recognition, as a gesture of appreciation, and as a tribute. Nevertheless, I am of course painfully aware that these words cannot reach him, in the manner as they could have while he was still alive. They reach him too late; François himself is no longer here.² (And yet, François of course is still present among us and in us, as we still can have relations with him, even though he can know nothing of it anymore. It is we who are absent to him, since it is not him who has disappeared from the world but the world has disappeared from him. For this text, for example, François appears as a donor, because it is his life and work that give me the occasion to give. He gives me the gift of giving on this particular occasion.) So, let me repeat my question. For whom are these words? To whom and for whom does one write? I wrote to *you*. And who are you? I do not imagine you as a suspicious, hypercritical reader whom I assume to disagree with everything I have to say, and whose every possible objection I would therefore try to anticipate.³ Rather, I intend you as my friend. This means that this text is surely not “for all and none”, as Nietzsche pompously pictured the readership of his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1999), for those who are friends to all are no one's friend in particular, Aristotle (2000: 1171a) reminds us.

By regarding you as a friend does not, however, mean that you and I should be like-minded. You do not have to conform and agree, but you may also disagree. “The best I can hope for is that [you] disagree in full disclosure and in constructive ways” (Dépelteau, 2018b: 28) – I treasure these words of wisdom by François and take them as my guiding light here. Yet, you may disagree already here. By what right do I call someone like François whom I never met a *friend*? Or you whom I do not even know? Can friendship just be declared, unilaterally? I am fully aware that calling François my friend even if we never got to meet each other in person may easily sound daring, unsuitable, wrong, and also less credible than when coming from someone who had known him well and for a good while. Aristotle stresses that a friend is not to be had without trial nor in a single day; it takes time to see if friendship endures the test of time (Aristotle, 2011: 1237b, 13, 17). What is more, considering the circumstances, calling François

my friend may appear possessive and presumptuous, a case of indecent posthumous appropriation. Am I using him here for my own purposes, to get another peer-reviewed publication and earn some points? Those who were his “true” friends in the sense of knowing him for a long time and being close to him might quite legitimately say that he was *their* friend and not mine. And they would be absolutely right. Our friendship was of a peculiar kind. As friends, François and I were – and *are*, in the eternal present of theory – above all, friends of processual-relational thinking.⁴ That is what we share. That is our common denominator, the Third mediating our relation. And that is also how I would like you to approach this text: as a friend of relational sociology. A friendly piece of advice: if you are not interested in relational sociology, you'd better stop reading here and move on to something else that might fascinate you instead. Life is long unless you make it short by wasting it (Seneca, 2005).

Let me also emphasise that a friend is not a property, but relational. One cannot “get” friends in the sense of obtaining or acquiring them as one would collect objects (apart from Facebook “friends”, perhaps). Instead, friends are *made* in mutual co-constitutive relations: the other can be my friend only insofar as the other not only accepts my positioning of themselves as my friend, but also sees me as their friend, and I accept that position. (It is not possible that one has a friend to whom oneself is an enemy; one can only become – not be – friends with an enemy.)

The question of who and what is a friend (of relational sociology) lies at the heart of the present text. The article explores how François pictures the project of relational sociology as a collective undertaking by examining his thoughts and initiatives within the framework of hospitality, especially in conjunction with Derrida's thoughts. In his opening piece to the monumental *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology* (2018) that he edited, François sketches the core ideas of relational sociology and invites fellow sociologists to join him in a discussion on what could and should be done to render relational sociology into a strong and vibrant intellectual movement. As François himself puts it:

This is an invitation to start a chain of discussion on the ideational and practical characteristics of this intellectual movement, which refers to the worldviews, principles, concepts, methods and scientific practices of this approach (Dépelteau, 2018b: 7–8).

I read François's piece and this sentence in particular as an invitation in the most literal sense, that is, as an act of *hospitality*.

1. François's friends have already responded with beautiful eulogies (see Guy, 2018; Selg, 2018; Vandenberghe, 2018b).
2. Derrida examines this problem of *for whom* in his eulogy for Roland Barthes (Derrida, 2001: 35).
3. Howard Becker (2007: 8–9) suggests that, as writers, social scientists tend to make “innocuous but safe” rather than bold statements, “because we fear that others will catch us in obvious errors if we do anything else, and laugh at us”. And thus we walk on eggshells.
4. In his tribute to François, Jean-Sebastien Guy (2018) fittingly writes that, when launching the research cluster of relational sociology within the Canadian Sociological Association, François “was not searching for disciples, but for colleagues or even friends – not people to boss around, but people to cooperate with as equals.”

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Friends of Relational Sociology? The Relational Current as a Space of Hospitality

Instead of searching for cues where he would speak about hospitality, I explore his thinking as hospitality (see Friese, 2004: 74; Höckert, 2015: 40). By inviting people to join in the discussion on what relational sociology is and what it could be, the invitation opens up a space not only to do things together, but also to do togetherness. And this is also how I approach François's own writings here: as efforts to build and gather together the relational sociology community in a performative manner. I explore how they try out and expand the possibilities of creating hospitality within the relational sociology movement/community. To be sure, such a reading strategy focuses on and proceeds from the margin, trying to tease out new ideas and perspectives. Hospitality cannot in any way be said to constitute a central theme in François's work. As far as I know, it is close to a non-existent subject matter in his publications. And yet, his writings evince and express hospitality. The quotation from François – "Whatever it is called, this is an invitation for an exploration by fellow travelers" – placed at the beginning of this article as an epigraph illustrates this beautifully.

I suggest that the antinomy between what Derrida (2000a&b) has called *unconditional hospitality*, on the one hand, and *conditional hospitality*, on the other, proves helpful when trying to explicate François's views on keeping relational sociology alive as a project or intellectual movement. While as a coordinator and organiser François wanted to create a space in which differences could flourish and to which he was also willing to welcome whomever, without distinguishing between friend and enemy, guest and parasite, as an author he introduced demarcations and divisions. In the text "Relational Thinking in Sociology: Relevance, Concurrence and Dissonance", he insists that, as relational sociologists, we need to "find a balance between controversy and discipline" (Dépelteau, 2018b: 27), if we want the movement to subsist and prosper. And I will argue that the tension between these two practices can be best conceptualised in terms of the contrast between the two notions of hospitality.

Invitation as a hospitable act

What is an invitation? In the book *Of Hospitality* (2000b: 133, 135), Derrida remarks in passing that "[i]nviting... go[es] by way of language or the address to the other". This formulation captures two key aspects of an invitation. First of all, that an invitation is tied to language. It designates the spoken or written form in which a person is invited or assumes an inviting gesture through which our body speaks to the other (though the high prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual abuse bear witness

to how messages never intended as inviting in the first place are often deliberately misread as inviting, thus overriding, coercing, or manufacturing consent). An invitation is thus always declared and needs to be made explicit. There cannot be any implicit invitation. For something to count as an invitation, it can never remain secret, but it must always become manifest.

Secondly, Derrida's remark rightly underlines how an invitation is dependent on *the other*. It is a relation between self and other, positioning the self as a host and the other as a guest. Host and guest are relational concepts. A person cannot be a host without a guest whom one welcomes and hosts. The host and the guest are thus co-constituted; we cannot have one without the other. This does not mean that their relation would be symmetrical. On the contrary, the host-guest relation is very much an asymmetrical one. The gesture of welcoming gives the host power to define the "guest situation" (Berking, 1999: 82), and the two have unequal rights and duties. The co-constitution of the host and the guest means above all else that the two terms are conceivable only in relation to each other. I can be a guest only in relation to the host, who interpellates me. The alterity of the guest can be understood only in reference to the host, who precedes it, both logically and semantically. And yet the host, too, always implies a guest, whom one invites or welcomes. It is only in relation to a guest – and by addressing the guest – that one may present and declare oneself as a host. There would never occur any generosity, and no hospitality would ever take place, if the gesture of giving hospitality was not accepted by the other. The actualisation of hospitality relies thus not only on giving but on receiving as well.⁵

How does one become a host? By what right? In the general sense of the term, hospitality seems to assume a certain amount of sovereignty: "No hospitality, in the classical sense, without sovereignty of oneself over one's house" (Derrida, 2000a: 55). Being a host thus necessitates dwelling, a home, a particular relation to space. One's hospitality is made possible by one's own home (ibid.: 53). Hospitality, the opening up of space, would thus paradoxically be dependent on and conditioned by its opposite, a prior appropriation of space. It is as if I could make a space accessible to others only insofar as I first enclosed that space and excluded the others by saying "this is mine".⁶

What qualifies François as a host, then? While he might have agreed that relational sociology is his home, it would be less appropriate to say that it belongs originally to him, that he, as a host, is its designated owner. He is not one of the "founding fathers" of the subfield, and so in this sense he is not the head of house but himself a guest. His invitation itself amounts to a response to preceding initiatives and already existing discussions and debates. François does not claim ownership over relational

5. I have emphasised the significance of receiving also in relation to the gift (see Pyyhtinen, 2014a).

6. For more on the appropriation of space, see Serres (2011).

sociology. He does not say “this is mine”. On the contrary, he openly acknowledges that “the field of relational sociology started many years ago thanks to the works of founders such as P. Donati and M. Emirbayer in the 1980s and 1990s” (Dépelteau, 2018a: ix). Indeed, in Italy, sociologist Pierpaolo Donati had been systematically pursuing and developing relational sociology from the early 1980s, and Donati has also created a network of scholars with an interest in relational sociology, under the name Relational Studies in Sociology. Yet it was above all with the publication of Mustafa Emirbayer’s “Manifesto for a Relational Sociology”, published in *The American Journal of Sociology* in 1997 that relational sociology began to take shape as an explicit, self-conscious international programme and movement. Today, Donati’s realist relational sociology and the so-called New York School represented by Emirbayer and the works of Harrison White, Charles Tilly, Ann Mische, and Margaret Somers, for example, form two largely independent and separate sub-groups of the relational sociology current.

But even if François did not found relational sociology, neither did Donati and Emirbayer themselves create it *ex nihilo*. Not even they can claim ownership over it. Even though the name “relational sociology” is of more recent origin, relational ideas can be found already in the work of several classical authors, including Karl Marx (see e.g. Burkitt, 2018), Georg Simmel (see e.g. Cantó-Milà, 2005; 2016; 2018; Donati, 2011; Crossley, 2011; Ruggieri, 2016; 2017; Pyyhtinen, 2010; 2016; 2017; Kemple, 2018; Papilloud, 2018); Gabriel Tarde (see e.g. Toews, 2003; Tonkonoff, 2018), George Herbert Mead (see e.g. Côté, 2018), and even Émile Durkheim (see e.g. Dépelteau, 2017), whose work is usually seen to exemplify fairly orthodox substantialist thought. In addition, the figurational sociology of Norbert Elias already was relational through and through (see e.g. Elias, 1978; Dépelteau & Landini, 2013). And of course, the thoughts of these authors did not emerge out of nothing, but they, too, have their predecessors and sources of inspiration.

All this makes it anything but easy to determine who are the guests and who the hosts in the history and world of ideas. It is not always clear, whether or to what extent one gives or takes. The host and the guest appear as circulating epithets, tokens given and passed from one author to another. The verb “to give” needs to be understood in the most literal sense here: scientific contributions are *gifts*. In *The Scientific Community* (1965: 52), Warren Hagstrom analyses science as a “system wherein gifts of information are exchanged for recognition from scientific colleagues”. Indeed, while scientific research is an extremely competitive field, it is precisely by *what they give* that scholars compete for recognition. One becomes an acknowledged member of the community only as a donor; one cannot gain before and without having given first. One may receive recognition for instance by having one’s outputs accepted for publication in academic journals or by book publishers. Later, that one’s texts

are cited by other authors, invitations to give talks and lectures, positions gained, and awards are further means of paying and receiving recognition. Provided that the gift is a crucial vehicle of scientific community and research, the increasing marketisation of scientific publishing and teaching in terms of paywalls, high subscription fees, and tuition fees, for example, pose a serious threat to the scientific community and jeopardise the very practices of doing research.

So, if everyone owes something to others, what is it that qualifies François as a host within the space of relational sociology? First of all, François played a decisive role in advancing relational sociology as an international current. He made a significant impact not only discursively, as an author and as an editor of the volumes *Conceptualizing Relational Sociology* (Powell & Dépelteau, 2013), *Applying Relational Sociology* (Dépelteau & Powell, 2013), and *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology* (2018), but also socially or institutionally, by doing and hosting togetherness: he organised conferences, launched the Palgrave Studies in Relational Sociology book series, and coordinated the research cluster of relational sociology, which operates under the Canadian Sociological Association (CSA), but is actually an international and transdisciplinary network of relational scholars, with over 120 members from 25 countries.

Secondly, it is important to rethink the very notion of hospitality. Is it really necessary to start from a prior appropriation and enclosure of space to offer hospitality? Could we begin from the giving of place to those without a home or shelter instead? In that case, the place of hospitality would belong neither to the host nor to the guest, but to the gesture of welcoming (Dufourmantelle, 2000: 62). It would be the act of hospitality, the giving of place, that created the hospitable place, not the prior appropriation of space. The host, too, would, in a sense, enter the place of hospitality by the grace of the visitor, or, to be more exact, thanks to their interrelation. The relation of hospitality would be primary, not any one of the subjects.

This is where relational sociology comes in. As I see it, relational thinking reminds us in an important manner that any agent is in fact always a guest, and any action is a response to an invitation. Along similar lines, Spanish philosopher Daniel Innerarity suggests in his book *Ethics of Hospitality* (2017: 3) that “human life is less a set of sovereign initiatives than a set of replies to the invitations that the world gives us”. No agent is the sole origin of the things accomplished or even of one’s own action, but any action is to some extent *received*, a response, as it is conditioned and constituted by others. Action or agency, for that matter, is never “possessed” by an agent, but the agent is rather itself possessed by action (Ingold, 2013), as any agent is always immersed in ongoing activity (Whitehead, 1938: 217). This makes action always *dislocated*: “borrowed, distributed, suggested, influence, dominated, betrayed, translated” (Latour, 2005: 46). Take thinking, for example. The one who thinks is not

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Friends of Relational Sociology? The Relational Current as a Space of Hospitality

the sole origin of one's thought. The voice of the tradition and that of the sources of influence and inspiration always already precede one's own, and relations are a condition of possibility of the very exercise of thought itself. Even in the most solitary act of thinking one is always already populated by a multitude of voices (Deleuze & Parnet, 2006: 5). To apply Nietzsche's (2003: 26) thoughts on action: the thinker is a "mere appendage" to the act of thinking. With this regard, it is revealing that the words "thinking" and "thanking" have the same etymological root. The one who thinks is a guest, who to a large part has received one's thoughts and ideas.⁷

Unconditional and conditional hospitality

To whom does one offer hospitality? To whom is François's invitation addressed? To the friends of relational sociology? And, if so, how can we tell who they are? How can they be identified? Or is the invitation an open call, extended to whomever? Would the parasites and enemies be welcomed as well? And what would actually happen if anyone came and joined in the party?

Hospitality is a process, where the other undergoes a transformation from a stranger to a guest. It is only when we know each other's names that we stop being strangers to each other. Hospitality thus usually starts with identifying the other, by asking the other person's name (Derrida, 2000a: 27). However, the invitation presented by François breaks with this. It presents a gesture of hospitality that welcomes basically whomever, offering hospitality before identifying and interrogating the other. It does not ask who the other is and demand to see whether the papers of the person crossing the threshold are in order.

Thereby, in many respects François's invitation corresponds to what Derrida has termed *unconditional hospitality*. Unconditional hospitality is absolute and unlimited. It means readiness to give without recognition, to welcome "the absolute, unknown, anonymous other" (ibid.: 25). One does not select to whom one gives place. Instead, unconditional hospitality requires that I "say yes" to whomever turns up, "before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification*" (Derrida, 2000b: 77). Unconditional hospitality preserves the ambivalence inscribed in the Latin term *hostis*, which means both guest and enemy. It abstains from distinguishing between invited and uninvited visitor, guest and parasite, friend and enemy. François pictures the community of relational sociologists as an "open 'society'"

(Dépelteau, 2018b: 7). This means, among other things, that discussions on relationality and relational sociology should not be kept solely among like-minded people. Whoever wants to join in is welcomed. It is fairly common in academia, François laments, that scholars "avoid any real discussion with colleagues who disagree with them, except for episodic moments when it becomes inevitable – in congresses, for example". In such a case, "comparisons and critiques happen but they typically are designed to promote [and/or] protect the 'theory'". (Ibid.: 23.) To have "[r]eal and [p]roductive [d]iscussions", François asserts, we should not try to repress and exclude disagreement and controversies (ibid.: 24), but embrace difference and make room for controversy.

Yet François is no naïve idealist. On the contrary, he is very well aware that "full openness would destroy the existence of any approach" (ibid.: 7). Against much cherished Western political utopias, no community can be absolutely inclusive. An entirely open, inclusive community without any exclusion would not have any shape and would collapse in a minute.⁸ The constitution of community therefore relies on drawing a boundary between the inside and the outside. A border needs to be set up to establish order within and close it off from the disorder of the outside. Order is possible only on the condition that chaos is excluded, while chaos, of course, exists only in relation to order. Indeed, if relational sociology embraced difference to the full and included approaches, thoughts, and ideas of all sorts, "[w]e would end up with an empty and meaningless label", as François maintains (ibid.: 7). He suggests that "we need some form of self-discipline, and maybe even some form of decentralised and soft social control where 'libertarians' or 'anarchists' would be gently reminded by others that this movement is also a 'collective' or a little 'society'" (ibid.: 7).

There is thus a tension between welcoming otherness and protecting identity in how François pictures relational sociology as a collective and movement. Frédéric Vandenberghe (2018a: 53 n. 6) has captured this nicely by observing that:

As a coordinator of the network of relational sociologists, François Dépelteau is inclusive and ecumenical. Whoever identifies with the relational project and wants to contribute to its expansion is in. But as an author (Dépelteau 2015, 2008), he is rather more divisive and develops his transactional sociology as a radical pragmatist-processual sociology without any concession to the more structuralist pole of relational sociology.

The tension between being "inclusive and ecumenical," on the one hand, and "divisive," on the other, can also be conceptualised

7. The work of Tarde (1903) is of crucial importance with regard to this theme, as it emphasises the entanglement of invention and imitation and gives primacy to relations over the psyche or the mind. Tardean sociology amounts to a kind of interpsychology, which explores the affective processes and relations between minds. Instead of being endowed first with some primordial interiority closed off from the outside world, we gain a psychological interiority only through relations with the extrapsyche (Tarde, 1903; see also Latour, 2005: 216).

8. See also Pyyhtinen (2014b: 61–62).

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Friends of Relational Sociology? The Relational Current as a Space of Hospitality

in terms of the contrast between unconditional and conditional hospitality. Unlike unconditional hospitality, conditional hospitality is selective and limited in character. It endows both the guest and the host with certain (asymmetrical) rights and duties and asks the guest to enter into a pact and somehow repay the hospitality received. While François seems to welcome whomever, before any identification, he nevertheless stresses the importance of having a common language. The stranger needs to speak our language and share what is shared with a language. To quote his own words: "Relational sociology cannot become a 'Tower of Babel' with no common language or some sort of anomic (pseudo) group of people which would all use the label 'relational' in their own way, according to their own desire" (Dépelteau, 2018b: 7). So, he insists that in order to survive the relational sociology community needs to have some boundaries to protect its identity.

And, at present, relational sociology does indeed lack a clear or coherent identity. It presents a somewhat unorganised and diffuse cluster of theories and approaches. There also exist several partly overlapping divisions between them:

- 1) While some relational approaches are based on a realist ontology (e.g. Donati & Archer, 2015; Donati, 2011; 2018), there are others, which base themselves on a constructivist ontology (e.g. Latour, 2003), and still others which see the question of ontology irrelevant and thereby wish to do away with it entirely (e.g. Kivinen & Piironen, 2006). Relational realists, to put the matter crudely, conceive relations as connecting previously unconnected bounded entities and having an emergent being of their own, whereas thinkers of a more constructivist pole consider relations as constitutive of entities.
- 2) There is also a divide between "relational-structuralist" and relational-processualist perspectives, that is, between approaches that emphasise the structural properties of relations and approaches that lay more emphasis on processes, becoming, and dynamics of relations (Vandenberghe, 2018a).⁹ While relational-structuralist perspectives focus typically on network-structures and the structures of relational formations, process-oriented perspectives lay emphasis on the processual and dynamic nature of relations. For processual-relational sociology, relations are not "things" (like "ties" or "bonds") or "structures," but fluid and ongoing processes to be grasped in their incessant becoming and formation (Pyyhtinen, 2010; 2015; 2016; 2017).
- 3) While some varieties of relational thought are more or less anthropocentric (e.g. Vandenberghe, 2002; Donati, 2011; Fuhse, 2013) by focusing solely on relations between

human actors (and conglomerates of humans), others adopt a non-anthropocentric perspective (e.g. Mol, 2002; Latour, 2005; Pyyhtinen, 2015; Dépelteau, 2018b&c), emphasising that to get a full sense of the relations that constitute us and of our entanglement with the world it is important that we acknowledge the powers of non-human, more-than-human or not-quite-human materials, objects, and flows in shaping us and society.

- 4) Relational thinkers also disagree on whether social structures, such as networks and social systems, have causal powers once they have emerged or whether they are sheer relational effects (see Dépelteau, 2018b). Some relational sociologists, like Donati (2018; 2020) and Nick Crossley (2011), assign networks of relations some causal powers. There are, however, other relational scholars who oppose the idea that network-structures could interact with human agents not to speak of being able to self-act, that is, act in their own right. Structures are rather considered 'as empty abstractions apart from the elements of which they are produced' (Emirbayer, 1997: 288). As François puts it, structures are "not 'external' from their interactants since they constantly 'emerge', are transformed or dissolved through their interactions" (Dépelteau, 2018c: 509; see also Dépelteau, 2008).
- 5) There is also no agreement even on the matter of how we should conceptualise relations (e.g. should we consider them in dyadic terms or otherwise? Should we understand relations as structures or as unfolding processes? Are relations primary or secondary vis-à-vis what is connected by them? Can we reduce all relations to one basic model, such as communication (Luhmann); exchange or reciprocity (Simmel; Mauss); translation (Serres), and trials of strength (Latour)? In addition, how do terms such as "social ties", "bonds", "connections", "links", "associations", "relationships", and "interactions" relate to each other?).

All these divisions and disagreements suggest that relational sociology presents no homogeneous space – even when we consider it as a space of hospitality. And the dissonances are the main reason why François sees it as important to introduce coherence and identify "the strong ideational core" of relational sociology, which for him is found in the idea that sociology should study relations, and that social phenomena are co-produced by interdependent interactants (Dépelteau, 2018b: 23).

However, what makes the tension between embracing difference and protecting identity difficult is that one cannot just choose either one. While the contrast between unconditional and

9. Quite often (though not always), this divide tends to overlap with the first one: scholars who identify themselves as "relational realists" tend to pay attention to the structural aspects of relational compounds, while those subscribing to a constructivist ontology adopt a processualist perspective on social reality.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Friends of Relational Sociology? The Relational Current as a Space of Hospitality

conditional hospitality seems absolute, as the two notions negate one another, they are in fact indissociable. They simultaneously presuppose and exclude each other. As Derrida writes: “They incorporate one another at the moment of excluding one another, they are dissociated at the moment of enveloping one another” (Derrida, 2000b: 81). They presuppose and oppose one another in one and the same gesture, and therefore, to understand hospitality, both of these notions need to be included as its components. On the one hand, to some extent hospitality always seems to require some sovereignty, certain conditional rights and duties. No hospitality is possible without at least some right to choose one’s guests. Otherwise, as Derrida remarks, the notion of hospitality “would risk being abstract, utopian, illusory”. On the other hand, conditional hospitality would be corrupted or perverted were it not “guided”, inspired, and “given aspiration” by the idea(l) of unconditional, absolute hospitality (Ibid.: 79). If most of the energy was focused on establishing boundaries and guarding them, conditional hospitality would cease to be hospitality at all and instead turn into something inhospitable. It would enclose space rather than keep it open for others.

Concluding thoughts

This article is a response to the invitation, expressed by François Dépelteau in several of his writings, to join in the discussion on the core ideas and key practices of relational sociology. To continue in existence, relational sociology, just like any movement and community, needs the convergent and interdependent efforts of many people. And, precisely because it is fundamentally a collective undertaking, co-produced by a multitude of scholars, no single author can claim ownership over it. No one can be relational sociology or have it all to him/herself; one can only be its *friend*, as was also suggested by the title of this text.

However, I have not responded to the invitation as the host may have expected, amounting thus to a disobedient, “untidy guest”, who gives an “unexpected twist to the social situation” and the host-guest relation (Veijola et al., 2014: 2). Instead of participating, as was solicited in the invitation, in the collective effort to specify the ideational and practical characteristics of the relational sociology movement, I have examined François’s invitation itself as an act of hospitality and community building, trying to accomplish togetherness. When examined as hospitality, François’s thinking appears as being structured in the tension between unconditional and conditional hospitality. On the one hand, he stresses the importance of embracing difference. Rather than crossing out alterity and forming a collective only among those with whom we seem to have something in common, François is willing to welcome whoever wants to join in. Yet on the other hand, he emphasises

that relational sociology needs to have some core and identity. Full openness would destroy it.

The antinomy between unconditional and conditional hospitality is therefore not a matter of theoretical hair-splitting, but it has concrete consequences. Just think for instance of the justification (and erosion) of the welfare society, which has been under much debate and criticism during the last few decades, or the current governmental actions against *personae non gratae*, such as turning away refugees, closing borders, and exiling asylum seekers. All these issues bear a relationship to the problem of hospitality. What is at stake in them, just like in the efforts to keep relational sociology alive as an intellectual movement, is the problem of inclusion and exclusion, and how the law of hospitality and the right to choose one’s guests may at some point turn hospitality into hostility and xenophobia. With regard to the relational sociology community, here lies the threat of a kind of intellectual protectionism, of the movement closing in upon itself, which easily leads to a suffocating dogmatism. What is needed, rather, is openness to alterity and readiness to welcome the other, even though this otherness may not match our desires and think alike, but may contradict how we see the world and what we know and believe in. Thinking in openness and heterogeneity exposes us to new, unexpected ideas and alternative perspectives. I also see here something like a germ of an ideal of good academic life, concentrated more on leaving open the possibility of disruption, noise, messiness, and disorder than protecting the community with rigid boundaries. It would be a life where “learning the productive commerce with alterity” (Innerarity, 2017: 4), not closing the borders, is seen as the source of renewal and vitality.

References

- ARISTOTLE. *The Eudemian Ethics*. Trans. A. KENNY. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. ISBN 9780199586431. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oseo/instance.00258602>
- ARISTOTLE. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. and ed. R. CRISP. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. ISBN 9780511802058. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511802058>
- BECKER, Howard. *Writing for Social Scientists. How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. Second Edition. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007. ISBN 9780226041322. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226041377.001.0001>
- BERKING, Helmuth. *Sociology of Giving*. Trans. P. CAMILLER. London: Sage, 1999. ISBN 9780761956495.
- BURKITT, Ian. Relational Agency. In: DÉPELTEAU, François (ed.). *The Palgrave Hand-book of Relational Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Pages 523–538. ISBN 978-3-319-66004-2. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_26

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Friends of Relational Sociology? The Relational Current as a Space of Hospitality

- CANTÓ-MILÀ, Natàlia. *A Sociological Theory of Value: Georg Simmel's Sociological Relationism*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2005. ISBN 3899423739 (pbk.). <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839403730>
- CANTÓ-MILÀ, Natàlia. On the Special Relation between Proximity and Distance in Simmel's Forms of Association and Beyond. In: KEMPLE, Thomas & PYYHTINEN, Olli (eds.). *The Anthem Companion to Georg Simmel*. London and New York: Anthem Press, 2016. Pages 81–100. ISBN 9781783082810.
- CANTÓ-MILÀ, Natàlia. Georg Simmel's Concept of Forms of Association as an Analytical Tool for Relational Sociology. In: DÉPELTEAU, François (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Pages 217–230. ISBN 978-3-319-66004-2.
- CÔTÉ, Jean-François. G.H. Mead and Relational Sociology: The Case of Concepts. In: DÉPELTEAU, François (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Pages 101–117. ISBN 978-3-319-66004-2. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_5
- CROSSLEY, Nick. *Towards Relational Sociology*. London and New York: Routledge, 2011. ISBN 9780203887066. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203887066>
- DELEUZE, Gilles & PARNET, Claire. *Dialogues II*. Trans. H. TOMLINSON & B. HABBERJAM. London & New York: Continuum, 2006. ISBN 9780826490773.
- DÉPELTEAU, François. Relational Thinking: A Critique of Co-Deterministic Theories of Structure and Agency. In: *Sociological Theory*. Vol. 26, n° 1, pages 51–73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2008.00318.x>
- DÉPELTEAU, François. Toward a Processual-Relational Adaptation of 'Substantialist' Sociology: Starting with Durkheim. In: *Sociologia*. 2017. Vol. 54, n° 4, pages 410–425. ISSN 0038-1640.
- DÉPELTEAU, François. The Promises of the Relational Turn in Sociology. In: DÉPELTEAU, François (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018a. Pages v–xiv. ISBN 978-3-319-66004-2. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9>
- DÉPELTEAU, François. Relational Thinking in Sociology: Relevance, Concurrence and Dissonance. In: DÉPELTEAU, François (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018b. Pages 3–33. ISBN 978-3-319-66004-2. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_1
- DÉPELTEAU, François. In: DÉPELTEAU, François (ed.). From the Concept of 'Trans-Action' to a Process-Relational Approach. In: DÉPELTEAU, François (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018c. Pages 499–519. ISBN 978-3-319-66004-2. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_25
- DÉPELTEAU, François & LANDINI, Tatiana (eds.). *Norbert Elias and Social Theory*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. ISBN-10 1349457167 ISBN-13 978-1349457168. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137312112>
- DÉPELTEAU, François & POWELL, Christopher (eds.). *Applying Relational Sociology: Relations, Networks, & Society*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. ISBN-10 113737991X ISBN-13 978-1137379917. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137407009>
- DERRIDA, Jacques. Foreigner Question: Coming from Abroad / from the Foreigner. In: DUFOURMANTELLE, Anne & DERRIDA, Jacques. *Of Hospitality*. Trans. R. Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000a. Pages 3–73. ISBN 9780804734059.
- DERRIDA, Jacques. Step of Hospitality / No Hospitality. In: DUFOURMANTELLE, Anne & DERRIDA, Jacques. *Of Hospitality*. Trans. R. BOWLBY. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000b. Pages 75–155. ISBN 9780804734059.
- DERRIDA, Jacques. *The Work of Mourning*. Ed. P.-A. BRAULT & M. NAAS. Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2001. ISBN 9780226502496.
- DERRIDA, Jacques. *The Politics of Friendship*. Trans. G. COLLINS. London and New York: Verso, 2005. ISBN-10 1844670546 ISBN-13 978-1844670543.
- DONATI, Pierpaolo. *Relational Sociology: A New Paradigm for the Social Sciences*. London & New York: Routledge, 2011. ISBN 9780415524063. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203860281>
- DONATI, Pierpaolo. An Original Relational Sociology Grounded in Critical Realism. In: DÉPELTEAU, François (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Pages 431–456. ISBN 978-3-319-66004-2. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_22
- DONATI, Pierpaolo. Fluxes and Structures: Which Relational Gaze? A Comparison between Relational Sociologies. In *Polish Sociological Review*, 2020. n° 210, pages 179–197. ISSN 1231-1413.
- DONATI, Pierpaolo & ARCHER, Margaret. *The Relational Subject*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. ISBN-10 1107106117 ISBN-13 978-11071066116. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316226780>
- DUFOURMANTELLE, Anne. Invitation. In: DUFOURMANTELLE, Anne & DERRIDA, Jacques. *Of Hospitality*. Trans. R. BOWLBY. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000. Pages 2–154. ISBN 9780804734059.
- ELIAS, Norbert. *What is Sociology?* Trans. S. MENNELL & G. MORRISSEY. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978. ISBN 9780231045513.
- FRIESE, Heidrun. Spaces of Hospitality. Trans. J. KAYE. In: *Angelaki*. 2004. Vol. 2, pages 67–79. ISSN 0969-725X. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725042000272753>
- FUHSE, Jan. Social Relationships between Communication, Network Structure, and Culture. In: DÉPELTEAU, François & POWELL, Christopher (eds.). *Applying Relational Sociology: Relations, Networks, & Society*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Pages 181–206. ISBN-10 113737991X ISBN-13 978-1137379917. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137407009_8

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Friends of Relational Sociology? The Relational Current as a Space of Hospitality

- GUY, Jean-Sebastien. Remembering François Dépelteau. Available at: <https://www.csa-scs.ca/index.php?p=news.ViewStory&story=118>. 2018. Checked 18 May 2020.
- HAGSTROM, Warren. *The Scientific Community*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965. ISBN-10 0465074030 ISBN-13 978-0465074037.
- HÖCKERT, Emily). *Ethics of Hospitality. Participatory Tourism Encounters in the Northern Highlands of Nicaragua*. Academic dissertation, 2015. Available at: https://lauda.ulapland.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/62200/H%c3%b6ckert_Emily_ActaE_180_pdfA.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y
- INGOLD, Tim. *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. London: Routledge, 2013. ISBN 9780415567237. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203559055>
- INNERARITY, Daniel. *Ethics of Hospitality*. Trans. S. WILLIAMS & S. CHAMPEAU. London: Routledge, 2017. ISBN 9781138333529. <https://doi.org/10.4324/97811315618241>
- KEMPLE, Thomas. *Simmel*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018. ISBN-10 1509521100 ISBN-13 978-1509521104.
- KIVINEN, Osmo & PIIRONEN, Tero. Towards Pragmatist Methodological Relationalism: From Philosophizing Sociology to Sociologizing Philosophy. In: *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. 2006. Vol. 36, n° 3, pages 303–329. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0048393106289794>
- LATOUR, Bruno. The Promises of Constructivism. In: IDHE, Don & SELINGER, Evan (eds.). *Chasing Technoscience: Matrix of Materiality*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003. Pages 27–46. ISBN-10 0253216060 ISBN-13 978-0253216069.
- LATOUR, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. ISBN-10 0199256055 ISBN-13 978-0199256051.
- MOL, Annemarie. *The body multiple. Ontology in medical practice*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. ISBN-10 0822329174 ISBN-13 978-0822329176. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822384151>
- NIETZSCHE, Friedrich. *Thus Spake Zarathustra. A Book for All and None*. Trans. T. COMMON. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1999. ISBN-10 0486406636 ISBN-13 9780486406633.
- NIETZSCHE, Friedrich. *The Genealogy of Morals*. Trans. H. B. SAMUEL. Mineola and New York: Dover, 2003. ISBN-10 9780486426914 ISBN-13 978-0486426914.
- PAPILLOU, Christian. Georg Simmel and Relational Sociology. In: DÉPELTEAU, François (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Pages 201–215. ISBN 978-3-319-66004-2. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_10
- POWELL, Christopher & DÉPELTEAU, François (eds.). *Conceptualizing Relational Sociology: Ontological and Theoretical Issues*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. ISBN-10 1137379901 ISBN-13 978-1137379900. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137342652>
- PYYHTINEN, Olli. *Simmel and 'the Social'*. Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. ISBN-10 0230236170 ISBN-13 978-0230236172. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230289840>
- PYYHTINEN, Olli. *The Gift and its Paradoxes*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2014a. ISBN 9781409450979.
- PYYHTINEN, Olli. "Paradise with/out Parasites". In: VEIJOLA, Soile, GERMANN MOLZ, Jennie, PYYHTINEN, Olli, HÖCKERT, Emily & GRIT, Alexander. *Disruptive Tourism and its Untidy Guests: Alternative Ontologies for Future Hospitalities*. Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014b. Pages 42–67. ISBN-10 113739949X ISBN-13 978-1137399496. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137399502_3
- PYYHTINEN, Olli. *More-than-Human Sociology: A New Sociological Imagination*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. ISBN-10 1137531835 ISBN-13 978-1137531834. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137531841>
- PYYHTINEN, Olli. The Real as Relation: Simmel as a Pioneer of Relational Sociology. In: KEMPLE, Thomas & PYYHTINEN, Olli (eds.). *The Anthem Companion to Georg Simmel*. London and New York: Anthem Press, 2016. Pages 101–120. ISBN-10 9781783082780 ISBN-13 978-1783082780.
- PYYHTINEN, Olli. *The Simmelian Legacy: A Science of Relations*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. ISSN 1616-2552. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-00664-6>
- RUGGIERI, Davide. *La Sociologia Relazionale di Georg Simmel: La relazione come forma sociale vitale*. Milano: Mimesis, 2016. ISBN: 9788857532585.
- RUGGIERI, Davide. Georg Simmel and the 'Relational Turn'. Contributions to the Foundation of the Lebenssoziologie since Simmel. In: *Simmel Studies*. 2017. Vol. 21, n° 1, pages 43–72. ISSN 1616-2552. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1041336ar>
- SELG, Peeter. In Memory of Francois Dépelteau. <https://www.csa-scs.ca/index.php?p=news.ViewStory&story=118>. 2018. Checked 18 May 2020.
- SENECA. *On the Shortness of Life*. Trans. C. D. N. COSTA. London: Penguin Books, 2005. ISBN-10 0143036327 ISBN-13 978-0143036326.
- SERRES, Michel. *Malfeasance. Appropriation through Pollution?* Trans. A.-M. FEENBERG-DIBON. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011. ISBN-10 0804773033 ISBN-13 978-0804773034.
- TARDE, Gabriel. *The Laws of Imitation*. Trans. E. C. PARSONS. New York: H. Holt and Company, 1903.
- TOEWS, David. The New Tarde: Sociology after the End of the Social. In: *Theory, Culture & Society*. 2003. Vol. 20, n° 5, pages 81–98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02632764030205004>
- TONKONOFF, Sergio. *Sociology of Infinitesimal Difference. Gabriel Tarde's Heritage*. In: DÉPELTEAU, François (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Friends of Relational Sociology? The Relational Current as a Space of Hospitality

- Macmillan, 2018. Pages 63–83. ISBN 978-3-319-66004-2. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_3
- VANDENBERGHE, Frederic. Reconstructing Humans: A Humanist Critique of Actant-Network Theory. In: *Theory, Culture & Society*. 2002. Vol. 19, n° 5–6, pages 51–67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026327602761899147>
- VANDENBERGHE, Frederic. The Relation as Magical Operator: Overcoming the Divide Between Relational and Processual Sociology. In: DÉPELTEAU, François (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018a. Pages 35–57. ISBN 978-3-319-66004-2. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_2
- VANDENBERGHE, Frederic. Relational Sociology as a Form of Life: In memoriam of François Dépelteau (1963–2018). *Canadian Review of Sociology*. 2018b. Vol. 55, n° 4, pages 636–638. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cars.12226>
- VEIJOLA, Soile; GERMANN MOLZ, Jennie; PYYHTINEN, Olli; HÖCKERT, Emily; GRIT, Alexander. *Disruptive Tourism and its Untidy Guests: Alternative Ontologies for Future Hospitalities*. Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. ISBN-10 113739949X ISBN-13 978-1137399496. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137399502>
- WHITEHEAD, Alfred North. *Science and the Modern World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Friends of Relational Sociology? The Relational Current as a Space of Hospitality

Olli Pyyhtinen

(olli.pyyhtinen@tuni.fi)

Associate Professor of Sociology
Tampere University

Olli Pyyhtinen is Associate Professor at the New Social Research programme at Tampere University, Finland. His research intersects social theory, philosophy, science and technology studies, economic sociology, and the study of art, and he is the author of for example *The Simmelian Legacy* (2018), *More-than-Human Sociology* (2015), *The Gift and its Paradoxes* (2014), and *Simmel and the Social* (2010), and co-author of *Disruptive Tourism and its Untidy Guests* (2014).

New Social Research programme
University of Tampere
FI-33014 Finland



UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Special Section: “Special Issue guest-edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of François Dépelteau”

The Field of Relational Sociology¹

Jan Fuhse

Humboldt University of Berlin

Date of submission: February 2020

Accepted in: October 2020

Published in: December 2020

Recommended citation:

FUHSE, Jan (2020). “The Field of Relational Sociology”. In: SELG, Peeter. “Special Issue guest-edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of François Dépelteau”. [online article]. *Digithum*, no. 26, pp. 1-10. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and Universidad de Antioquia. [Accessed: dd/mm/yy]. <http://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.374145>



Los textos publicados en esta revista están sujetos –si no se indica lo contrario– a una licencia de Reconocimiento 4.0 Internacional de Creative Commons. La licencia completa se puede consultar en <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.es>

Abstract

I offer a qualitative sketch and a brief empirical analysis of relational sociology as a scientific field. The field consists of scholarly communication that adheres to the label “relational sociology”, articulating and elaborating the idea that the social world is structured in relations. Within this general orientation, very different versions of relational sociology exist. These rest on diverging conceptions of the key term “social relations” and on different epistemological approaches (pragmatism, critical realism, constructive empiricism). These patterns are reconstructed by way of correspondence analyses of co-citation patterns of authors in the chapters of *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Contemporary self-proclaimed relational sociologists (Crossley, Dépelteau, Donati, Emirbayer) here co-feature with sociological classics rebranded under the label as key references in the field. The major division reflects a separation between authors working on the theoretical reflection of network research, on the one hand, and those focusing on the theoretical formulation of a social world made of relations, on the other hand. This second tendency then bifurcates into pragmatism-inspired authors and critical realists.

Keywords

author, citation, relational sociology, scientific field

1. You can read the article “Relational Sociology of the Scientific Field: Communication, Identities, and Field Relations”, by Jan Fuhse included in this Special Section here: <http://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.374144>

El campo de la sociología relacional

Resumen

Ofrezco un esbozo cualitativo y un análisis empírico conciso de la sociología relacional como campo científico. El campo consiste en la comunicación académica que obedece a la etiqueta «sociología relacional», que articula y elabora la idea de que el mundo social se estructura en relaciones. Dentro de esta orientación general existen versiones muy diferentes de la sociología relacional, que se basan en concepciones divergentes del término clave, «relaciones sociales», y en enfoques epistemológicos diferentes (pragmatismo, realismo crítico, empirismo constructivo). Estas características se reconstruyen por medio de análisis de correspondencia de características de citas de autores en los capítulos de *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Los autoproclamados sociólogos relacionales y contemporáneos (Crossley, Dépelteau, Donati, Emirbayer) son coprotagonistas aquí junto con sociólogos clásicos como referentes importantes en el campo. La división principal refleja una separación entre los autores que, por una banda, trabajan en la reflexión teórica de investigación en red, y en aquellos que, por la otra, se centran en la formulación teórica de un mundo social hecho de relaciones. Esta segunda tendencia también se divide después en autores inspirados en el pragmatismo y en los realistas críticos

Palabras clave

autor, cita, sociología relacional, campo científico

1. Introduction²

The concept of scientific fields denotes arenas of mutual orientation in scientific or academic discourse (Bourdieu 1975; 1997). These consist of communicative events – publications, but also presentations and informal talk – that primarily relate to each other, picking up on ideas and arguments from previous communication in the respective fields, and referring to key publications and authors. Every scientific field thus organises around a set of ideas and authors with a distinct “style of thought” (Fleck [1935] 1979). This makes for the boundary of meaning separating the field from the outside world, in particular from other scientific fields (Abbott 1995).

Of course, this separation is always gradual, with publications in one field frequently building on ideas and authors from neighbouring fields. Also, a field features internal competition and diversity within the general orientation separating it from its environment. Authors strive to innovate on the prevalent ideas and present their work as superior to that of others in the field. While a scientific field – say: sociology – reproduces its general orientations in publications and presentations, the drives towards distinction and innovation make for its heterogeneity and dynamism.

I take fields to consist of specific communication, and authors only feature as projection points in the field – as cornerstones to which ideas are attributed and around which discourse is organised (Foucault [1969] 1998). While we have some ideas about authors subjectively looking for recognition and distinction, the analysis

of communication in the field focuses on what ideas (and what other authors) authors are associated with.

I lay out this perspective in a companion piece (Fuhse 2020). This short paper applies the framework to the field of relational sociology (RS). In what sense, and to what extent, does RS have a boundary of meaning and constitutes a subfield within the field of sociology, itself a subfield of the scientific field? Which are the key authors of RS, and how are they related to each other in field-internal communication? This should indirectly also tell us something about different approaches and directions within the field, as associated with different reference authors.

I first offer a short qualitative account of the field of relational sociology (section 2). My first-hand knowledge as participant in the field here undoubtedly makes for a biased presentation. In section 3, I complement this sketch with a small quantitative analysis of citation patterns in RS. A correspondence analysis of the authors referred to in the chapters of *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology* (Dépelteau 2018a) gives us information about the key authors in the field, but also about different approaches associated with them.

2. Relational sociology

Mustafa Emirbayer's “Manifesto for a Relational Sociology” (1997) was a rallying cry that powerfully reframed theoretical debate.

2. I would like to thank the autonomous reviewer for helpful suggestions, Jakob Lutz for the tedious work of cataloguing the references in the Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology, and Oscar Stuhler for critical feedback and for helping with my amateur coding in R.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

The Field of Relational Sociology

Diverse approaches from Marx to Bourdieu were christened as “relational sociology” and declared not only different, but superior to individualist and holist approaches. Like the “Communist Manifesto”, this rallying cry resonated with work done previously or around the same time, especially with a new approach to social networks around Harrison White (of which Emirbayer was a part; Pachucki / Breiger 2010; Mische 2011; Erikson 2013; Fuhse 2015). Broadly speaking, this approach turns away from a purely structural understanding of networks. With a strong infusion of pragmatism, interactionism, and Bourdieu’s theory of practices, it conceptualises networks as interwoven with meaning and culture (stories, identities, categories, styles, language etc.). Prominent proponents of the approach include White, Emirbayer, Peter Bearman, Ronald Breiger, Paul Di-Maggio, Roger Gould, John Levi Martin, Ann Mische, John Mohr, Margaret Somers, and Charles Tilly.

While this approach has continued to spur important and innovative work, much of it does not explicitly identify as “relational sociology”. Instead, the current wave of self-proclaimed RS really started around 2010, with prominent publications by British former movement researcher Nick Crossley (2011) and by Italian theorist Pierpaolo Donati (2011; following up on his *Introduzione alla sociologia relazionale* from 1983). Both became part of an international movement of self-declared “relational sociologists”. Canadian sociologist François Dépelteau played an important role in assembling this motley crew of theorists with an emphasis on “relations” in the social world. He edited two volumes with Christopher Powell on “conceptualizing” and “applying relational sociology” (Dépelteau / Powell 2013; Powell / Dépelteau 2013), as well as an impressive handbook (Dépelteau 2018a). Also, he organised an internet discussion group, a research cluster, and a number of workshops and sessions at international conferences.

While this movement shows internal links, it subsumes wildly differing approaches: Donati advocates a “critical realist relational sociology” with social relations like friendship, the family, social movements and other collectives, as well as individual persons as basic entities (2015). Crossley combines inter-actionism and French pragmatism (Merleau-Ponty) to account for collective mobilisation and for the creation of culture and cultural creativity out of networks (2011; 2015a; 2015b). Dépelteau’s “deep relational sociology” rejects all conceptual dualisms and ideas of structure over and above “transaction processes” (2008; 2015). This lies closer to Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory than to Donati’s critical realism, Crossley’s interactionist network theory, or the network studies around White. Other contributions discuss relational aspects of Georg Simmel, Gabriel Tarde, George Herbert Mead, Norbert Elias, Gilles Deleuze, Niklas Luhmann, Pierre Bourdieu, Bruno Latour, Michael Mann, and postcolonialism (Dépelteau 2018a). The different positions within relational sociology have been mapped by Dépelteau (2018b), Riccardo Prandini (2015), and myself (Fuhse 2015: 36f).

This “relational sociology” is not overly homogeneous with regard to assumptions and arguments. Its symbolic coherence and boundary rest on dedication to theory and to the notions of “social relations” or “relational sociology”. Contention and competition in the field centre around the meaning of these notions. According to Emirbayer (2013), “relational sociology” and “relational thinking” were “fighting words” of scholars like White, Tilly, and Bourdieu. They were probably less designating a common endeavour, than aimed *against* sociological approaches centred on “substances” like the rational individual or a functionally integrated society. The label works as part of the boundary marking relational sociology in opposition to other approaches, rather than subsuming a coherent whole.

Relational sociology thus only partly constitutes a common approach and perspective. Rather, it defines itself negatively *against* other approaches, without a positive definition and orientation. This conforms to the definition of a field given above: authors orient towards each other in a common discourse and around the coveted label “relational sociology”. The unity of the field is achieved and visible in mutual references, in discussions (as in the e-mail group organised by Dépelteau), in common publications that subsume divergent perspectives under the same unifying label, and at symposiums and workshops. Relational sociology is less united in the commonality of ideas than in discursive practices. Its authors take part in the same game, pay attention to each other’s work and distance themselves from each other as often as they claim allegiance to a common approach. Therefore, it makes sense to examine relational sociology as a field of contention and competition, rather than a harmonious collective.

Generally, authors cite mostly those works and authors they by and large agree with – to invoke support by trusted authors for their own arguments, and to place themselves in an “imagined community” of academics holding similar views. A relational sociologist is unlikely to cite natural scientists, but she will also tend to cite other relational sociologists more often than rational choice theorists or quantitative demographers. We might send a token reference to Parsons or to Coleman to distance ourselves from them. But we need a lot more references to our intellectual companions to elaborate our position. Of course, this includes authors who will not or cannot reciprocate our citations, such as the classics of relational sociology: Georg Simmel, John Dewey, Norbert Elias, and Pierre Bourdieu. As authors to which we attribute ideas, and as projection points, they can still feature in the field of relational sociology long after their biological death.

3. Relating relational sociologists

A brief investigation of citation patterns will help us get a rough sense of the field of relational sociology in its current state. I focus on the authors cited most often in the *Palgrave Handbook*

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

The Field of Relational Sociology

of *Relational Sociology* (Dépelteau 2018a). This admittedly convenient choice should give us a sense of which authors currently wield the most authority in relational sociology. But the citation patterns, rather than mere numbers, also show which authors tend to be cited together, thus indicating different approaches and currents in the field. The *Handbook* has 686 pages with 33 chapters and 2195 references to 1008 authors, including co-authors.

Following the examples of Pierre Bourdieu ([1979] 1984: 126ff) and Ronald Breiger (2000), I resort to correspondence analysis of binary data to study the constellation of the field. This requires dichotomising the data: cell entries in the table now represent whether a particular author is cited (1) in one of the 33 chapters, or not (0). Only authors who are cited by more than one chapter give us information about the pattern in the field. To simplify matters, I only consider authors cited in at least six different chapters and at least once as first author.³ This includes classics and eminent contemporary sociologists rebranded (and enlisted) as relational sociologists (Archer, Bourdieu, Dewey, Elias, Latour, Simmel, Tilly, White), as well as authors active in the current debate on relational sociology (Crossley, Dépelteau, Donati, Emirbayer, Mische, Powell, and myself). The data and the R code for the analyses are available by request.

In this analysis, the chapters serve as a proxy for ideas. This assumes that the different chapters of the *Handbook* cover different aspects of the ideational realm of relational sociology. I do not investigate this level of ideas further. But the analysis reveals how different authors are associated (seen as relevant sources) with various facets of relational sociology. It should be noted, though, that some of the reference authors wrote chapters on their own positions in the *Handbook*, thus featuring both as authors of chapters and as projection points of references here. Hence, the chapters by Crossley (chapters #24 and #30), Dépelteau (#1 and #25), Donati (#22), and myself (#23) skew the analyses.

The correspondence analysis reconstructs a simple version of the space of authors and ideas in relational sociology (the first two dimensions, covering about 30 percent of the overall co-variation), based on the contingency table of *Handbook* chapters and cited authors (Figure 1).⁴ The vicinity of two authors in this socio-symbolic constellation signals that they feature in similar chapters, and that they are referred to in connection with similar topics and arguments. The relatively

high cut-off of six chapters was necessary to avoid crowding the figure with too many names. This cut-off is somewhat arbitrary, but ensures that the most relevant authors are included in the analysis. Lower cut-offs (e.g. a minimum of four chapters for cited authors) lead to similar patterns, but render the arrangement less clear.

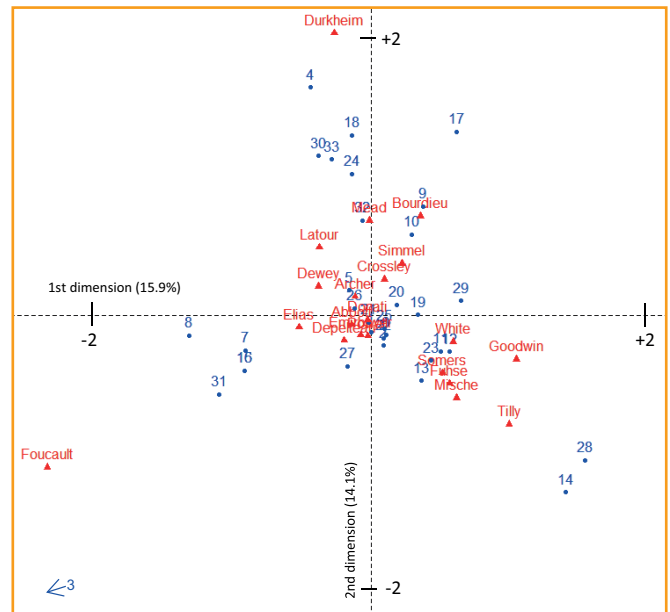


Figure 1: Correspondence analysis of chapters and cited authors in the *Handbook*. Correspondence analysis of citations of authors (red pyramids, with labels) in at least six chapters (blue balls, numbered) in *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*, first two dimensions. The chapters of the *Handbook* are listed (with the numbers in the diagrams) in the appendix.

Visual inspection reveals Émile Durkheim (on the top left of the diagram, cited in seven chapters) and Michel Foucault (bottom left, also 7) as outliers in the citation patterns. Both are classics in sociological theory, but only cited in a few very specific chapters as relevant for relational sociology. Both adopt different versions of holism contrasting with the relational perspective: Durkheim views society as an integrated entity characterised by a division of labour and by mechanical or organic solidarity. And he advocates for studying social facts on the basis of statistics of individual cases, rather than of patterns of interaction. Foucault analyses the organisation of discourses by inherent rules and, later, the disciplining of individuals by social structures. Though Foucault's concept of power shows some

- This conveniently sets the cut-off for inclusion to the number of references to myself in the *Handbook*. Co-authors omitted from the analysis include Loïc Wacquant, only cited as Bourdieu's co-author (eight times), and James Dewey's co-author Arthur Bentley (nine times). Jeff Goodwin is mostly cited as Emirbayer's co-author, but has one reference to a first-authored publication. Ann Mische features as co-author of Emirbayer, but also of a number of sole-authored and first-authored references (with Harrison White as co-author). Co-authorship would add another layer to the analysis, but is not included here for the sake of simplicity.
- Only the first two dimensions can easily be presented in publications. Unfortunately, this does not constitute a natural stopping point in this analysis: dimensions 3 and 4 cover a further 11.9% and 10.8% of the co-variation.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

The Field of Relational Sociology

Overall, the authors at the top left share a concern for developing their very own theoretical perspectives, with social relations (Archer, Donati) and processes in them (Dépelteau, Latour) as key features. We could argue similarly for Crossley, Emirbayer, and Powell (and for Abbott), but here a second ingredient or impetus becomes important: the extensive reference and re-working of arguments from classical authors like Norbert Elias (14), John Dewey (11), and George Herbert Mead (6). All of them are to be found at the bottom left. Dewey and Mead mark the pragmatist and interactionist roots of relational sociological thinking by Crossley, Dépelteau, Emirbayer, and Powell (to varying extents), but they are quite far from the network thinking around White. I see Elias's theory of configurations closer to networks, but he places close to the other two on the far left here, as a third classical key author drawn on here. All of them are more important for the core from Abbott to Dépelteau, but less important for the critical realists in the top left, or for the "New York school" on the right of the diagram.

The second dimension (covering 14 percent), then, is not as straightforwardly interpretable as the first. On the left, it pits authors closer to pragmatism and symbolic interactionism (bottom) against critical realists (top), with the odd positioning of Latour. On the right, White, Mische, Goodwin (mostly with the Emirbayer / Goodwin 1994 article), and myself are more closely connected to network research than Bourdieu, Somers, and Tilly. Simmel and Bourdieu are the only "classics" featuring on this side, with Simmel closer to networks. After the elimination of Durkheim and Foucault, Bourdieu constitutes the new outlier in this analysis. But note the big difference in the positions of Bourdieu and Simmel in the correspondence analyses with or without Durkheim and Foucault. Both Bourdieu and Simmel were relatively central in the original analysis, moving to the periphery when omitting Durkheim and Foucault.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Overall, this piece offers some support for considering relational sociology a scientific field (Bourdieu 1975; Fuhse 2020). Starting with the notion of "relational sociology", communication builds on the ideas, identities, and relations between them, from previous publications in the field. The label and the contested idea of social relations make for a certain symbolic integration. Given the prominence of the label, of some ideas associated with it, and of reference authors like Crossley, Dépelteau, Donati, Elias, and Emirbayer we may call them "institutions" governing the communication in the field. However, fields are characterised by competition and contention, not consensus. In the case of RS, competing versions are on offer. As in Bourdieu's analyses, these constitute different ways of seeing the world,

including the field itself. Relational sociology looks different when adopting pragmatism, critical realism, or constructivism. These different approaches are not only connected to diverging ideas, but also to different reference authors.

The correspondence analyses offered in section 3 makes use of this duality of authors and ideas to reconstruct a rough and provisional sketch of the field. The co-citation patterns in *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology* (Dépelteau 2018a) reveal which authors are referred to in connection with the same ideas (as treated in the Handbook chapters). This analysis is admittedly limited, working with binary data, with an arbitrary cut-off point, and only considering the first two dimensions covering about 30 percent of the covariance. Also, the convenient choice of the *Palgrave Handbook* means that idiosyncratic choices and contingencies on the part of its editor and authors (and non-authors) play a role in this analysis.

Nevertheless, we can discern some important features of the field of RS:

1. Durkheim and Foucault do not really form part of the field, judging by their peripheral positions. Of course, relational sociology can still draw on their ideas and incorporate them into the canon. But up to now, they fall out-side of the core of the approach.
2. The field shows a cleavage between the "New York School" of relational analysis (Mische 2011) with its focus on methodological advances and theoretical reflection of network research on the one hand, and the reconstruction and development of a theoretical approach of RS out of engagement with classical authors (Dewey, Mead, Elias), on the other hand.
3. A lesser division pits the authors associated with pragmatism against those adhering to critical realism.

However, given the reduction of co-citation patterns to two dimensions, and the various meanings that citations can have, a few odd placements should not surprise us. In particular, Latour and Bourdieu have somewhat peculiar positions in space. However, given their unique versions of relational thinking, it is not quite clear where they *should* be placed.

Importantly, the analysis does not examine *authors* as producing or driving the field, but as projection points with which particular ideas and relations to other authors are associated *in discourse*. Ideally, we would complement this analysis with a more thorough examination of the ideas associated with authors, and of other kinds of relationships (co-authorships, personal relationships). The new methods of automated text analysis and computational social science give us tools to examine the socio-cultural formations of scientific fields with an interplay of actors and ideas. This lies beyond the confines of the rather provisional analysis in this chapter, but is a topic for future research.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

The Field of Relational Sociology

Appendix:

List of chapters in *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology (Dépelteau 2018a)*:

Number	Author	Title
1	François Dépelteau	Relational Thinking in Sociology: Relevance, Concurrence and Dissonance
2	Frédéric Vandenberghe	The Relation as Magical Operator: Overcoming the Divide Between Relational and Processual Sociology
3	Sergio Tonkonoff	Sociology of Infinitesimal Difference. Gabriel Tarde's Heritage
4	David Toews	Pluralism and Relationalism in Social Theory: Lessons from the Tarde–Durkheim Debate
5	Jean-François Côté	G.H. Mead and Relational Sociology: The Case of Concepts
6	Osmo Kivinen / Tero Piironen	Pragmatist Methodological Relationalism in Sociological Understanding of Evolving Human Culture
7	Peter Lenco	Deleuze and Relational Sociology
8	Olli Pyyhtinen	Triangular Relations
9	Christian Papilloud	Bruno Latour and Relational Sociology
10	Christian Papilloud	Georg Simmel and Relational Sociology
11	Natàlia Cantó-Milà	Georg Simmel's Concept of Forms of Association as an Analytical Tool for Relational Sociology
12	Jorge Fontdevila	Switchings Among Netdoms: The Relational Sociology of Harrison C. White
13	Emily Erikson	Relationalism and Social Networks
14	Jean-Sébastien Guy	Is Niklas Luhmann a Relational Sociologist?
15	Chares Demetriou	Charles Tilly and Relational Sociology
16	Tönis Saarts / Peeter Selg	Mann and Relational Sociology
17	Christian Papilloud / Eva-Maria Schultze	Pierre Bourdieu and Relational Sociology
18	Julian Go	Relational Sociology and Postcolonial Theory: Sketches of a "Postcolonial Relationalism"
19	Andrea Doucet	Shorelines, Seashells, and Seeds: Feminist Epistemologies, Ecological Thinking, and Relational Ontologies
20	Lily Liang / Sida Liu	Beyond the Manifesto: Mustafa Emirbayer and Relational Sociology
21	Douglas Porpora	Critical Realism as Relational Sociology
22	Pierpaolo Donati	An Original Relational Sociology Grounded in Critical Realism
23	Jan Fuhse	Deconstructing and Reconstructing Social Networks
24	Nick Crossley	Networks, Interactions and Relations
25	François Dépelteau	From the Concept of 'Trans-Action' to a Process-Relational Sociology
26	Ian Burkitt	Relational Agency
27	Peeter Selg	Power and Relational Sociology
28	Chares Demetriou / Eitan Alimi	Relational Radicalization
29	Christian Morgner	The Relational Meaning-Making of Riots: Narrative Logic and Network Performance of the London "Riots"
30	Nick Crossley	Music Sociology in Relational Perspective
31	Sarah Hillcoat-Nallétamby	Relational Sociology: Contributions to Understanding Residential Relocation Decisions in Later Life
32	Scott Eacott	Relations, Organising, Leadership and Education
33	Christian Papilloud	Marcel Mauss, the Gift and Relational Sociology

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

The Field of Relational Sociology

References

- ABBOTT, Andrew. Things of Boundaries. In: *Social Research*. 1995. Vol. 62, No. 4, pages 857-882. ISSN 0037-783X.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. The Specificity of the Scientific Field and the Social Conditions of the Progress of Reason. In: *Social Science Information*. 1975. Vol. 14, Issue 6, pages 19-47. ISSN 0539-0184. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F053901847501400602>
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Distinction*. Cambridge / Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, [1979] 1984. ISBN-10: 0674212770 ISBN-13: 978-0674212770.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Les usages sociaux de la science; Pour une sociologie clinique du champ scientifique*. Paris: Éditions Quæ, 1997. ISBN-10: 2738007937 ISBN-13: 978-2738007933.
- BREIGER, Ronald. A Tool Kit for Practice Theory. In: *Poetics*. 2000. Vol. 27, Issues 2-3, pages 91-115. ISSN 0304-422X. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-422X\(99\)00026-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-422X(99)00026-1)
- CRANE, Diane. *Invisible Colleges*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972. ISBN-10: 0226118576 ISBN-13: 978-0226118574.
- CROSSLEY, Nick. *Towards Relational Sociology*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2011. ISBN-10: 0415534275 ISBN-13: 978-0415534277.
- CROSSLEY, Nick. Relational Sociology and Culture: A Preliminary Framework. In: *International Review of Sociology*. 2015a. Vol. 25, Issue 1, pages 65-85. ISSN 0390-6701. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2014.997965>
- CROSSLEY, Nick. *Networks of Sound, Style and Subversion; The Punk and Post-Punk Worlds of Manchester, London, Liverpool and Sheffield, 1975-80*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015b. ISBN-10: 0719088658 ISBN-13: 978-0719088650.
- DÉPELTEAU, François. Relational Thinking: A Critique of Co-Deterministic Theories of Structure and Agency. In: *Sociological Theory*. 2008. Vol. 26, Issue 1, pages 51-73. ISSN 0735-2751. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_1
- DÉPELTEAU, François. Relational Sociology, Pragmatism, Transactions and Social Fields. In: *International Review of Sociology*. 2015. Vol. 25, Issue 1, pages 45-64. ISSN 0390-6701. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2014.997966>
- DÉPELTEAU, François (ed.) *Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018a. ISBN-10: 3319881507 ISBN-13: 978-3319881508.
- DÉPELTEAU, François. Relational Thinking in Sociology: Relevance, Concurrence and Dissonance. In: DÉPELTEAU, François. *Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018a. Pages 3-33. ISBN-10: 3319881507 ISBN-13: 978-3319881508. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_1
- DÉPELTEAU, François and POWELL, Christopher (eds.). *Applying Relational Sociology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. ISBN-10: 113737991X ISBN-13: 978-1137379917.
- DONATI, Pierpaolo. *Introduzione alla sociologia relazionale*. Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1983. ISBN-10: 8820428172 ISBN-13: 978-8820428174.
- DONATI, Pierpaolo. *Relational Sociology; A New Paradigm for the Social Sciences*, New York: Routledge, 2011. ISBN-10: 0415524067 ISBN-13: 978-0415524063.
- DONATI, Pierpaolo. Manifesto for a critical realist relational sociology. In: *International Review of Sociology*. 2015. Vol. 25, Issue 1, pages 86-109. ISSN 0390-6701. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2014.997967>
- DONATI, Pierpaolo and ARCHER, Margaret. *The Relational Subject*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. ISBN-10: 1107106117 ISBN-13: 978-1107106116.
- EMIRBAYER, Mustafa. Manifesto for a Relational Sociology. In: *American Journal of Sociology*. 1997. Vol. 103, No. 2, pages 281-317. ISSN 0002-9602. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/231209>
- EMIRBAYER, Mustafa. Relational Sociology as Fighting Words. In: POWELL, Christopher and DÉPELTEAU, François. *Conceptualizing Relational Sociology*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Pages 209-211. ISBN-10: 1137379901 ISBN-13: 978-1137379900. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137342652_12
- EMIRBAYER, Mustafa and GOODWIN, Jeff. Network Analysis, Culture, and the Problem of Agency. In: *American Journal of Sociology*. 1994. Vol. 99, No. 6, pages 1411-1154. ISSN 0002-9602. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/230450>
- ERIKSON, Emily. Formalist and Relationalist Theory in Social Network Analysis. In: *Sociological Theory*. 2013. Vol. 31, Issue 3, pages 219-242. ISSN 0735-2751. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F07352751113501998>
- FLECK, Ludwik. *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, [1935] 1979. ISBN-10: 0226253252 ISBN-13: 978-0226253251.
- FOUCAULT, Michel. What Is an Author? In: FOUCAULT, Michel. *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. New York: The New Press, [1969] 1998. Pages 205-222. ISBN-10: 1565845587 ISBN-13: 978-1565845589.
- FUHSE, Jan. Theorizing Social Networks: Relational Sociology of and around Harrison White. In: *International Review of Sociology*. 2015. Vol. 25, Issue 1, pages 15-44. ISSN 0390-6701. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2014.997968>
- FUHSE, Jan. "Relational Sociology of the Scientific Field: Communication, Identities, and Field Relations". In: *Digithum*. 2020. No. 26. ISSN 1575-2275. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.3199>
- MISCHE, Ann. Relational Sociology, Culture, and Agency. In: SCOTT, John and CARRINGTON, Peter (eds.). *Sage Handbook of Social Network Analysis*. London: Sage, 2011. Pages 80-97. ISBN-10: 1847873952 ISBN-13: 978-1847873958. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446294413.n7>

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

The Field of Relational Sociology

- PACHUKI, Mark and BREIGER, Ronald. Cultural Holes: Beyond Relationality in Social Networks and Culture. In: *Annual Review of Sociology*. 2010. Vol. 36, pages 205-24. ISSN 1545-2115. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1146/annurev.soc.012809.102615>
- PRANDINI, Riccardo. Relational Sociology: A Well-Defined Sociological Paradigm or a Challenging 'Relational Turn' in Sociology? In: *International Review of Sociology*. 2015. Vol. 25, Issue 1, pages 1-14. ISSN 0390-6701. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2014.997969>
- POWELL, Christopher and DÉPELTEAU, François (eds.). *Conceptualizing Relational Sociology*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. ISBN-10: 1137379901 ISBN-13: 978-1137379900.
- SELG, Peeter. Power and Relational Sociology. In: DÉPELTEAU, François. *Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Pages 539-557. ISBN-10: 3319881507 ISBN-13: 978-3319881508.
- TONKONOFF, Sergio. Sociology of Infinitesimal Difference. Gabriel Tarde's Heritage. In: DÉPELTEAU, François. *Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Pages 63-83. ISBN-10: 3319881507 ISBN-13: 978-3319881508. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_3

Jan Fuhse

(jan@fuhse.net)

Humboldt University of Berlin

Jan A. Fuhse is an interim professor of sociology at the University of Bremen, Germany. After his PhD in sociology from Universität Stuttgart (Germany) in 2007 he completed a post-doc (funded by the Alexander von Humboldt foundation) at Columbia University 2007-2008. There he worked with Harrison White and Charles Tilly on the theory of social networks. From 2009 to 2013 he was an assistant professor of political sociology at the University of Bielefeld, completing his habilitation in 2011. From 2013 to 2018, Fuhse worked as a Heisenberg Fellow (funded by the German Research Association) at Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany. His research focuses on communication and meaning in social networks, on social networks in inequality and interethnic relations, on constellations in political discourse, and on the theory of computational social science. Recent publications: "Theorizing Social Networks: Relational Sociology of and around Harrison White" (International Review of Sociology, 2015), "Networks from Communication" (European Journal of Social Theory, 2015), "New Media and Socio-Cultural Formations" (Cybernetics & Human Knowing, 2018), "Relating Social and Symbolic Relations in Quantitative Text Analysis. A Study of Parliamentary Discourse in the Weimar Republic" (Poetics, 2020, with Oscar Stuhler, Jan Riebling, and John Levi Martin), and "Theories of Social Networks" in: Ryan Light / James Moody (eds.): Oxford Handbook of Social Networks (2020, OUP).

UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Special Section: “Special Issue guest-edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of François Dépelteau”

Relational Sociology of the Scientific Field: Communication, Identities, and Field Relations¹

Jan Fuhse

Humboldt University of Berlin

Date of submission: February 2020

Accepted in: October 2020

Published in: December 2020

Recommended citation:

FUHSE, Jan (2020). “Relational Sociology of the Scientific Field: Communication, Identities, and Field Relations”. In: SELG, Peeter. “Special Issue guest-edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of François Dépelteau”. [online article]. *Digithum*, no. 26, pp. 1-14. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and Universidad de Antioquia. [Accessed: dd/mm/yy]. <http://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.374144>



Los textos publicados en esta revista están sujetos –si no se indica lo contrario– a una licencia de Reconocimiento 4.0 Internacional de Creative Commons. La licencia completa se puede consultar en <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.es>

Abstract

A relational sociological conceptualisation of social fields is developed and applied to the world of academia and science. Generally, social fields are arenas of communication governed by specific institutions and by the sense (illusio) of involvement in the same game. They consist of communicative events like publications in science, claims and demands in politics etc. Scientific fields are organised around representational claims about the phenomena under study. Such communicative events offer particular definitions of the situation that subsequent communication builds on and / or renegotiates. In this process, ideas develop that structure the field, and identities of actors associated with these ideas. In this perspective, actors do not drive the processes of the field, but they serve as projection points that organise discourse in the field. Actors are connected to ideas, and thus indirectly to each other, in position-takings. Field relations then involve constellations of actors and ideas. Unlike social relationships like friendship or patronage, field relations can be one-sided, and they affect follow-up communication in the larger field rather than only between two involved actors. In contrast to previous theories of social fields, these are seen as socio-cultural constellations developing in the course of communication, rather than the competition of actors for resources, or constellations of subjective orientations.

Keywords

academic field, authors, field theory, relational sociology, social relations, scientific field

1. You can read the article “The Field of Relational Sociology”, by Jan Fuhse included in this Special Section here: <http://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.374145>

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relational Sociology of the Scientific Field: Communication, Identities, and Field Relations

Sociología relacional del campo científico: comunicación, identidades y relaciones de campo

Resumen

Se forma una conceptualización sociológica relacional de los campos sociales y se aplica al mundo académico y científico. Generalmente, los campos sociales son espacios de comunicación controlados por determinadas instituciones y por la sensación (*illusio*) de participar en el mismo grupo. Consisten en actividades comunicativas como publicaciones en ciencia, afirmaciones y peticiones en política, etc. Los campos científicos se estructuran en torno a afirmaciones representativas de los fenómenos objeto de estudio. Tales actividades comunicativas ofrecen definiciones determinadas de la situación en la que se basa o se renegocia la comunicación posterior. En este proceso, se desarrollan ideas que estructuran el campo y las identidades de los actores asociados a estas ideas. En este sentido, los actores no dirigen los procesos en el campo, sino que son puntos de proyección que estructuran el discurso en el campo. Los actores están conectados a las ideas y, por ende, indirectamente entre ellos, en la toma de posiciones. Entonces, las relaciones de campo involucran constelaciones de actores e ideas. A diferencia de las relaciones sociales como la amistad o el apoyo, las relaciones de campo pueden ser unilaterales, y afectan a la continuación de la comunicación en un campo mucho más amplio, y no solo a los dos actores implicados. A diferencia de las teorías anteriores de los campos sociales, estas se consideran como constelaciones socioculturales que se desarrollan en el curso de la comunicación, y no como la competición de los actores por los recursos o las constelaciones de orientaciones subjetivas.

Palabras clave

Campo académico, autores, teoría de campo, sociología relacional, relaciones sociales, campo científico

Personal Remarks²

In recent years, François Dépelteau was the chief organiser of discussions about relational sociology (RS). He co-edited two volumes on RS with Chris Powell from 2013 and the impressive *Palgrave Handbook* from 2018, while also organising workshops, sessions, online discussions, the research cluster on relational sociology in the Canadian Sociological Association, the book series *Palgrave Studies in Relational Sociology*, and so on. It is to be hoped that the discussions he sparked, and the interest he rallied around RS will continue, after his untimely passing in 2018.

My own version of RS is, like François's, quite idiosyncratic and somewhat iconoclastic. We have some overlap in our emphasis on processes in the social world, and in both of us dismissing human actors from their privileged positions as starting points and unshakable cornerstones of sociological thinking. While human actors are undoubtedly important, we should not feel too special about ourselves. From this perspective, the transactions or communication between us make(s) for the impressive achievements and colossal mistakes of human history. States, universities, journals, and scientific discourse do not consist of human beings but of what happens between us. If anything,

François was more radical than myself. He was ready to include non-human entities in transactions (including transactions between non-human entities), and determined to dismiss any idea of lasting structures in the social world. He would argue that states, universities, journals, and scientific discourse are really just processes of transaction. In contrast, I see them as governed by expectations that develop in the process and that guide the process in the future.

François and I debated our theoretical differences fervently and in semi-public in the e-mail group of the *research cluster on relational sociology* in the *Canadian Sociological Association* in the spring of 2015.³ François organised the research cluster as well as the e-mail group and the discussion. As much as we disagreed on pretty much everything (with frequent provocative comments on my side), François always remained amicable in these discussions and in our extensive non-public e-mail exchanges. More than once he called me a "virtual friend", and I happily agree. François was a partner in intellectual discourse because of his inclusive approach to relational sociology, more than a rival, with our very different understandings of RS. He was intellectually stimulating and challenging, and that is probably the best academic discourse has on offer. But above all, he was enthusiastic about our joint (and very different) project(s) of RS, determinedly working on its

2. I would like to thank Christian Papilloud, Peeter Selg, Oscar Stuhler, and the anonymous re-viewers for helpful criticisms and suggestions on this article.

3. Thanks to Daniel Silver, much of this discussion got published subsequently in the electronic newsletter of the *Research Committee on Sociological Theory* in the *International Sociological Association* (Dépelteau et al. 2015).

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relational Sociology of the Scientific Field: Communication, Identities, and Field Relations

discussion, promotion, and dissemination. His passing is a severe loss for all of us, and I much regret never meeting him in person – so I have to remember him as “virtual friend”.

1. Introduction

Recent years have brought a surge of field theory in sociology (e.g. Martin 2003; 2011; Powell et al. 2005; Beckert 2010; Fligstein / McAdam 2012; Green 2014; Dépelteau 2015; Emirbayer / Desmond 2015). Diverse social phenomena are modelled as fields of actors competing with each other. This line of work builds on German Gestalt psychology, on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, and on neo-institutionalism. It stresses the interrelation between actors on the one hand, and the emergence of relatively durable structures and institutionalised cultural forms on the other hand. This diverges from the field theoretical tradition in physics, where fields are used to model the effects of forces like gravitation or magnetism on objects in the field mathematically (Hesse [1961] 2005). In the social world, fields are not so much abstract constructions governing the behaviour of things, as very much concrete socio-cultural formations: the field itself has to exist as a symbolic construction and to guide actors and events in its realm.

What exactly social fields consist of, and how they structure the processes in them, remains contested. Much field theory focuses on individual actors with their subjective orientations and with “objective positions” in the field. As in Bourdieu’s theory of practices, the field is conceptualised as existing in the minds of the actors involved – in the belief in the system (*illusio*), in position-dependent scripts of action (*habitus*), in subjective orientations to the other positions in the field, or even in sexual desire (Bourdieu 1980; Martin 2011; Green 2014). Actors engage in the field based on these subjective dispositions, and they use their individual skills (Fligstein 2001) to acquire more or less favourable positions in the field. These are dubbed variously as endowed with field-specific capital or with power (Bourdieu / Wacquant 1992: 71ff; Fligstein / McAdam 2012: 11; Emirbayer / Desmond 2015: 87f, 127f). From this angle, a social field looks like a vertically structured conglomerate of individuals engaging in similar activities and competing with each other for ranks in a status ladder.

In this paper, I argue for a vision of social fields less centred on individuals:

First, I conceptualise the basic processes in the field as *communication* between actors, rather than as their unitary actions or practices. The focus lies on the “communicative construction of the field”, as an integrated arena organised around symbols and ideas circulating in communication. The processes making and shaping the field are communicative. The field is

“discursive” (Spillman 1995; Bail 2012: 857ff), and the actors acquire their identities and positions through the communication or “transactions” between them (Dépelteau 2015).

Secondly, apart from institutions shaping and integrating the field, the key structures in a field do not consist of vertical status hierarchies with positions determined by the endowment of actors with resources (of field-specific capitals). Rather, the field is structured by *social relations* between actors (Anheier et al. 1995; Powell et al. 2005; Beckert 2010). These certainly afford different opportunities to actors by their positions in the network of field relations, but they should not be reduced to a more-or-less, or better-or-worse. Rather, they involve the *identities* of actors in the field as constructed from the communicative events attributed to them. Political parties and politicians acquire their identities from the claims and demands voiced, artists from the works attributed to them, and scientists from ideas presented and published. These identities are then defined in relation to each other, as more or less competent, skilled, creative, or original, but also as pursuing particular political ideologies, artistic styles, and scientific approaches.

These two conceptual decisions give us an improved conceptual tool kit to observe the construction of fields and of relations in them in discourse (Foucault [1969] 1972; Fuhse 2015a) and to analyse fields with regard to network constellations of actors (DiMaggio 1986; Anheier et al. 1995; White et al. 2004; Powell et al. 2005; Bottero / Crossley 2011). Even a coherent and compelling theoretical system has to work in empirical research, to help bring about interesting and non-trivial empirical insights. To render the theoretical framework a little less abstract and aloof, I apply it to the *scientific field*.⁴ I suspect that many of the processes and structures at play similarly work in other fields, but do not discuss this here.

First, I consider the notion of social fields – not as the starting point, but as the final aim of this endeavour (section 2). Putting fields up front gives the journey ahead a clear finishing line to reach. Then I apply the concept to the scientific field (3). Communication is then introduced and discussed as the basic constituent element of field (4). In the process of communication, structures develop that guide future communication: ideas, institutions, and the identities of actors (5). These are linked by relations that position actors and ideas in a field to each other (6). The conclusion locates this notion of fields in the broader project of relational sociology (7).

2. Defining and demarcating fields

John Levi Martin notes that the field concept is used in various ways in the social sciences. Purely topologically as (1) an “analytic

4. Out of convenience, I subsume the two worlds of academia and science under the notion of the scientific field.

area ... in which we position persons or institutions", as (2) an "organization of forces", or (3) as a "field of contestation, a battlefield" (2003: 28).⁵ A field as a purely analytical area alone (1) is not very interesting. The actors in question ("persons or institutions") should not be a convenient sample of unrelated entities. Rather, a field becomes interesting if the behaviour of these actors is interrelated and oriented towards each other, in a "field of contestation" or "battlefield" (3). Now the notion of field only makes sense if the contestation of actors is governed by rules, by forces that organise the conflicts in the field (2). The notion of field becomes most fruitful for social inquiry where the three senses overlap.

The field concept in physics is an analytical construct to mathematically describe the uniformity of effects on objects in circumscribed space (Hesse [1961] 2005). The objects in a gravitational field do not really interact with each other, but they are subject to the same gravitational pull in one direction (magnetic fields are more complicated). Objects in a field behave similarly. This calls for the construction of forces (gravitation, magnetic attraction) that govern the field. Field and force define each other: The force is the mathematical construct to make sense of the behaviour of objects in the field, and the field is defined as the space where the force plays out.

If we transfer these ideas to the social sciences, a social field should be characterised by the *similarity of behaviour of actors*. We consider politics, the economy, science and academia, sports, the mass media, and the arts separate fields because people behave relatively similarly within one realm, but differently across realms. We would want to know where this similarity comes from, but the notion of fields in physics only requires its mathematical modelling. The social sciences are notoriously bad at precise mathematical modelling. For the time being, our main aim is to come up with verbal accounts of why particular behaviour occurs. What could make for the similarity and inter-relatedness of behaviour, thus defining the field?

In the social world, behaviour is frequently accounted for by cultural factors: different countries, different social groups, different companies, different neighbourhoods are all supposed to be characterised by distinct cultures, making for the recognisable patterns of behaviour in them (Geertz [1973] 1993). As a first aspect of *field culture*, Pierre Bourdieu suggests that actors in a field share "illusio", a general sense of being part of the game and of its rules (Bourdieu / Wacquant 1992: 115ff). Following neo-institutionalism, we might say that the field features institutions – cultural rules and models that guide actors in the field (Powell /

DiMaggio 1991). A social field would be defined and demarcated by the illusion of being part of and invested in a game, and by the reach of institutions characterising the field. These institutions then bound and constitute the field (Abbott 1995). The field ends where behaviour is no longer governed by them (and by the illusio). However, this remains quite abstract and needs to be elaborated regarding particular fields.

Importantly, illusio and institutions do not make for harmony in the field. They lead to a certain similarity of the behaviour in the fields, but the actors are united in divisions and struggle, as Bourdieu emphasises. The field is a battleground of actors competing with each other and relating to each other more in conflict than consensus. Nonetheless, the field needs a common orientation to aims that actors compete for, and to rules governing this competition.

Overall, then, I define a social field as a context of interrelated activities, characterised and recognisable by a similarity of behaviour in the field. These activities are governed by field-specific institutions: cultural rules making for the similarity of behaviour and for an understanding ("illusio") of taking part in the same game – even if the actors relate to each other in conflict and difference. These arguments will be qualified further in the following sections. Here we can already note: this concept of field applies to social phenomena at various levels (Emirbayer / Johnson 2008; Fligstein / McAdam 2012). Families, friendship groups, school classes, work groups, organisations, social movements all qualify. As do economic markets, political arenas, international politics, the arts, and science and academia.

3. The scientific field

Turning to science and academia, the general illusion of the field seems to be that of a *production of knowledge* (Bourdieu 1975; 1997; Luhmann 1990; Knorr Cetina 1999). Scientists are in the business of advancing truth claims about the world. Some sub-areas from computer science to psychotherapy are geared more at producing knowledge that can be put to use – to get machines running or to cure diseases or distress. But in general, truth claims are supposed to accurately *represent* a phenomenon under study (Hacking 1983; van Fraassen 2008).

Most social fields are characterised by different positions with divergent roles and activities for actors. The economic realm features sellers and buyers, producers and consumers. Politics has politicians and voters, with lobbies and interest groups intervening

5. François Dépelteau seems to mostly focus on a fourth, less demanding usage: as a field of study with the "transactions between the observer and the observed" (2015: 58). But he also refers to multiple social fields that individuals are embedded in over the life course: "their mother's womb", "games played with other kids", "conversations with co-workers", "fights in a battlefield", "work at the assembly line", "trafficking women in a transnational field", and "making love in the bedroom" (57). All of these Dépelteau views as "social spaces" with their borders inscribed in and governing transactions between human beings and non-human entities.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relational Sociology of the Scientific Field: Communication, Identities, and Field Relations

and journalists evaluating the performance of politicians. Art worlds are populated by artists, galleries, museums, collectors, and foundations that all play their part in the production, construction, and evaluation of art (Becker 1982). Typically, actors in one role perform one set of activities and compete with each other in these fields, rather than with other kinds of positions. Science is different in that all actors in the field are advancing knowledge claims and evaluating each other's claims. Scientists orient primarily towards each other, following the same routines and rules, taking each other's observations as starting points or as counter-positions, and competing with each other for the prevalent forms of recognition in the field: publications, citations, academic positions and honours, and third-party funding.

The theoretical language introduced in the next section relegates the individual actions and subjective orientations of scientists to secondary importance. The activities in a field are better modelled as communicative events that build on each other, meticulously distinguishing between the scientific and the non-scientific by way of institutionalised standards (Luhmann 1990). The competition between scientists builds on this meaningful separation of the scientific field from everything else (including its objects of study) in communication. The field, then, is first of all constructed in communication.

Scientific communication shows a clear compartmentalisation into various fields and subfields, sometimes even into national or language-based discourses and different theoretical and methodological approaches within one discipline. Physicists do not compete for university positions with psychologists, nor do they cite each other or publish in the same journals. This partly rests on the organisation of institutions of higher education in different departments and disciplines. But it also reflects different "styles of thought" (Fleck [1935] 1979; Abend 2006), "styles of reasoning" (Hacking 2002: 161f, 180ff) or "epistemic cultures" (Knorr Cetina 1999). These result from lengthy processes of institutionalisation, making for fundamental differences in concepts, perspective, methods, and subjects of study by discipline, field of study, nation- or language-based discourse, and even different approaches.

The precise boundaries of a scientific field are hard to establish. We can start by pointing to the strong connection between fields and institutions (Powell / DiMaggio 1991): fields of mutual observation and orientation make for the emergence of institutions. These govern the communication in the field, rendering it relatively similar by positions in the field. The field ends wherever the institutions characterising it hold no more. In a sense, institutions define and demarcate fields, just as forces and fields define each other in physics (see above). Fields themselves have to be institutionalised. Science only slowly and gradually acquired its autonomy from politics, economy, and religion. Similarly, disciplines develop over time as their particular perspectives and methods institutionalise, as departments, study programs, and journals organise around them (Abbott 1999). This holds for

philosophy over the last 2,500 years, for economics in the 19th century and sociology in the early 20th century, for communication science in the second half of the 20th century, and currently for computational social science and digital humanities.

We can envision the disciplines as enmeshed in a network, with links of varying strengths between each other, rather than hermetically sealed entities. This network-character becomes even more apparent when adding academic specialties and approaches to the picture. Relational sociology, for example, connects to other branches in sociology, to philosophy, to interdisciplinary network research, but also to history, economics, political science, education sciences, social psychology, sociolinguistics and many other fields of application and sources of inspiration. Denoting academic and scientific disciplines, specialties, and approaches as fields only points to their nature as relatively cohesive contexts with a fair degree of internal communication and orientation. In principle, we have to check empirically whether this or that purported field actually displays internal cohesion, and separation from the outside, for example by examining the links within and across fields (White et al. 2004).

4. Communication

The following sections dig deeper into the concept of social fields. Before turning to their structures in the next section, I consider the question of their basic elements: what do social fields consist of? The basic choice is: either fields are made of the *actors* in the field with their subjective orientations, or they have the *social processes* in them as their basic elements. I argue in this section for a focus on social processes, on the communicative events that follow the institutionalised rules of the field. Fields are contexts of interrelated activities, rather than of actors engaging in them.

According to Bourdieu, social fields are characterised by the mutual orientation of actors and the competition between them (1997; Bourdieu / Wacquant 1992: 115ff). The behaviour of actors (their "practices") are driven by subjective orientations that follow from their involvement in the field: they share the "illusio" as the general orientation of "being part of the field". The specific positions in the field, then, make for the particular "habitus" of actors: the sedimented and mostly unconscious sense of one's place in the field and of behaviour appropriate to this position. The notion of actor here spans the level of subjective orientations (illusio and habitus) and that of observed behaviour (practices), with behaviour following from subjective orientations, as in theories of action by Max Weber and others.

If actors and their activities are this inseparable, why should we ask whether one or the other constitute the field? Here we run into theoretical and methodological issues. Defining fields in terms of actors is not impossible, but it comes with two implications that I wish to avoid:

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relational Sociology of the Scientific Field: Communication, Identities, and Field Relations

(1) The first implication is that actors themselves would be part of the field, and that is: as *full actors*. Consider individuals: in modern society, people are always involved in a number of “social circles” like family, friends and neighbours, formal organisations (companies, universities), or social fields like the economy, politics, law, and science (Simmel [1908] 1964; Luhmann [1997] 2013: 87ff). If we hold fields to be composed of actors, these *multiple entanglements* would themselves become part of the field. Media and real estate tycoons turned politicians Silvio Berlusconi and Donald Trump are obvious cases in point. While their business interests might matter in the realm of politics, their positions in the fields of economy and the mass media do not directly translate into electoral success and public office. Many billionaires have failed to convert their wealth and economic status into political careers.

There is a certain virtue in taking the positions of individual actors in other fields into account when examining a field. However, the general stance of field theory is to examine one realm in isolation. The very construct of a field – in physics as in the social sciences – presupposes that we can focus on what happens in a field (Martin 2003). Imagine Silvio Berlusconi or Donald Trump venturing into the social sciences. Would their academic arguments convince us because of their fame and fortune in politics, the economy, and the mass media? Probably not. The academic and scientific world is relatively cut off from outside influences. Our family, our political convictions (or offices held), our wealth do not influence our positions in academia much. I therefore find it preferable to consider only parts of actors as in a field – actors not in full but in their positions and positionings in the field.

(2) The second problem concerns the organisation of meaning in a field. As argued in section 2, a social field is a symbolic construction. It consists of patterns of meaning that guide the processes in the field. If we conceptualise social fields as resting on individual actors, this places the main emphasis on their *subjective meaning*. The meaning of an event – say, a publication or a conference talk – in the field would be determined by the subjective orientations that bring this event about.

Building on Bourdieu, events in a field have a double meaning: First, they derive from the *subjective* considerations of actors (illusio and habitus). John Levi Martin stresses this aspect of fields (2003; 2011): they make for phenomenological orientations of actors in line with their relations to others, rendering their actions appropriate to their positions in the field. Secondly, the event constitutes a *position-taking* (“prise de position”) in the field (Bourdieu / Wacquant 1992: 105). In a publication or a conference talk, particular academic arguments and references to other authors are advanced and acquire meaning in the field – not in the sense of subjective orientations driving them, but in the sense of patterns of meaning structuring the field. Concepts are connected in arguments, claims are advanced, authors are related to each other, approaches are proclaimed or called into question.

In extreme cases, such patterns crystallise and institutionalise into durable structures of the field, for example if relational sociology becomes an approach that academic discourse organises around.

This second meaning of an event is less about the subjective orientations of actors, than about the meaning inscribed in the event and reacted upon in follow-up events. It consists of the “definition of the situation” advanced in communication, and picked up on by others. I would stress this second sense of meaning out of theoretical and methodological reasons: methodologically, it is next to impossible to know the subjective meaning behind communicative events. Theoretically, communicative events like publications make a difference in the field not through the subjective meaning behind them, but through the claims formulated in them and through their reception, interpretation, and reactions by others. In this sense, communicative events carry their own meaning, not the actors in their minds.

These considerations lead away from the actors to their activities as the basic elements of fields. In a sense, they are not even “their” activities anymore, they are activities of the field – just as the movement of a stone in a gravitational field is governed by forces in the field (rather than by intrinsic qualities or dispositions of the stone). Publications and conference talks in scientific discourse are placed in the stream of other publications and conference talks, relating back and forth. Academic and scientific statements are negotiated in this sequence of communicative events, as are the identities of the actors themselves (see 5.).

Communicative events, then, constitute the basic elements of a field. Social fields are “discursive” constructions rather than mere structures or assemblages of actors (Spillman 1995; Bail 2012: 857ff). Actors certainly play their parts in them, but not as prefixed entities driving the field, and not in full with their bodies, minds, and multiple social entanglements. In principle, sociology has a number of concepts for social / communicative events on offer – from individual behaviour, action, or practice to exchange, interaction, transactions, or communication (Fuhse 2021, chapter 7). Without elaborating in detail, I argue for conceptualising them as distinctly social events that take place *between* people (or: in a field). This rules out the concepts of behaviour, action, or practices that view social events as governed by individual attributes or dispositions. Also, the events have to be seen as *processing meaning*, as formulating “definitions of the situation” that subsequent events build on, reject, or otherwise have to deal with.

Michel Foucault terms the communicative events in discourses “*énoncés*” (literally “utterances”, but frequently translated as “statements”; 1969: 41ff; [1969] 1972: 28ff). Niklas Luhmann’s term of “*communication*” comes with similar implications: communication is a sequence of events taking place between at least two individuals, with both involved in the joint negotiation of the meaning the events (2002: 155ff; Fuhse 2015a). In this process, events acquire a meaning of their own that subsequent

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relational Sociology of the Scientific Field: Communication, Identities, and Field Relations

events build on. Luhmann's concept of communication stresses the supra-personal nature of social events, the processing of meaning in these events, and their temporal unfolding in sequences of communication. All of this has important consequences for social fields, if these are conceptualised as made of communication:

First, social fields acquire *emergent features*. They are no longer governed by the qualities and dispositions of actors taking part in them. Rather, any event in the field reacts to previous events, making the inner workings of a field relatively independent of subjective orientations.

Secondly, fields are *constructions of meaning*, like all social and cultural patterns. Therefore, we have to study the definitions of the situation offered in the field and the struggles around them. This focus is very different from the prevalent surveys of the distribution of resources across actors ("economic", "cultural", and "social capital" following Bourdieu).

Thirdly, fields *unfold and change over time*, rather than constituting stable structures that mainly lead to their own reproduction. Changes in the field do not only come from the changing fortunes of actors in the field, from challengers successfully replacing incumbents as power-holders (Fligstein / McAdam 2012: 13ff, 96ff). For example, we may want to observe the changing configurations of ideas in the scientific or academic field, with actors propagating them tying their fortunes to those of the ideas.

These three points do not make for a radical revamping of the field concept in the social sciences. They already form part of the most important field theories, in different versions and weights (Bourdieu / Wacquant 1992; Martin 2003; 2011; Fligstein / McAdam 2012). But they constitute a slight shift in perspective, with events, their temporal unfolding, and the processing of ideas in them gaining prominence at the expense of actors, resources, and structures. Consequently, a social field can now be defined as the *complex of interrelated communication structured by a set of institutions regulating conflict and competition* in the field.

Unlike Foucault's discourses or Luhmann's systems, the fields generated through communication are not by and large harmonious (see 2.). Communication marks differences and conflict as well as commonality and consensus. Definitions of the situation are not necessarily agreed upon, but frequently subject to contention. As a result, fields feature not only common cultural institutions, but also different ideas, and identities to which these ideas are attributed, as well as relations between identities. These form part of the structures in the field.

5. Ideas, and identities

Generally, structures arise in the social world as the result of the process of communication. Communicative events lead to *expectations* that govern the production of future events in the

field. These expectations concern what kinds of communication will take place, in terms of content (ideas, institutions), from whom (identities), and between whom (social relations). Expectations are relatively inert because of the tendency of events to conform to them. At the same time, they gradually change with every event, making for an open-ended "evolution". I discuss ideas and identities here, and social relations in the next section.

The ideational structure of a field includes its boundary, with the *illuio* of what the field is about, and the institutions governing the communication in the field (see 2.). These ideational patterns are quite different from field to field. In the academic field, they include prevalent theories and methods, but also prominent findings that any scientific statement has to take into account. These have been coined "styles of thought" (Fleck [1935] 1979) and "epistemic cultures" (Knorr Cetina 1999) in section 3. Each academic and scientific discipline develops its own epistemic culture, even differing by sub-specialties. Such structures of expectations are always provisional. They can be challenged and changed. Even prominent findings can be discarded in the light of follow-up research, culminating in the fundamental upheavals that Thomas Kuhn calls "scientific revolutions" ([1962] 2012). Journal articles and books have to come up with new ideas to be published, and authors cannot make their careers by reiterating what is already known. Scientific and academic fields thus harbour in them the impulse for change and a certain heterogeneity of ideas. Even authors pursuing the same approach have to distinguish themselves from each other.

Now the social sciences are home to a number of competing approaches at odds with each other – the oft-lamented "balkanisation". Relational sociology is one such approach, but within it we find incommensurable positions: Nick Crossley's interactionist theory of social relationships and networks (2011), François Dépelteau's "deep relational sociology" (2008; 2015) with its similarities to Actor-Network Theory, Pierpaolo Donati's critical realism of social relations (2011), the pragmatism-inspired reflections on social network analysis by Mustafa Emirbayer (1997) and Emily Erikson (2013), my own account of the construction of relational patterns in communication (Fuhse 2009; 2015; 2018; 2021), and many more (Dépelteau 2018; Fuhse 2020). A field thus harbours the competition between different ideas and different authors associated with them. Fields are not supposed to be harmonious, like groups and collective identities. Rather, they constitute battlefields where actors compete with each other for resources and influence, but generally following the same rules governing their behaviour.

Actors, together with their ideas, then constitute important features of the field: politicians, parties, and social movements in politics; companies in economic markets; artists, galleries, and museums in art. In the perspective advanced above, an "actor" is less the point of origin from which communicative events spring, be they political claims, products, artworks, or publications. Rather,

his or her identity serves as a projection point to which these events (and the ideas in them) are attributed. Actors do not come into discourse with pre-given qualities like skills, ideological leanings, creativity, and excellence. Rather, these skills are attached to actors as a result of attribution, and of the reception of claims, artworks, or publications in follow-up communication. A politician may call for a particular tax cut out of legitimate concern for an industry. But then others accuse her or him of favouring political donors, and she or he comes to be seen as trading favours. Original intentions do not organise discourse, but attributed intentions do.

If attribution is key, everything can become an actor in a field to which communication is attributed. This holds for individuals as well as for collectives and formal organisations (Fuhse 2015a: 53f). As far as I can see, most material and spiritual objects do not meet this requirement, since they are not seen as the sources of communication in a field. Bots in online environments constitute an important exception (Howard et al. 2018). For now, they can probably be dismissed from the field of science. But that is not an essential distinction: bots and non-human actors can be actors in a field if communication treats them as such, and develops expectations concerning their future behaviour towards others in the field.⁶

In science and academia, universities and departments are one type of actors competing with each other (Münch 2014). But mostly, ideas are attributed to individuals as the authors or co-authors of publications. Michel Foucault views authors as projection points for ideas and texts, that help organise discourse (Foucault [1969] 1998). Great authors, like the classics in sociology (Marx, Durkheim, Simmel, Weber), lend credit to arguments when invoked. And the construction of their greatness frequently contributes to all sorts of ideas being attributed to them and not to minor figures (Merton 1968). Intellectual achievements, however, rarely come from individuals but from networks of academics working on similar questions, toying with words, inspiring and challenging each other (Collins 1998: 3, 14f).

In this sense, the “Manifesto for a Relational Sociology” sprang from the discussions between network scholars and friends in New York City in the early 1990s, but it is credited to Emirbayer alone (1997; Mische 2011: 82f). His attempt at reconstructing a common position of relational sociologists including Harrison White, Charles Tilly, Margaret Somers, Ann Mische, himself, and many others has come to denote his own position in discourse. In a similar vein, the Gestalt of Jacques Derrida changed with transfer from the French to the American intellectual field (Lamont 1987). Mainly read and discussed among French philosophers, the translated Derrida became a hero of the nascent field of literary criticism in the US. Naturally, the ideas attributed to him changed

through the shift. An author is not somebody who injects ideas into academic debates, but a source to visit, an authority to appeal to or to rebel against, a construction whose shape is continuously revamped and whose merits are repeatedly reassessed.

Authors by themselves are of little importance for the field. They only acquire their identity and their position in the field through links with ideas, arguments, and achievements. However, the construction of identities in the field is also linked to their relations with others (White 2008).

6. Field relations

Relational sociology obviously has to stress the role of relations in fields. But what are social relations? Bourdieu repeatedly stresses relations as key in the social world and in his theory of practices: “The real is relational” ([1994] 1998: 3). As a number of critics clarify, Bourdieu is not really interested in social relationships of interaction between actors (Bottero 2009; Mohr 2013). Bourdieu’s relations run between positions in fields, and these have two sides: actors are positioned “objectively” in a field by the field-relevant resources (economic, cultural, social capital and others) they possess, and by their symbolic practices (“position-taking”). Generally, practices are supposed to follow the habitus of actors, and these are determined by the objective positions in terms of the relative distribution of resources (Bourdieu [1980] 1990).

In the perspective adopted here, actors and their resources do not drive the field, but they result from the processes of construction and allocation in the field. Therefore, I focus on the “position-taking” in the field: The relations between actors are constructed in the communication in the field, with actors relating to each other in the communicative events attributed to them. In science and academia, these events consist primarily of publications, to a lesser extent also of presentations and informal talk in departments and at conferences.

Emirbayer’s “Manifesto” does not detail what social relations are. Instead he focuses on “relational thinking” (following Cassirer) and on processes of “transaction” (following Dewey and Bentley) unfolding between actors (Emirbayer 1997: 282f, 286f). Relations here seem to be processes, rather than structures. Dépelteau goes further in dismissing any structures arising in transactions (2008; 2015). For him, relational sociology is about the mutual effects of (different kinds of) entities in transactions, rather than about lasting relational patterns. Charles Tilly, in contrast, argues that “interpersonal transactions compound into identities, create and transform social boundaries, and accumulate into durable social

6. This position does not entail that we should not reflect on, and study, subjective cognition like subjective orientations and cultural scripts in a field (Lizardo 2004; Leschziner / Green 2013). But it treats cognition as part of a field’s environment, given that it cannot be observed directly in the field.

ties" (2005: 6f). I agree with Tilly rather than with Dépelteau: social processes (termed communication here, rather than transactions) make for relatively durable patterns of expectations that guide future process (Abbott 2016). Social relations are one such form of expectations: how do actors stand towards each other? These "relational expectations" develop in past communication between actors, and they guide their subsequent communication.

Elsewhere, I insist that we should study social relationships rather than mere social relations (Fuhse 2013: 183f). The difference is that social relationships are characterised by two-way communication between the parties involved and by the build-up of expectations in the course of it (Figure 1). These expectations concern the question of how two actors stand towards each other, and how they will and should behave towards each other in the future.

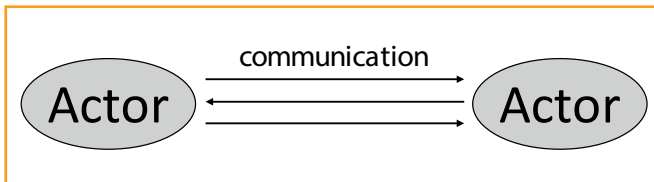


Figure 1: Communication in a social relationship

These kinds of social relationships can also matter in fields. But generally, the communication in a field is a little different. If a political party or a social movement organisation suggests controlling the ownership of handguns, this is first of all a political demand. But it will be seen as aligning with other groups supporting the same demand and as conflicting with gun rights-advocating groups and parties. Actors in a field thus relate indirectly towards each other through ideas and institutions (see 5.). Also, one political actor may attack or support another political actor without the second actor taking note or reacting. This still constitutes a relation in the field, as long as it is visible to others and affects subsequent communication – for example by further actors joining the support or attacks, or by rivalling actors closing ranks.

A relation in a field thus has a wider frame of reference than a social relationship. It not only connects actors directly with other actors in two-way relationships, but also actors with ideas and indirectly with other actors (through the joint support of ideas or the contention around them). Also, actors are sometimes unilaterally tied to other actors. Follow-up communication is the decisive factor in both instances: in social relationships, actors are connected to each other through the expectations that govern subsequent communicative events between them. Field relations, in contrast, consist of expectations that guide future communication in the field, whether or not the same actors are involved. Expectations are here not confined to the dyadic relationship, but concern the wider socio-cultural organisation of communication in the field. Within this socio-cultural organisation,

ideas, authors, and relations are mutually co-constitutive (Fuhse et al. 2020: 6f; Fuhse 2020): an idea means something by virtue of its connections to other ideas held by the same actors. And actors are related through ideas. By articulating an idea, then, one takes a stance towards other actors, thus establishing relations to them and marking one's position in the field (Figure 2).

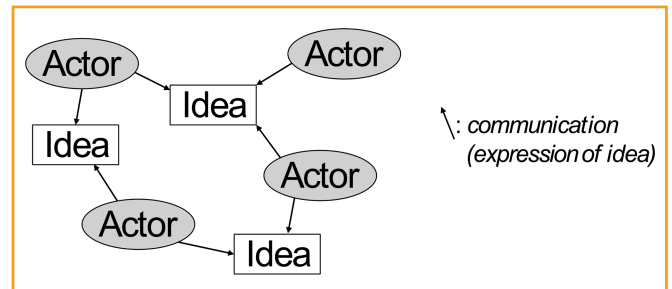


Figure 2: Relations in fields (between actors and ideas)

Scientific and academic fields are then structured by a pattern of expectation about how authors and ideas relate to each other, but also how authors (and ideas) are positioned among themselves. Scientific or academic communication takes place within these socio-cultural patterns, building on and reacting to the relations in the field. At the same time, it forges new connections, suggesting particular links between ideas (and authors), and establishing its authors as projection points to which ideas are attributed. I leave the question of what an "idea" is deliberately vague here. For example, it can consist of linking two concepts, as between "relationality" and "agency" (Burkitt 2016).

But relations also run between authors, for example with one author citing the work of another. These references point to, and make for, the relevance of the cited author in the field. At the same time, it entails that the citing author takes a position vis-à-vis the cited author. References do not always endorse the ideas of the cited authors. But even critical citations are better than no citations at all – being ignored makes for the disappearance of publications and authors from the field. Generally, authors cite mostly those works and authors they by and large agree with – to invoke support by trusted authors for their own arguments, and to place themselves in an "imagined community" of academics holding similar views. Of course, this includes authors who will not or cannot reciprocate our citations, such as the sociological classics: Émile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, Max Weber. As authors to which we attribute ideas, and as projection points, they can still feature in the field of sociology long after their biological death.

7. Conclusion

The notion of fields is not integral to relational sociology. Many relational sociologists (Andrew Abbott, Margaret Archer, Pierpaolo

Donati, Ann Mische, Christopher Powell, Charles Tilly, and Harrison White) make do without it. However, in recent years, there seems to be a growing consensus among relationally-minded sociologists: the field concept allows us to model the relational aspects of large-scale social phenomena like arts, economic markets and collaborations, sexual scenes, the world of academia and science, even social inequality (DiMaggio 1986; Anheier et al. 1995; Bottero / Crossley 2011; Fligstein / McAdam 2012; Green 2014; Emirbayer / Desmond 2015). The question then is how to conceptualise social fields.

In this essay, I advance a particular version of social fields from a theoretical perspective that views social and cultural structures as patterns of expectations that arise in the process of communication and structure it in turn (Fuhse 2009; 2015; 2018; 2021). This conceptualisation has the following main features:

Communicative events, rather than actors, are the constituent elements of fields. The structures of fields and their boundaries are symbolic patterns (expectations) that crystallise and change over the course of communication. Every communicative event offers a definition of the situation that subsequent communication builds on, or has to deal with.

The *boundaries of fields* are part and parcel of these provisionally crystallised definitions of the situation. They include an “illuio” of common involvement, and of particular rules (institutions) governing behaviour in the field.

Fields thus feature a *socio-cultural organisation* over and above the level of social relationships and networks. Every actor, every idea, every relation between actors (and between actors and ideas) is embedded in the socio-symbolic constellation of other relations within the field, as well as in the illuio and institutions of the field. Therefore, we cannot simply reduce fields to networks, but have to consider their overall patterns.

Relations in the field differ from social relationships proper, in that two actors do not have to be involved in two-way communication. Communicative events here relate actors to ideas and to other actors within the broader socio-cultural organisation of the field.

Actors and ideas acquire their identities and meaning within this socio-cultural organisation, through the relations to other ideas and other actors.

Academic and scientific fields then consist of scholarly communication, in particular publication, with most fields composed of representational claims about empirical phenomena. Scholarly communication is attributed to authors, along with concepts and arguments advanced in them. Authors and ideas, and the relations between them, constitute the basic structures of expectations in a field. As in Foucault’s theory of discourse, authors are projection points in the field, rather than self-driven entities driving the processes in the field.

The notion of social fields advanced here combines elements from different theoretical approaches and perspectives. I diverge

from Bourdieu’s concept of fields by relegating individual orientations (*habitus*) and resources (economic, cultural, and social capital) to secondary importance. In contrast to Fligstein and McAdam’s theory of fields, I emphasise the socio-cultural organisation of fields (including the construction of their boundaries) more than struggles for power and individual skills. This resembles Martin’s conceptualisation of fields, apart from its individualist focus on subjective orientations. This theory of fields then uniquely stresses their phenomenological organisation and ongoing construction *in communication*, rather than in people’s minds. In this regard, my approach lies closer to Foucault’s discourse analysis and to Luhmann’s theory of social systems. Unlike these, the notion of fields allows me to stress the role of patterns of relations and of conflicts in fields.

I view this conceptualisation of fields as compatible to the theories of social networks as interwoven with meaning (White 2008; Crossley 2011; Fuhse 2009; 2021), but adding important elements to it. Fields have a socio-cultural organisation and unity over and above networks of social relationships. Actors are not only related to each other in “stories” (White) or “relational expectations” (Fuhse), but immersed in a constellation of other actors and ideas. Actors are here related in position-takings (Bourdieu), both directly (e.g. in citations or in attacks) and indirectly (in the contention around ideas). Social relationships constitute a separate layer to these field relations. The role of social relationships and networks has been well documented in the sociology of science (Breiger 1976; Collins 1998). Generally, we can expect social relationships to correspond to field relations – with friends and colleagues converging on similar arguments, and with adherents of one approach more likely to develop friendships and to co-author together. But this conjecture has to be explored in empirical studies.

Many of the differences outlined seem scholastic at first glance. But like all theory, they are linked to particular methodological sensibilities. The field concept advanced here focuses on the processing of meaning in fields, and on the construction of constellations of actors and ideas. This leads away from the behaviour of actors as the prime object of study, towards constellations of actors and towards contention around ideas, labels, categories, authors, and collective identities – in line with the general trend in relational sociology away from entities towards the relations and processes between them.

References

- ABBOTT, Andrew. Things of Boundaries. In: *Social Research*. 1995. Vol. 62, No. 4, pages 857-882. ISSN 0037-783X.
- ABBOTT, Andrew. *Department & Discipline*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999. ISBN-10: 0226000990 ISBN-13: 978-0226000992.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relational Sociology of the Scientific Field: Communication, Identities, and Field Relations

- ABBOTT, Andrew. *Processual Sociology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016. ISBN-10: 022633662X ISBN-13: 978-0226336626.
- ABEND, Gabriel. Styles of Sociological Thought: Sociologies, Epistemologies, and the Mexican and U.S. Quests for Truth. In: *Sociological Theory*. 2006. Vol. 24, Issue 1, pages 1-41. ISSN 0735-2751. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111%2Fj.0735-2751.2006.00262.x>
- ANHEIER, Helmut, GERHARDS, Jürgen and ROMO, Frank. Forms of Capital and Social Structure in Cultural Fields: Examining Bourdieu's Social Topography. In: *American Journal of Sociology*. 1995. Vol. 100, No. 4, pages 859-903. ISSN 0002-9602.
- BAIL, Christopher. The Fringe Effect: Civil Society Organizations and the Evolution of Media Discourse about Islam since the September 11th Attacks. In: *American Sociological Review*. 2012. Vol. 77, Issue 6, pages 855-879. ISSN 0003-1224. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0003122412465743>
- BECKER, Howard. *Art Worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982. ISBN-10: 0520052188 ISBN-13: 9780520052185.
- BECKERT, Jens. How Do Fields Change? The Interrelations of Institutions, Networks, and Cognition in the Dynamics of Markets. In: *Organization Studies*. 2010. Vol. 31, Issue 5, pages 605-627. ISSN 0170-8406. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0170840610372184>.
- BOTTERO, Wendy. Relationality and social interaction. In: *British Journal of Sociology*. 2009. Vol. 60, Issue 2, pages 399-420. ISSN 0007-1315. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2009.01236.x>
- BOTTERO, Wendy and CROSSLEY, Nick. Worlds, Fields and Networks: Becker, Bourdieu and the Structures of Social Relations. In: *Cultural Sociology*. 2011. Vol. 5, Issue 1, pages 99-119. ISSN 1749-9755. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1749975510389726>
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. The Specificity of the Scientific Field and the Social Conditions of the Progress of Reason. In: *Social Science Information*. 1975. Vol. 14, Issue 6, pages 19-47. ISSN 0539-0184. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F053901847501400602>
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, [1980] 1990. ISBN-10: 0804720118 ISBN-13: 978-0804720113.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Practical Reason*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, [1994] 1998. ISBN-10: 0804733635 ISBN-13: 978-0804733632.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Les usages sociaux de la science; Pour une sociologie clinique du champ scientifique*. Paris: Éditions Quæ, 1997. ISBN-10: 2738007937 ISBN-13: 978-2738007933.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre and WACQUANT, Loïc. *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity, 1992. ISBN-10: 0745610331 ISBN-13: 978-0745610337.
- BREIGER, Ronald. Career Attributes and Network Structure: A Blockmodel Study of a Biomedical Research Speciality. In: *American Sociological Review*. 1976. Vol. 41, No. 1, pages 117-135. ISSN 0003-1224. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2094376>
- BURKITT, Ian. Relational Agency: Relational Sociology, Agency and Interaction. In: *European Journal of Social Theory*. 2016. Vol. 19, Issue 3, pages 303-321. ISSN 1368-4310. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1368431015591426>
- COLLINS, Randall. *The Sociology of Philosophies; A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*. Cambridge / Massachusetts: Belknap, 1998. ISBN-10: 0674001877 ISBN-13: 978-0674001879.
- CROSSLEY, Nick. *Towards Relational Sociology*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011. ISBN-10: 0415534275 ISBN-13: 978-0415534277.
- DÉPELTEAU, François. Relational Thinking: A Critique of Co-Deterministic Theories of Structure and Agency. In: *Sociological Theory*. 2008. Vol. 26, Issue 1, pages 51-73. ISSN 0735-2751. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111%2Fj.1467-9558.2008.00318.x>
- DÉPELTEAU, François. Relational Sociology, Pragmatism, Transactions and Social Fields. In: *International Review of Sociology*. 2015. Vol. 25, Issue 1, pages 45-64. ISSN 0390-6701. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2014.997966>
- DÉPELTEAU, François (ed.). *Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. ISBN-10: 3319881507. ISBN-13: 978-3319881508.
- DÉPELTEAU, François and FUHSE, Jan et al. Invitation to an ongoing experiment: discussing what relational sociology is In: *Theory, The Newsletter of the Research Committee on Sociological Theory, International Sociological Association*. Summer 2015, pages 25-53. https://www.academia.edu/13964142/Theory_Summer_2015
- DIMAGGIO, Paul. Structural Analysis of Organizational Fields: A Blockmodel Approach. In: *Research in Organizational Behavior*. 1986. Vol. 8, pages 335-370. ISSN 0191-3085.
- DONATI, Pierpaolo. *Relational Sociology; A New Paradigm for the Social Sciences*. New York: Routledge, 2011. ISBN-10: 0415524067 ISBN-13: 978-0415524063. EMIRBAYER, Mustafa. Manifesto for a Relational Sociology. In: *American Journal of Sociology*. 1997. Vol. 103, No. 2, pages 281-317. ISSN 0002-9602. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/231209>
- EMIRBAYER, Mustafa and DESMOND, Matthew. *The Racial Order*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015. ISBN-10: 022625352X ISBN-13: 978-0226253527.
- EMIRBAYER, Mustafa and JOHNSON, Victoria. Bourdieu and Organizational Analysis. In: *Theory and Society*. 2008. Vol. 37, No. 1, pages 1-44. ISSN 0304-2421. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-007-9052-y>
- ERIKSON, Emily. Formalist and Relationalist Theory in Social Network Analysis. In: *Sociological Theory*. 2013. Vol. 31, Issue 3, pages 219-242. ISSN 0735-2751. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0735275113501998>

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relational Sociology of the Scientific Field: Communication, Identities, and Field Relations

- FLECK, Ludwik. *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, [1935] 1979. ISBN-10: 0226253252 ISBN-13: 978-0226253251.
- FLIGSTEIN, Neil. Social Skill and the Theory of Fields. In: *Sociological Theory*. 2001. Vol. 19, Issue 2, pages 105-125. ISSN 0735-2751. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111%2F0735-2751.00132>
- FLIGSTEIN, Neil and MCADAM, Doug. *A Theory of Fields*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. ISBN-10: 0190241454 ISBN-13: 978-0190241452.
- FOUCAULT, Michel. *L'archéologie du savoir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1969. ISBN-10: 207026999X ISBN-13: 978-2070269990.
- FOUCAULT, Michel. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. London: Tavistock, [1969] 1972. ISBN-10: 0422736503 ISBN-13: 978-0422736503.
- FOUCAULT, Michel. What Is an Author? In: FOUCAULT, Michel. *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. New York: The New Press, [1969] 1998. Pages 205-222. ISBN-10: 1565845587 ISBN-13: 978-1565845589.
- FUHSE, Jan. The Meaning Structure of Social Networks. In: *Sociological Theory*. 2009. Vol. 27, Issue 1, pages 51-73. ISSN 0735-2751. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111%2Fj.1467-9558.2009.00338.x>
- FUHSE, Jan. *Social Relationships between Communication, Network Structure, and Culture*. In: DÉPELTEAU, François and POWELL, Christopher (eds.). *Applying Relational Sociology*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Pages 181-206. ISBN-10: 113737991X ISBN-13: 978-1137379917.
- FUHSE, Jan. Networks from Communication. In: *European Journal of Social Theory*. 2015. Vol. 18, Issue 1, pages 39-59. ISSN 1368-4310. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1368431014549683>
- FUHSE, Jan. Deconstructing and Reconstructing Social Networks. In: DÉPELTEAU, François (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. New York: Palgrave, 2018. Pages 457-479. ISBN-10: 3319660047 ISBN-13: 978-3319660042. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_23
- FUHSE, Jan. "The Field of Relational Sociology". In: *Digithum*. (2020). No. 26. ISSN 1575-2275. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.3199>
- FUHSE, Jan. *Social Networks of Meaning and Communication*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021 (in preparation).
- FUHSE, Jan, STUHLER, Oscar, RIEBLING, Jan and MARTIN, John Levi. Relating Social and Symbolic Relations in Quantitative Text Analysis. A Study of Parliamentary Discourse in the Weimar Republic. In: *Poetics*. 2020. Vol. 78, Article 101363. ISSN 0304-422X. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2019.04.004>
- GEERTZ, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. London: Fontana, [1973] 1993. ISBN-10: 0006862608 ISBN-13: 978-0006862604.
- GREEN, Adam Isaiah (ed.). *Sexual Fields; Towards a Sociology of Collective Sexual Life*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014. ISBN-10: 022608499X ISBN-13: 978-0226084992.
- HACKING, Ian. *Representing and Intervening*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983. ISBN-10: 0521282462 ISBN-13: 978-0521282468.
- HACKING, Ian. *Historical Ontology*. Cambridge / Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002. ISBN-10: 0674016076 ISBN-13: 978-0674016071.
- HESSE, Mary. *Forces and Fields; The Concept of Action at a Distance in the History of Physics*. Mineola, NY: Dover, [1961] 2005. ISBN-10: 0486442403 ISBN-13: 978-0486442402.
- HOWARD, Philip, WOOLLEY, Samuel Woolley and CALO, Ryan. Algorithms, bots, and political communication in the US 2016 election. In: *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*. 2018. Vol. 15, Issue 2, pages 81-93. ISSN 1933-1681. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2018.1448735>
- KNORR CETINA, Karin. *Epistemic Cultures*. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999. ISBN-10: 0674258940 ISBN-13: 978-0674258945.
- KUHN, Thomas. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, [1962] 2012. ISBN-10: 0226458121 ISBN-13: 978-0226458120.
- LAMONT, Michèle. How to Become a Dominant French Philosopher: The Case of Jacques Derrida. *American Journal of Sociology*. 1987. Vol. 93, No. 3, pages 584-622. ISSN 0002-9602. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/228790>
- LESCHZINER, Vanina and GREEN, Adam Isaiah. Thinking about Food and Sex: Deliberate Cognition in the Routine Practices of a Field. In: *Sociological Theory*. 2013. Vol. 31, Issue 2, pages 116-144. ISSN 0735-2751. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0735275113489806>
- LIZARDO, Omar. The Cognitive Origins of Bourdieu's Habitus. In: *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*. 2004. Vol. 34, Issue 4, pages 375-401. ISSN 0021-8308. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5914.2004.00255.x>
- LUHMANN, Niklas. *Die Wissenschaft der Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt / Main: Suhrkamp, 1990. ISBN-10: 3518580655 ISBN-13: 978-3518580653.
- LUHMANN, Niklas. *Theory of Society*, Volume 2. Stanford: Stanford University Press, [1997] 2013. ISBN-10: 080477160X ISBN-13: 978-0804771603.
- MARTIN, John Levi. What Is Field Theory? In: *American Journal of Sociology*. 2003. Vol. 109, No. 1, pages 1-49. ISSN 0002-9602. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/375201>
- MARTIN, John Levi. *The Explanation of Social Action*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. ISBN-10: 0199773319 ISBN-13: 978-0199773312.
- MERTON, Robert. The Matthew Effect in Science. In: *Science*. 1968. Vol. 159, Issue 3810, pages 56-63. ISSN 0036-8075. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.159.3810.56>

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Relational Sociology of the Scientific Field: Communication, Identities, and Field Relations

- MISCHE, Ann. Relational Sociology, Culture, and Agency. In: SCOTT, John and CARRINGTON, Peter (eds.). *Sage Handbook of Social Network Analysis*. London: Sage, 2011. Pages 80-97. ISBN-10: 1847873952 ISBN-13: 978-1847873958.
- MOHR, John. Bourdieu's Relational Method in Theory and in Practice. In: POWELL, Christopher and DÉPELTEAU, François. *Applying Relational Sociology*. Palgrave Macmillan US, 2013. Pages 101-135. ISBN-10: 113737991X ISBN-13: 978-1137379917. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137407009_5
- MOODY, Jim and LIGHT, Ryan. A View from Above: The Evolving Sociological Landscape. In: *The American Sociologist*. 2006. Vol. 37, No. 2, pages 67-86. ISSN 0003-1232. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12108-006-1006-8>
- MÜNCH, Richard. *Academic Capitalism; Universities in the Global Struggle for Excellence*. New York: Routledge, 2014. ISBN-10: 0415840147 ISBN-13: 978-0145840149.
- POWELL, Walter and DIMAGGIO, Paul (eds.). *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991. ISBN-10: 0226677095 ISBN-13: 978-0226677095.
- POWELL, Walter, WHITE, Douglas, KOPUT, Kenneth and OWEN-SMITH, Jason. Network Dynamics and Field Evolution: The Growth of Inter-Organizational Collaboration in the Life Sciences. In: *American Journal of Sociology*. 2005. Vol. 110, No. 4, pages 1132-1205. ISSN 0002-9602. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/421508>
- SIMMEL, Georg. The Web of Group-Affiliations. In: SIMMEL, Georg. *Conflict & The Web of Group Affiliations*. New York: The Free Press, [1908] 1964. Pages 125-195. ISBN-10: 0029288401 ISBN-13: 978-0029288405.
- SPILLMAN, Lynn. Culture, Social Structures, and Discursive Fields. In: *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*. 1995. Vol. 15, pages 129-154. ISSN 0278-1204.
- TILLY, Charles. *Identities, Boundaries and Social Ties*. Boulder: Paradigm, 2005. ISBN-10: 1594511314 ISBN-13: 978-1594511318.
- VAN FRAASSEN, Bas. *Scientific Representation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN-10: 0199278237 ISBN-13: 978-0199278237.
- WHITE, Douglas, OWEN-SMITH, Jason, MOODY, James and POWELL, Walter. Networks, Fields and Organizations. In: *Computational & Mathematical Organization Theory*. 2004. Vol. 10, pages 95-117. ISSN 1381-298X. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:CMOT.0000032581.34436.7b>
- WHITE, Harrison. *Identity and Control; How Social Formations Emerge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008. ISBN-10: 0691137153 ISBN-13: 978-0691137155.

Jan Fuhse

(jan@fuhse.net)

Humboldt University of Berlin

Jan A. Fuhse is an interim professor of sociology at the University of Bremen, Germany. After his PhD in sociology from Universität Stuttgart (Germany) in 2007 he completed a post-doc (funded by the Alexander von Humboldt foundation) at Columbia University 2007-2008. There he worked with Harrison White and Charles Tilly on the theory of social networks. From 2009 to 2013 he was an assistant professor of political sociology at the University of Bielefeld, completing his habilitation in 2011. From 2013 to 2018, Fuhse worked as a Heisenberg Fellow (funded by the German Research Association) at Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany. His research focuses on communication and meaning in social networks, on social networks in inequality and interethnic relations, on constellations in political discourse, and on the theory of computational social science. Recent publications: "Theorizing Social Networks: Relational Sociology of and around Harrison White" (International Review of Sociology, 2015), "Networks from Communication" (European Journal of Social Theory, 2015), "New Media and Socio-Cultural Formations" (Cybernetics & Human Knowing, 2018), "Relating Social and Symbolic Relations in Quantitative Text Analysis. A Study of Parliamentary Discourse in the Weimar Republic" (Poetics, 2020, with Oscar Stuhler, Jan Riebling, and John Levi Martin), and "Theories of Social Networks" in: Ryan Light / James Moody (eds.): Oxford Handbook of Social Networks (2020, OUP).



**UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA**

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Special Section: “Special Issue guest-edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of François Dépelteau”

Are relational processes teleological or self-referential? What relational sociology can learn from systems theory

Jean-Sébastien Guy
Dalhousie University

Date of submission: April 2019

Accepted in: June 2020

Published in: February 2021

Recommended citation:

GUY, Jean-Sébastien (2020). “Are relational processes teleological or self-referential? What relational sociology can learn from systems theory.” In: SELG, Peeter. “Special Issue guest-edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of François Dépelteau”. [online article]. *Digithum*, no. 26, pp. 1-12. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and Universidad de Antioquia. [Accessed: dd/mm/yy]. <http://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.374159>



The texts published in this journal are – unless otherwise indicated – covered by the Creative Commons Spain Attribution 4.0 International licence. The full text of the licence can be consulted here: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Abstract

This paper aims at expanding on François Dépelteau’s conception of social relation as dynamic processes. I argue that the basic concept of process is in need of further developments. We tend to understand processes as teleological, but I contend that self-referential processes are a more interesting model for relational sociology. Using Niklas Luhmann’s theory, we can conceive self-referential processes as systems that self-organise by transforming disorder into order. For this to be possible, systems must harbour within themselves. The paper then explores the various reasons that explain this special feature.

Keywords

François Dépelteau, Niklas Luhmann, self-referential systems, order, disorder

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Are relational processes teleological or self-referential? What relational sociology can learn from systems theory.

¿Son los procesos relacionales teleológicos o autorreferenciales? Lo que la sociología relacional puede aprender de la teoría de sistemas

Resumen

En este artículo se pretende ampliar la concepción de François Dépelteau de la relación social como procesos dinámicos. Sostengo que el concepto básico de proceso debe desarrollarse más. Tendemos a entender los procesos como teleológicos, pero mantengo que los procesos autorreferenciales son un modelo más interesante para la sociología relacional. Haciendo uso de la teoría de Niklas Luhmann podemos concebir los procesos autorreferenciales como sistemas que se autoorganizan por medio de la transformación del desorden en orden. Para que esto sea posible, los sistemas deben albergarse dentro de sí mismos. En el artículo, además, se exploran las diversas razones que explican esta característica especial.

Palabras clave

François Dépelteau, Niklas Luhmann, sistemas autorreferenciales, orden, desorden

Introduction

This paper is inspired by many conversations I had with my late friend François Dépelteau. It aims at developing some of the ideas that I had in the wake of these conversations. The paper focuses on the concept of *process* around which François formulated the latest iteration on his vision of relational sociology (2018a, see also 2018b, 2015, 2008). While I understand the reasons François, along with other relational sociologists like Mustafa Emirbayer (1997), had for valuing the concept of process, this choice or decision does not entirely give me satisfaction. On one hand, “processes” are introduced as a way to push back against “substances”. Put differently, we speak of processes to remind ourselves that social reality is forever dynamic and never (or at least never completely) static. On the other hand, the concept of process is in turn burdened with certain ambiguities that have not been properly addressed as of yet. Namely, a distinction must be made between *teleological* processes and *self-referential* processes. I argue that the processes that best embody the ideals of relational sociology as François conceived it are self-referential processes. However, to make this point, I must take a detour through Niklas Luhmann’s systems theory.

I met François in person on multiple occasions through the Canadian Sociological Association’s (CSA) annual meetings. Our acquaintance began officially in 2014, when we had dinner together after I presented a paper on a panel organised by François and Chris Powell (although I should say for the record that François and I had already crossed paths once the year before). In the following years – from 2015 to 2017 – François and I launched a research cluster on relational sociology under CSA’s umbrella and we created more panels on relational sociology through the same organisation (also for the record, I should add that credit must go

to François for most, if not all, of these initiatives). Since I had a chance to work closely with François, it was easy to observe how dedicated he was to John Dewey’s and Arthur Bentley’s threefold distinction between self-action, interaction and transaction (1989 [1949], see also Morgner 2020a). Part of the attraction was probably the economy or parsimony of this distinction: with three words only, François could communicate elegantly both the project he wanted to promote and the counter-projects he wanted to resist (or at least stay away from).

Self-action and interaction imply a form of substantialism whereby the properties of social actors engaged in relation with other actors are simply pre-given and therefore taken for granted. By the same token, relations remain secondary to social actors. The remedy is transaction as the true form (or a deeper form) of processualism or processual thinking. Actors are shaped – that is, defined – by the relation they maintain with other actors. We can think of actors as algebraic variables that can take on different values, whereas the relation between actors would be the equivalent of the mathematical equation holding these variables together. Thus, one cannot change the value of one variable without changing the value of the others. In the same way, the properties of one actor are tied to the properties of the other actors at the same moment in time (we must add though that the mathematical equation cannot be admitted as an extra term in addition to the variables tied together: the equation merely reflects the relation between actors and the way this relation comes to evolve in time).

I can report that listening to François convinced me to take my distance with critical realism. While I initially found the concept of emergence an interesting option to account for the reality of social structures, François helped me to understand that inter-action (or co-determinism) is ultimately a position plagued with contradiction (Dépelteau 2018a: 507, and also Dépelteau 2008). In place of

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Are relational processes teleological or self-referential? What relational sociology can learn from systems theory.

Margaret Archer, François recommended that I read Anthony King. The main lesson was this: structures do not constrain actors; only other actors can constrain actors (human or nonhuman).

When I joined forces with François back in 2014, I was very much invested in Niklas Luhmann's systems theory and I still am today (Luhmann 1995, 2002, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). It occurred to me that the sort of sociology that François was envisioning was in many ways compatible with Luhmann's own approach to social systems (Guy 2018a, 2018b, 2019). I had a chance to talk about this with François more than once and I have reasons to believe that François was progressively warming to Luhmann's ideas, although I do not think he had the time to read and learn more about them (I also suspect that François would have greatly disliked Luhmann's heavy style of writing).

This is where François and I had to leave things unexpectedly – and this is where I want to pick them up today. That is, following the pattern that sank in between François and me, I will be talking about systems theory as a way to respond to François' dream of a relational sociology. For my intervention, I will move away from the confrontation between processes and substances to open up a distinction among processes. I will point out that we can think of processes as either teleological or self-referential. Self-referential processes are the more interesting option for relational sociology. Yet the conceptualising of self-referential processes (or systems, as Luhmann will have it) raises certain theoretical challenges. I seek to address these challenges in this paper. But first I must clarify why teleological processes make for the inferior or less interesting model.

For François, talking in processual terms was essential to ground the dynamic, lived and therefore temporal character of social relations. This is fine, except that the word "process" suggests other things nonetheless. For instance, when envisioning processes, one is tempted to imagine a transformation going from an initial state to a final state. Think of boiling water: in the beginning, the water is not boiling; later on, once the temperature of the liquid has finally reached 100 degrees Celsius, it starts to boil. I suspect that François would have probably rejected this example, but I contend nonetheless that most commentators would admit that boiling is a valid illustration of what a "process" is supposed to be in principle. What causes confusion is that boiling water clearly implies a beginning and an end. It is that following moment that defines the process retrospectively for what it is (as opposed to any other processes, like freezing). This is potentially misleading because the processual thinking that François and other relational sociologists advocate *needs not* imply such teleological projections.

In Luhmann's systems theory, we find an aspiration similar to that of relational sociology, to repeat again. The difference is that Luhmann's theory is not built on process or relation as magic operator (to say it like Vandenberghe – 2018). Luhmann's theory is therefore helpful in safeguarding processual thinking

from teleological thinking. Most significant is the notion of self-reference. For Luhmann, social systems are self-referential systems. Unlike processes like boiling water, social systems are not posed between an initial state and a final state. This is to say that social systems are not moving toward a definite outcome located in the future and yet known ahead of time (like, say, equilibrium, adaptation, growth or even justice and a more humane world). In time, social systems just continue to react to themselves in a recursive fashion. What Luhmann designates as a system is not a fixed arrangement of solid parts, a "form" that ought to be preserved or held stable. For Luhmann, there is a system inasmuch as a first series or wave of actions-reactions leads to another wave of actions-reactions, and another, and another, etc. Each round is meant to bring about another round, thus keeping the system "alive" for another moment, and another, etc. In this way, a boundary coalesces, setting the system apart from anything else around it without ever keeping the system tied to unchangeable conditions.

To better understand self-referential systems, it is useful to examine the distinction between order and disorder. Mainstream sociologists are already familiar with these concepts. At least since Talcott Parsons (who himself referred to Thomas Hobbes), it is common practice to speak of social life in terms of collective order to underscore the regularity and the predictability of social activities in most situations. This order is usually understood as grounded in cultural beliefs (Durkheim) or imbued with legitimacy (Weber). Accordingly, disorder is associated with moments of conflict or periods of crisis when regularity and predictability fall apart because social actors no longer agree on the same set of values or the right course of action. Without downplaying these variables, Luhmann deviates from mainstream sociology by redefining order and disorder in formal terms. Order does not coincide with what is good or desirable, and disorder, with what is bad or undesirable. Rather they indicate levels or degrees of organisation, e.g. whether activities are tightly or loosely organised. These parameters induce various effects whenever a system comes to face a new situation. The system then reacts by altering its inner organisational features. In sum, social systems are self-organising systems and self-organisation is the process whereby a system's internal order and disorder are periodically reshuffled.

To continue exploring the concept of self-reference and ultimately to preserve relational sociology from the lure of teleological thinking, the rest of the article reconstructs the interplay between order and disorder in three steps. For the sake of the discussion though, I give priority to the concept of disorder. This choice is justified by the fact that it is disorder that allows a social system to transform itself by substituting for its internal order another order. In other words, there is more activity on the disorder side than on the order side. Once properly qualified, disorder must be readmitted as a positive force by the same token.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Are relational processes teleological or self-referential? What relational sociology can learn from systems theory.

It is therefore strategic to focus on disorder as entry point. I will therefore talk about (1) disorder and the formation of observing systems, (2) disorder and the question of meaning, and (3) disorder and the interplay between expectations and surprises. But first, let me begin by taking a brief detour through the ideas of British anthropologist and cybernetic thinker Gregory Bateson to identify the main points that I will develop in the other three sections.

Can disorder be positive? Lessons from Gregory Bateson

Gregory Bateson was a member of the second-order cybernetics movement, which had a great influence on Luhmann (Guy 2018b). He wrote about multiple topics (from play to alcoholism to Bertrand Russell's theory of logical types) across multiple disciplines (from anthropology to psychiatry to biology). At times, he expressed his core ideas by writing simple conversations between a nameless father and his daughter (note: Bateson had a daughter in real life) (Bateson 1972). One of these dialogues is illuminating for our own topic. The daughter asks her father (and this is the title of the piece): "Why do things get in a muddle?" The protagonists first establish a distinction between tidy and muddled (or untidy). From there, their exchanges unfold like this:

F: [...] Now—let's look at what *you* call tidy. When your paint box is put in a tidy place, where is it?

D: Here on the end of this shelf.

F: Okay—now if it were anywhere else?

D: No, that would not be tidy.

F: What about the other end of the shelf, here? Like this?

D: No that's not where it belongs, and anyhow it would have to be *straight*, not all crooked the way you put it.

F: Oh—in the right place *and* straight.

D: Yes.

F: Well, that means that there are only very few places which are "tidy" for your paint box—

D: Only *one* place—

F: No—very *few* places, because if I move it a little bit, like this, it is still tidy.

D: All right—but very, very few places.

F: All right, very, very few places. Now what about the teddy bear and your doll, and the Wizard of Oz and your sweater, and your shoes? It's the same for all the things, isn't it, that each thing has only a very, very few places which are "tidy" for that thing?

D: Yes, Daddy—but the Wizard of Oz could be anywhere on that shelf. And Daddy—do you know what I hate, hate it when my books get all mixed up with your books and Mummy's books.

F: Yes, I know. (Pause)

D: Daddy, you didn't finish. Why do my things get the way I say isn't tidy?

F: I have finished—it's just because there are more ways which you call "untidy" than there are ways which you call "tidy." (Bateson 1972: 4-5)

We can take the distinction between tidy and muddled to be equivalent to the distinction between order and disorder. Bateson thus gives us a first fun and intuitive understanding of the issue at hand. At this stage though, disorder still appears in a negative light since it is associated with situations where "matter falls out of place", to put it like Mary Douglas (2002). But there is more.

Bateson calls these father-and-daughter dialogues "metalogues". He explains: "A metalogue is a conversation about some problematic subject. This conversation should be such that not only do the participants discuss the problem but the structure of the conversation as a whole is also relevant to the same subject" (Bateson 1972: 1). In other words, the structure of a metalogue is self-referential, hence the prefix meta.

Indeed, if you pay attention to Bateson's entire text, you quickly realise that the conversation regularly gets in a muddle and that the protagonists find themselves having to tidy things up over and over again – the "things" being here the same conversation that they are in. By now, disorder already begins to take on a more positive meaning in that it is given a more positive role: that of stimulating and sustaining the inter-action (i.e. the social system) from within. To be sure, the muddling arising in the course of the conversation is a source of frustration for the participants more often than not. The point however is that such muddling keeps the system *going*. What is positive about conditions of disorder is this operational effect. Luhmann built his whole theory around the same basic principle.

The system keeps going whenever one participant rejects what the other is saying, or whenever they reflect on what they said earlier, or whenever they update their objectives or criteria on the basis of their latest insights, etc. The participants never completely agree or disagree with each other. For instance, the father first agrees to answer the daughter's question, but then the daughter disagrees with or questions the way he frames the problem. Keeping the system going means determining at each moment what is "appropriate" or "required" under the circumstances considering the immediate priorities. Because words are slippery, this sometimes requires reinterpreting the same priorities in alternative ways, thereby changing the course of the conversation unexpectedly. Intuitively, we are reminded of the Beatles when they sang:

You say yes, I say no

You say stop and I say go go go, oh no

(...)

I say high, you say low

You say why and I say I don't know, oh no

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Are relational processes teleological or self-referential? What relational sociology can learn from systems theory.

Note that this kind of disorder arising in the context of social interaction is truly internal in origin. The conversation is not merely disrupted by external events (like, say, a fire in the house). Nor is disorder limited to personal interruptions. When the daughter objects to what her father is saying, we have to realise that she is still holding on to the chain of arguments thus far. She is still very much involved in the conversation and she is pointing back to it as she is pressuring her father. Only in this way can the daughter hope to exercise any pressure at all. In sum, the presence of disorder (muddling) does not rest on alien variables (like, say, bad weather), but is integral to the activity of conversing. All conversations – and by extension all social interactions and thereby all social systems – are inevitably self-muddling.

However, social systems do not simply continue to slide toward increasing entropy, because disorder can be transformed into order. Participants can clarify what must be clarified and decide what must be decided (until further notice). This leads to another interesting point: the mechanism whereby disorder is transformed into order seems to owe more to the former than the latter. In their yin-yang complementarity, it is disorder that turns out to be the active principle, and order, the passive one. In effect, the efforts made at eliminating or reducing disorder are triggered by the same disorder. Order emerges as a temporary side effect of this. Order does not mark the end of disorder, but only the latest direction that the system has taken.

Alternatively, we can imagine order and disorder as forming a pair of covariables that gets to be periodically updated, so that change in the social system implies a change in both values simultaneously. At time x , we have a first pair of order and disorder. At that moment, disorder spurs the system to “tidy up things”. The system proceeds by readjusting its current order. We then move from time x to time $x+1$. At that next moment, we observe a new pair of order and disorder: on one side, we have the new order that the system just turned into; on the other side, we have the new potential disorder that matches it. The system is capable of continuous self-renewal because disorder is continuously self-renewing.

In summary, disorder can be seen as positive in that it contributes directly to the evolution of social systems. To be fair, the concept of disorder does not entirely lose its aura of negativity, since total control escapes the protagonists. But total control and evolution do not always go hand in hand. On the contrary, Luhmann argues that for social systems to evolve at all – that is, to be able to adapt to unforeseen turns of events – they must incorporate a part of disorder, which in turn allows for not total but partial control at least (conversely, partial control leaves room for a part of disorder). Indeed, they *must*, Luhmann is telling us. That is, they could *not exist* any other way, or at least not as the kind of social systems Luhmann contends they are.

The next three sections aim at explaining why according to Luhmann there can be no social system that is not partially disorganised by definition.

Disorder and the formation of observing systems

Luhmann's theory is certainly monumental. As a beginner, where should one begin? Or perhaps more to the point, why should one begin at all, knowing that the task of reading Luhmann for the first time will be time-consuming to say the least? If a pre-emptive defence is in order, it is worth stating that Luhmann himself begins with what it means to observe the world. This is a fundamental question that anybody can appreciate, whether they are trained as sociologists or not. It is easy to miss it though. To clarify what the stakes are, it is convenient to begin with a critique of determinism.

Broadly speaking, determinism is the position that the world is governed by universal natural laws (Prigogine 1997, Prigogine & Stengers 1992, 2017). While these laws account for the phenomena we can observe around us, the laws themselves remain beyond change: they are eternal. Accordingly, the same causes always produce the same effects. This vision of the world as completely deterministic translates into an equally deterministic vision of knowledge. To know is to know with certainty. The certainty of knowledge originates in the certainty of the laws of nature. Any lingering uncertainty must be attributed to the observer as opposed to the world, since the latter admits none in its design. Logically, any uncertainty must spring from a lack of some kind: for example, lack of measurements and testing as well as lack of adequate tools or technology to run the required testing, but perhaps more importantly lack of intelligence or lack of imagination on the part of the observer, and sometimes lack of scientific rigour as in cases of ideological biases and dishonesty.

However, determinism as a philosophical position creates some blind spots and therefore raises some problems. I name two. First, as pointed out by chaos theorists (Prigogine 1997, Prigogine & Stengers 1992, 2017), determinism does not do justice to the irreversibility of time. In a deterministic universe, there may be an arrow of time going from past to future, but the laws of nature are such that everything can happen in reverse, with effects reverting into their causes. Visualise a ball rolling on a snooker table until it hits another ball: we can play the same sequence from end to beginning without losing or altering anything. Determinism is limited in that it cannot account for all these other instances when past and future are no longer reverse symmetrical images of each other. This is what the notion of irreversibility implies: that things change so much so that past and future can no longer be kept under the same natural laws.

A second problem revolves around the status of the observer (Maturana & Varela 1972, Bunnell 2004). If the universe is completely deterministic, so much so that any uncertainty falls “outside of it” on the side of the observer, then the observer disappears out of view. In this schema, we associate observing with the exercise of objectivity. Since achieving objectivity is meant

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Are relational processes teleological or self-referential? What relational sociology can learn from systems theory.

to coincide with the discovery and understanding of the laws of nature, then the production of knowledge corresponds at the same time with the (self-)erasure of the observer (Bunnell 2004). However, erasing the observer is not a good explanation for what it means to observe anything. The observer sees the determinism of nature's law and yet he or she remains incapable of seeing his or her own seeing as a concrete activity. At best, we can understand the observer as a margin of error that should shrink down to zero following an asymptotic progression. In a totally deterministic universe, there can be no observer because there is nothing that could enable the observer to emerge at all, since the irreversibility of time is missing anyway.

The second problem connects back with the first one and we can now put together an alternative to determinism. The core issue is this: what we designate as an observer is not a disincarnate entity that could assume God's position by taking a view from nowhere (Nagel 1986). This is not to dismiss any scientific observations as fraught with subjective judgements (or as good as anybody's opinion), but to turn observation into an object of science (Fuchs 2001). Observation begins with an observer, while any observer must exist as an actual assemblage. The properties of this assemblage make for the parameters of observation. Think about the difference (and relation) between what you can see with your eyes and the physiology of your eyes as organs.

This line of reasoning forces us to revise our parallel understanding of "the world". The world is no longer a single compound that would precede the birth of any observer. Rather the world is recreated with each new observer stepping into action. This is no matter of fancy, as if each observer were free to rearrange the world at will (Luhmann 2002: 127). Each observer produces a world for himself or herself (or itself) as a function of its inner organisation. Granted, an observer can change the world by changing the way he or she (or it) observes it, but in order to pull up this trick the observer must transform himself or herself (or itself) at the same time on a structural level.

A science of observation would dissect any observer to figure out what an observer's own structure makes him or her (or it) capable of observing (Fuchs 2001). This echoes chaos theorists like Prigogine who insists that new structures emerge by way of bifurcation in conditions far from equilibrium. It is through mechanisms like these that what we designate as observers come into existence as assemblages of their own. In turn, this echoes Luhmann's theory. Luhmann contends that social systems are observing systems. Under the circumstances, the status of observer is therefore not restricted to humans, individuals, persons, minds, brains or organisms. By identifying the conditions that are required for social systems to operate as observers of their own, we will also understand why (partial) disorder is integral to their functioning.

To begin with, for social systems, observation is not a secondary activity that could be turned on and off while attending to more immediately pressing matters. To be in a functioning state, a

social system must be observing at all times. If the system is not processing any information, then the system is dead. This business of processing information is nothing passive, as if the system only had to wait for something to happen in its environment to be impressed by it. While the system exists in an environment, it must also distinguish itself from that environment. For the system to distinguish itself, it has to be capable of *organising its own activities, starting with observing*.

Indeed, the crux of our problem lies in the achievement of autonomy. One could say that the system has to break off with the cycles and rhythms, the flows and patterns already prevailing in the environment by coming up with its own melody, by humming its own refrain (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). Music analogies are limited though: we do not mean to suggest that a system infinitely repeats itself (most songs are fairly short and the systems that Luhmann talks about easily outlive them), but that the emergence of a system in an environment implies a split between these two. The system ought to be different from the rest of its environment or else it does not exist as a separated system. The same principle applies to the observations carried on by the system, since observing is a concrete activity that must be organised concretely within the same system. To put it redundantly, everything the system observes about its environment is observed by the system. Thus, there is a difference between the environment as it is, on one side, and the observation of the environment as done by the system, on the other side. As it turns out, our human eye only perceives very limited wavelengths along the light spectrum. It leaves out ultraviolet and infrared light; they never appear to us and we go on with our normal business, assuming that they are simply inexistent.

If the observations carried on by a system depend on that system's internal organisation, then the knowledge produced by way of observing is a matter of adaptation rather than representation, or fitness rather than faithfulness. In other words, the knowledge generated within a system with the means of that system's operation does not depict the world as a whole – as if the world is indeed one all-encompassing and eternal whole (see earlier comments) and as if all other systems had to agree on exactly the same representation – but fits within that one ecological niche that the system manages to occupy for now (Fuchs 2001).

As a matter of adaptation, knowledge production is a continuous and sustained achievement. The system cannot engage in observation just once, by taking a single snapshot and working with it and nothing else from there on. It is as though the system produces one observation to force itself to produce another one so as to validate or invalidate the first one. Like consciousness, observation and perception (and cognition) are best understood as running streams. Through observing, the system does not scan the entire environment, but rather monitors its own activities, if only because the system can generate multiple observations

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Are relational processes teleological or self-referential? What relational sociology can learn from systems theory.

at the same time and compare them with one another. This is how the system can establish itself as a closed circuit and achieve autonomy from the environment in the form of operational closure (Luhmann 2013a).

Let the reader take note that the epistemological model or sketch we have assembled so far directly resonates with the ideas set forth by Dewey and Bentley in *Knowing and The Known* (1989 [1949]). The relations or transactions that actors participate in depend on the perception that the said actors have of the same relations. The perception of a relation is therefore a factor in determining the subsequent trajectory or development of that relation. This makes for an Ouroboros-like (circular) mechanism since a change in the relation will enable a change in the perception of the relation, which will then enable a change in the relation, and so on and so forth (Dépelteau 2018a: 509, 513, Morgner 2020b: 15). In sum, acting and knowing are not cut off from each other.

Now then, how does disorder enter the picture? So far, we have established that determinism leaves us blind to the constitution of observers as immanent phenomena. Moreover, we have established that the said observers must operate in a circular (self-referential) manner for them to gain and maintain their independence from their environment. This circular character implies that systems remain in part indeterminate or uncertain so that they can continue to react to themselves.

We have to recognise that systems are never at rest. Each system is a chain of operations, each one of them precipitating more operations, thus extending the system's existence as a chain of operations. There is no operation a system can produce that could be "the operation to end all operations". Ending the chain of operations would entail ending the system itself. Accordingly, while the system succeeds in reproducing itself, it can only do so by reproducing its share of uncertainty or disorder by the same stroke. The system must always follow up on its own operations. For this reason, we can imagine a system as though it is always missing a part of itself, something yet to come, if only in the very short term, like the answer to a question for instance. It is this state of affairs that propels the system forward, that motivates the system to keep on producing more operations. In light of this, we can speak of the system's internal disorder to describe the fact that the system is forever in need of self-confirmation.

Disorder and the question of meaning

We can formulate the main conclusion we have reached so far as follows: in Luhmann's view, social systems are capable of self-organising because they are simultaneously self-destabilising and even self-disintegrating (Luhmann 1995: 48). Keep in mind that, in Luhmann's theory, what we designate as the system's elements are not objects (animate or inanimate), but operations which happen in an instant. The system produces operations and manages to

secure its own reproduction out of the products of its operations if, among the said products, there is the need or the compulsion to produce still more operations (ibid.: 49). All along, operations exist as events only, so that the whole system maintains itself in a perpetual transient state.

Luhmann writes:

Systems with temporalized complexity have properties that one cannot find on their underlying levels of reality. They compel themselves to change their states constantly to minimize the duration of the elements that compose them. Thus, viewed temporally, they combine stability and instability and, viewed factually, determinacy and indeterminacy. Every element (event, action, etc.) is then *determinate and indeterminate at the same time*: determinate in its momentary actuality and indeterminate in its connectivity (which must, however, also be actualized in the moment) (ibid.: 49).

Turning to Luhmann's concept of meaning will provide additional details to this picture. Breaking with Weberian interpretative sociology, Luhmann redefines meaning as the medium for the operations of social systems (note: meaning is also the medium for the operations of psychic systems – i.e. consciousness – but I will omit this part of Luhmann's theory for the sake of simplicity). Actual physical media include light and air (Heider 2017). What the human eye sees is not light, but light reflection. What the human ear hears is not air, but the sound waves carried by air or travelling across it. While light and air enable optic and sonic perceptions respectively, they remain undetected or unnoticed for what they are. Moreover, light and air cannot be limited to what we happen to see or hear right now. Accordingly, the definition of a medium is not tied to a particular content. Following this model, Luhmann suggests that meaning enables the operations of social systems without ever being exhausted by them. The operations of social systems carry meaning or are accepted as meaningful, but the local significations that are determined through these operations are not to be confused with meaning as the medium that provides affordance for the same operations and more.

One important consequence for sociology is that meaning is no longer a projection of the human mind. Meaning no longer originates from individuals in the form of opinions or beliefs (or sublimated instinctual drives), nor is meaning located or contained in people's heads as mental stuff. If we were to ask, "what is the meaning of *this*?" – like, say, "what is the meaning of life?" – Luhmann himself would not indicate a direct answer. He would point out however that, unless one is merely talking to oneself in one's own mind, addressing and handling such a question must occur as an actual event amid ongoing coordination efforts between two individuals or more. That is, it can only occur as an operation inside a social system (like an ordinary conversation between father and daughter for instance). For this to be possible,

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Are relational processes teleological or self-referential? What relational sociology can learn from systems theory.

a wider set of options must be available for selection purposes. When talking about meaning as a medium, Luhmann is directing our attention to this wider set that makes selecting possible without shrinking down to any one of these options or imposing one at the expense of the others. The structure of meaning is that of a phenomenological horizon. Options made available in the course of a system's operations appear in front of that background and against it while pointing out to each other. Within that horizon, the meaningfulness of the options lies in their mutual distinctions.

For example, we know the difference between winning and losing. For winning to be possible, losing must be possible at the same time. Information finds its source in the distinction between the two possibilities, so that any option carries with it the entire set that it depends on. This is what a *second-order* approach reveals, when we look at the observer as a system and when we examine the structure allowing that system to produce the observations that it does. That said, we must not forget to return to a *first-order* approach and re-discover what the system's observations feel like for the system. Surely, winning is exhilarating for the winners! This is to say that when the system releases an observation for its own consumption, the system is then completely absorbed by it. This is how observation becomes the present reality for the system. What else can a system come to know about itself and its environment but the observations that it produces internally? How else can a system know anything? Thus, from a first-order perspective, the event of winning and the feeling of winning are coterminous for the systems producing that observation (note: if the winners happen to be the opposite team, this is simply compounded in the observation, thus making for the feeling appropriate to such circumstances).

An observer therefore loses itself in its stream of observations – until the stream of observations turns into something else. This is where disorder resurfaces again, not because the system proceeds with its observations in a completely random manner, but because there is a chance for any observation to be contradicted by subsequent observations. What is observed as reality becomes real for the system by virtue of the system's inner functioning, i.e. by virtue of the fact that the said observation occurred as an operation in that system. From this point, the system continues by producing still more observations so as to confront its own observations with even more observations. The system is perpetually testing itself. Through this strategy, the system can oscillate around its own axis, as it were, whenever older observations are updated in light of newer observations. From a first-order perspective, this means that the reality registered by the system changes into a different one: one continues to win – the same event continues to stretch as the same present moment – until one no longer does.

Luhmann sums up:

The system is formed out of unstable elements, which endure for a short time or even, like actions, have no duration of their own but pass away in their very coming to be. Viewed

chronologically, every element, of course, takes up a certain amount of clock time. But the system itself determines the length of time during which an element is created as a unity that cannot be further dissolved; that period has a conferred, not an ontological character. Accordingly, an adequately stable system is composed of unstable elements. It owes its stability to itself, not to its elements; it constructs itself upon a foundation that is entirely not “there,” and this is precisely the sense in which it is autopoietic (1995: 47-48).

The idea is that meaning makes for a saturating experience, as it were, until your first meaningful experience is displaced by another meaningful experience. While your second experience gives you hindsight on your first experience, that second experience proves to be just as saturating in that it submerges you just like the first one did, so much so that it literally becomes the present you are living at that moment. Disorder therefore reappears in the picture in that one always has to *wait and see* how things will turn out to be. Any confirmation is never the last, only the latest one, so that things remain forever in suspension, like in the proverbial tale about a boy, a horse and a Zen master. In the movie *Wilson's War* (2007, directed by Mike Nichols), there is a scene where the main characters (played by Philip Seymour Hoffman and Tom Hanks) retell the story:

Gust Avrakotos: There's a little boy and on his 14th birthday he gets a horse... and everybody in the village says, “How wonderful. The boy got a horse.” And the Zen master says, “We'll see.” Two years later, the boy falls off the horse, breaks his leg, and everyone in the village says, “How terrible.” And the Zen master says, “We'll see.” Then, a war breaks out and all the young men have to go off and fight... except the boy can't cause his legs [are] all messed up. And everybody in the village says, “How wonderful.”

Charlie Wilson: Now the Zen master says, “We'll see.”

Anthony Giddens once aptly remarked that most sociologists managed to integrate time in their description of social existence only in the form of change (1979). For them, social existence displays a very high level of stability, so much so that change remains exceptional. Life in society is regulated or programmed with the precision of a Swiss clock, where every single piece fits with all the other pieces. For change to occur at all, everything must change at once. Clearly, Luhmann deviates from this creed. Change is not so rare that only political revolutions (and successful ones at that) are deemed worthy of the title. For Luhmann, change occurs frequently, if only as small local variations. The system constantly basks in these variations made possible by the environment. The system does not stand as the opposite to these disturbances, but feeds on them to sustain itself. In fact, in place of the classical dichotomy between stability and change (or continuity and discontinuity) scorned by Giddens, Luhmann raises another

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Are relational processes teleological or self-referential? What relational sociology can learn from systems theory.

question: which changes to accept and which ones to reject? This leads us to our next section.

Disorder and the interplay of expectations and surprises

At this point, Luhmann's ideas about social systems coalesce into a theory of surprises (surprise!). This is not to say that Luhmann can accurately predict surprises – if so, there would no longer be surprises – but that his theory can identify the social conditions that surprises as phenomena of their own depend on. In turn, this provides additional precision about the place and role of disorder in the way social systems operate.

Social systems not only manage to reproduce themselves, as we explained in the previous sections. In addition, they also manage to evolve. When it comes to social systems in particular, evolution implies the selection and retention of expectations (Luhmann 1995). In Bateson's metalogue, the conversation going on between father and daughter does not shrink down to the ideas expressed among them. At the same time, the conversation amounts to a self-contained situation. For instance, the conversation is recognised as "serious". The participants are not merely goofing around and joking about. Once again, that agreement or convention regarding the nature or purpose of the activity at hand is determined in the course of the same activity. Luhmann introduces the concept of expectation to account for this sort of development.

Once acquired, expectations bring stability in social interactions because you can then anticipate (i.e. expect) what others expect from you (Luhmann 1995: 303). Among other things, the selection of expectations in social contexts coincides in practice with the definition of roles. Other examples include the development of programmes as sequences of actions or steps for individuals to follow while playing along the role given to them. On a more general level, expectations also come in the form of values providing justification for specific programmes. At the other extreme, expectations finally congeal around persons, i.e. what people get to know you for as one individual: your personality, your style, your track record, your reputation, etc. (on the concept of roles, programmes, values and persons, see Luhmann 1995: 315-318).

Note that a difference remains between expectation and behaviour. The expectations that are cultivated in social systems result from the efforts made by multiple individuals to coordinate themselves with each other and maintain predictability. Yet the creation or selection of these expectations does not strictly bind the individuals participating in the operations of social systems. Put differently, while expectations enable anticipation – so that one can hope to trigger reaction X by doing Y – individuals can still deviate from them either by choice or by accident. Whatever

the cause may be (and this depends on the other individuals observing the deviant after the fact), it forces the system to react again. Except this time the problem does not lie in the complete absence of expectations (which makes an overwhelming situation for the participants, since they cannot tell what will happen). Now the challenge is to decide what to do with the set of expectations that has prevailed until then.

In other words, we speak of surprise when the operation produced by a social system is not in line with what the same system has led us to expect up to this point. The experience of surprise lies in its contrast with ongoing expectations. Accordingly, there can be no surprise without expectations. The concept of surprise is therefore useful to operationalise the concept of disorder in social systems. When faced with surprises, social systems are called to revise their expectations, as mentioned just now. Luhmann describes two possible strategies: either learning or enforcing norms (Luhmann 1995: 320-321).

To learn means to change. New events call for new expectations. The latest developments show that we have been holding on to the wrong expectations and/or that we can no longer hold on to the same old expectations. At this point, it becomes clear that we have misled ourselves. The smart thing to do is to abandon these old expectations and start experimenting again. The opposite strategy is to refuse to change by rejecting the latest developments as inappropriate or inadequate anyway. There is no problem with the set of expectations previously selected. If there is any problem, it is with this surprise that proves to be a bad one or an unacceptable one. We therefore reassert our expectations and protect them against change. What the concept of norms implies is exactly this: we do not revise expectations when the world proves us wrong, rather we resist the world by defending our expectations against it.

The word "learning" has presumably a positive ring to it, while Luhmann's treatment of norms may suggest something stubborn or unreasonable, perhaps even dangerous (as with religious fundamentalism). Luhmann is not trying to elevate one over the other. He merely identifies the different mechanisms whereby a social system comes to evolve and develop itself. A system that would change constantly would never grow in complexity in that it would never secure a basic structure as a foundation to build on. At the other end, a system that would never change would undermine its capacity to adapt so as to survive. Social systems that continue to thrive over time engage in both strategies simultaneously: learning as much as norm enforcement.

At this point, it becomes quite clear how Luhmann's systems theory overlaps with François Dépelteau's project of relational sociology. About two actors designated as A and B, François wrote: "A is what it is and does what it does because A interacts [i.e. transacts] with B, and viceversa" (Dépelteau 2018a: 513). He thus insisted that social actors are interdependent and coproducers of their reciprocal relations (or social fields). Even though he wished

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Are relational processes teleological or self-referential? What relational sociology can learn from systems theory.

to avoid projecting a difference between a micro level and a macro level, François nonetheless produced formulations that suggest a bottom-up movement: from the actors to the relations encompassing them all. By contrast, Luhmann seems to privilege a top-down approach: from the encompassing relation to the actors involved in them (although this is not exactly accurate either). Ultimately though, when Luhmann accounts for the creation of expectations whereby persons, roles, programmes and values come to be defined through the operations of social systems (without foreclosing the possibility of revising the said expectations afterwards), what he is suggesting strongly echoes François' own proposals.

Conclusion

Would François Dépelteau have ever embraced Luhmann's systems theory as an expression or a version of his vision of relational sociology? I cannot be completely sure because I continue to think that François would have been probably turned off by Luhmann's uncompromising and unflinching theoretical apparatus. Nevertheless, I also continue to think that François' deep relationalism is strongly reminiscent of Luhmann's radical constructivism. It is to better enlighten this connection that I introduced in this article a distinction between teleological process and self-referential process.

Indeed, I contend that the concept of process causes some difficulties in that it tends to force us to assume some sort of teleology, with a clear beginning and a simple end, as in the case of boiling water. But this teleological requirement makes for processes that are all too rigid and reductive, which then runs counter to the hopes of relational sociology (or relational galaxy). Alternatively, one can take advantage of the concept of self-reference as operationalised by Luhmann in his systems theory. Relational processes can then be remodelled as self-referential systems. Rather than being "caught" between an initial state and a final state, self-referential systems are constantly reacting to the disorder that they trigger themselves. Self-referential systems continue to reproduce themselves and to evolve by transforming this disorder into order.

While systems are busy transforming the disorder internal to them, they can never completely eradicate it because they themselves can only exist in a state of partial disorganisation. That peculiar condition is due to the fact that (a) social systems must achieve autonomy from their environment so as to generate their own observations, (b) the ongoing operations of a system can be reversed by the subsequent operations of that same system, as indicated by Luhmann's concept of meaning, and (c) systems allow for the development of expectations, which in turn allows for surprises.

In a way, this article is a metalogue in its own right (see Bateson). That is, it is a reaction to a certain ambiguity that has

been arising along with the focus on processual thinking within relational sociology. Hence, the objective was to clarify this issue – the difference between teleological process and self-referential process – and redirect the course of the conversation (and thereby assuming the risk of triggering new ambiguities hereafter). Disorder has been transformed into order – at least, for now – so that, as in life, the system can go on with its operations.

References

- BATESON, Gregory. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972. ISBN 0-226-03905-6.
- BUNNELL, Pille. Reflections on the Ontology of Observing. In: *Cybernetics and Human Knowing*. 2004. Vol. 11, no. 4, pages 72-84. ISSN 0907-0877.
- DOUGLAS, Mary. *Purity and Danger*. New York: Routledge, 2002. ISBN 0-7100-1299-3.
- DELEUZE, Gilles and GUATTARI, Félix. *A Thousand Plateaus*. London: Athlone Press, 1988. ISBN-10: 948511335X ISBN-13: 9780485113358.
- DÉPELTEAU, François. Relational Thinking: A Critique of Co-Deterministic Theories of Structure and Agency. In: *Sociological Theory*. 2008. Vol. 26, no. 1, pages 51-73. ISSN 0735-2751. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111%2Fj.1467-9558.2008.00318.x>.
- DÉPELTEAU, François. Relational sociology, pragmatism, transactions and social fields. In: *International Review of Sociology*. 2015. Vol. 25, no. 1, pages 45-64. ISSN 1469-9273. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2014.997966>.
- DÉPELTEAU, François. From the Concept of 'Trans-Action' to a Process-Relational Sociology. In: DÉPELTEAU, François (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018a. Pages 499-519. ISBN-10: 3319881507 ISBN-13: 978-3319881508. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_25.
- DÉPELTEAU, François. Relational Thinking in Sociology: Relevance, Concurrence and Dissonance. In: DÉPELTEAU, François (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018b. Pages 3-33. ISBN-10: 3319881507 ISBN-13: 978-3319881508. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_1.
- DEWEY, John and BENTLEY, Arthur F. Knowing and the Known. In: BOYDSTON, J. A. (ed.). *John Dewey, Later Works 1925-1953* (vol. 16: 1949-1952). Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989 [1949]. Pages 1-294. ISBN-10: 0809315378 ISBN-13: 978-0809315376.
- EMIRBAYER, Mustafa. Manifesto for a Relational Sociology. In: *American Journal of Sociology*. 1997. Vol. 103, no. 2, pages 281-317. ISSN 0002-9602. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/231209>.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Are relational processes teleological or self-referential? What relational sociology can learn from systems theory.

- FUCHS, Stephan. *Against Essentialism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001. ISBN 978-0-674-03741-0.
- GIDDENS, Anthony. *Central Problems in Social Theory*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979. ISBN-10: 0520039750 ISBN-13: 978-0520039759.
- GUY, Jean-Sébastien. Is Niklas Luhmann a Relational Sociologist? In: DÉPELLEAU, François (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018a. Pages 289-304. ISBN-10: 3319881507 ISBN-13: 978-3319881508.
- GUY, Jean-Sébastien. Niklas Luhmann before relational sociology: the cybernetics roots of systems theory. In: *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*. 2018b. Vol. 35, no. 6. Pages 856-868. ISSN 1099-1743. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/sres.2523>.
- GUY, Jean-Sébastien. *Theory Beyond Structure and Agency*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. ISBN-10: 3030189856 ISBN-13: 978-3030189853.
- HEIDER, Fritz. *Chose et médium*. Paris: Vrin, 2017. ISBN-10: 2711627721 ISBN-13: 978-2711627721.
- LUHMANN, Niklas. *Social Systems*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995. ISBN-10: 0804726256 ISBN-13: 978-0804726252.
- LUHMANN, Niklas. *Theories of Distinction*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002. ISBN-10: 0804741220 ISBN-13: 978-0804741224.
- LUHMANN, Niklas. *Theory of Society, Volume 1*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012. ISBN-10: 0804739501 ISBN-13: 978-0804739504.
- LUHMANN, Niklas. *Introduction to Systems Theory*. Cambridge: Polity, 2013a. ISBN-10: 0745645720 ISBN-13: 978-0745645728.
- LUHMANN, Niklas. *Theory of Society, Volume 2*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013b. ISBN-10: 080477160X ISBN-13: 978-0804771603.
- MATURANA, Humberto and VARELA, Francisco. *Autopoiesis and Cognition*. London: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1972.
- MORGNER, Christian (ed.). *John Dewey and the Notion of Trans-action*. Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020a. ISBN-10: 3030263797 ISBN-13: 978-3030263799.
- MORGNER, Christian. Reinventing Social Relations and Processes: John Dewey and Trans-Actions. In: MORGNER, Christian (ed.). *John Dewey and the Notion of Trans-action*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020b. Pages 1-30. ISBN-10: 3030263797 ISBN-13: 978-3030263799.
- NAGEL, Thomas. *The View from Nowhere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986. ISBN-10: 0195036689 ISBN-13: 978-0195036688.
- PRIGOGINE, Ilya. *The End of Certainty*. New York: Free Press, 1997. ISBN-10: 0684837055 ISBN-13: 978-0684837055.
- PRIGOGINE, Ilya and STENGERS, Isabelle. *Entre le temps et l'éternité*. Paris: Flammarion, 1992. ISBN-10: 2080812629 ISBN-13: 978-2080812629.
- PRIGOGINE, Ilya and STENGERS, Isabelle. *Order Out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature*. London: Verso, 2017. ISBN 9781786631008.
- VANDENBERGHE, Frédéric. The Relation as Magical Operator: Overcoming the Divide Between Relational and Processual Sociology. In: DÉPELLEAU, François (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Pages 35-57. ISBN-10: 3319881507 ISBN-13: 978-3319881508.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Are relational processes teleological or self-referential? What relational sociology can learn from systems theory.

Jean-Sébastien Guy

(jsguy@dal.ca)

Assistant Professor; Undergraduate Education Coordinator

Dalhousie University

Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

Jean-Sébastien Guy is a sociologist interested in sociological theory in general, whether classical (Durkheim, Marx, Simmel, Weber) or contemporary (Bourdieu, Foucault, Giddens, Luhmann) or anything in between (Garfinkel, Goffman, Lévi-Strauss, Parsons) or even off to the side (Deleuze, Wittgenstein). Rather than studying theory through an author's life or context, Dr. Guy approaches theory as revolving around a set of abstract problems, including central oppositions like individual/society, micro/macro, structure/agency, continuity/change, order/disorder, modernity/tradition, power/freedom, and so on.

Following this strategy, Dr. Guy has been using Niklas Luhmann's systems theory to develop a new way to look at globalisation - specifically, globalisation as society's self-description - and the issues linked to it, such as the global/local interface, the role of the state, and the influence of culture. More recently, he started working on formulating a new conceptual distinction aiming at replacing some of the older oppositions mentioned above: the metric/nonmetric distinction, which is inspired by the work of Manuel DeLanda.

Web: <https://www.dal.ca/faculty/arts/sociology-social-anthropology/faculty-staff/our-faculty/jean-sebastien-guy.html>

UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Special Section: “Special Issue guest-edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of François Dépelteau”

François Dépelteau and the generation of a relational intellectual community

Scott Eacott
UNSW Sydney

Date of submission: May 2019
Accepted in: June 2020
Published in: February 2021

Recommended citation:

EACOTT, Scott (2021). “François Dépelteau and the generation of a relational intellectual community”. In: SELG, Peeter. “Special Issue guest-edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of François Dépelteau”. [online article]. *Digithum*, no. 26, pp. 1-11. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and Universidad de Antioquia. [Accessed: dd/mm/yy]. <http://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.374154>



The texts published in this journal are – unless otherwise indicated – covered by the Creative Commons Spain Attribution 4.0 International licence. The full text of the licence can be consulted here: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Abstract

François Dépelteau is a major figure in the contemporary rise of relational scholarship. His untimely passing casts a shadow over the relational research community, particularly those with close ties to the Canadian sociological association research cluster. This paper seeks to honour the contribution and legacy of François through a relational analysis of a relational research community. Mobilising Eacott's *relational* approach, this paper turns relational scholarship upon itself to argue that the relational research community is organised around two fundamental questions – the explanatory and the empirical. François was not only embedded in, but embodied, this relationality. His approach to scholarship serves as an invitation, an invitation to think with, through and where necessary against relations in the pursuit of offering generative insights. François generated the conditions for many previously disparate researchers to come together and the challenge has now shifted to us – the relational research community – to honour him and continue this research agenda.

Keywords

organising activity, auctor, spatio-temporal conditions, relational, sociology, community, François Dépelteau

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

François Dépelteau and the generation of a relational intellectual community

François Dépelteau y la generación de una comunidad intelectual relacional

Resumen

François Dépelteau es una figura importante del auge contemporáneo del saber relacional. Su fallecimiento prematuro proyecta una sombra sobre la comunidad de investigación relacional, y, en particular, sobre quien tiene vínculos estrechos con el grupo de investigación de la asociación sociológica canadiense. En este artículo se rinde homenaje a la contribución y al legado de François a través de un análisis relacional de una comunidad de investigación relacional. Con la movilización [eliminada para revisión] del enfoque relacional, el artículo se centra en el saber relacional para argumentar que la comunidad de investigación relacional se organiza alrededor de dos cuestiones fundamentales: la explicativa y la empírica. François no solo estaba dentro de esta relacionalidad, sino que también la personificaba. Su punto de vista del saber resulta en una invitación, una invitación a pensar con, a través de y cuando sea necesario contra las relaciones en la búsqueda de ofrecer conocimientos generativos. François creó las condiciones para que muchos investigadores que no conectaban entre sí se unieran, y ahora el reto recae sobre nosotros, sobre la comunidad de investigación relacional, para homenajearlo y seguir con este programa de investigación.

Palabras clave

organización de la actividad, auctor, condiciones espaciotemporales, relacional, sociología, comunidad, François Dépelteau

Introduction

Early morning, at least it was in Sydney Australia, on the 23 November 2015 I received an email from François Dépelteau. The email served two purposes. First, it was to let me know he had come across my work and found it interesting. Being aware of François' work courtesy of the conceptualising and analysing relational sociology books with Christopher Powell (Dépelteau & Powell, 2013; Powell & Dépelteau, 2013), to have my work acknowledged and validated by him was intellectually pleasing. However, it was not the kind words but the second purpose of the email that was most telling about my interactions with François. He said that my work would be of interest to members of the Relational Sociology Cluster of the Canadian Sociological Association / Société canadienne de sociologie¹, and that I would find the work of members and emerging projects of equal interest. Rather than just seeking to build a critical mass to artificially inflate the scope and scale of the cluster, what was on offer was an invitation, an opportunity to be part of an intellectual community. Consistent with my unfolding relations with him over the following few years, François not only promoted but lived a relational approach. Through his ideas and commitment to relationality, he was constitutive of and emergent from a relational community.

François' untimely passing meant that I never got the opportunity to meet him in person. Instead, my interactions were limited to 150-200 emails between 2015 and 2018. Throughout those emails there is a sharing of ideas, working papers and feedback, and general strategising about building research programmes, both individual and collective. What I found most impressive about François was his commitment to the logic of academic work – argument and refutation. While he never used that language to describe his way of working, he was deeply committed to rigorous and robust scholarly debate. Significantly though, François did not seek to impose a single version of relational scholarship even if he did desire some clarity of the overarching project of relational sociology and what are relations. He wrote about the importance of controversy and distinctions within academic communities and their importance for advancing understanding (Dépelteau, 2018a). By not imposing a single version of relationality, François is embedded in and embodying of a relational community. While evidenced through traditional academic outputs (e.g., edited collections, the handbook, book series, conference sessions), collectives (e.g., the cluster), and connections with individuals, this relational research community can be explained in terms not necessarily associated with thinking of its constitution being made up of things. In other words, we can describe and explain the contribution and legacy of François to this community relationally.

1. See: <http://www.csa-scs.ca/files/webapps/csapress/relational/>

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

François Dépelteau and the generation of a relational intellectual community

In early 2018, during my last conversation with François, he challenged me to continue developing my *relational* approach.² In particular, he pushed me to move beyond the theoretical articulation of the work [e.g., Eacott, 2018] to show what it could do with regards to describing and explaining the problems and possibilities of the social world. I have sought to honour this challenge by returning to the Canadian Sociological Association / Société canadienne de sociologie to present ongoing work and sustain connections with cluster colleagues. Continuing to honour this challenge, it seems only fitting to mobilise the *relational* as an analytical resource in this paper. However, I am aware that the very act of crafting an analysis of François (and the relational research community to which I identify) runs the risk of objectifying a real person – one whom I never met in person. What this requires is a constant vigilance to ensure that I am not making François into a substance (an external knowable entity) and therefore violating the fundamental premise of relational scholarship.

Analytical approach

While the legacy of François Dépelteau continues to permeate throughout the relational research community, his final gift to me is in generating an opportunity to make public an analysis mobilising my *relational* approach to demonstrate the possibilities (and problems) of *relational* analysis. Best articulated in 'Beyond Leadership' (Eacott, 2018), the relational as methodology concerns our ontological complicity with the world as it is; problematising common labels; thinking through the embedded and embodied nature of the social to overcome analytical dualism and offer a generative contribution, not merely critique. Bringing the focus of this Special Section on the contribution and legacy of François Dépelteau into conversation with the *relational* approach, the analytical approach of this paper can be expressed as:

- The centrality of 'François Dépelteau' in the relational sociology community makes it difficult to epistemologically break with the ideal form of him;
- Rigour and robust social scientific inquiry calls into question labels of 'relational research community' and/or 'intellectual movement';
- The relational sociology community is at once constitutive of and emergent from the image of relations we hold;

- In turning relational analysis upon itself we can go beyond orthodox analytical dualisms and hyper-differentiation that exist throughout much social thought and analysis; and
- In doing so, there is a generative – not just critical – means to theorise the contribution and legacy of François Dépelteau and the relational research community.

The type of analysis made possible by this *relational* approach is to make public an analysis of the contribution and legacy of François Dépelteau, and arguably an emerging relational research community to which I identify, without uncritically objectifying both. That is, by shifting from a substantialist to relational ontology, we are able to demonstrate constant vigilance against objectifying while still describing and explaining what is unfolding in the social. There is recognition of the at once constitution and emergence of the social world through our relations. With the centrality of François Dépelteau to the contemporary momentum of relational sociology, and this paper being a contribution to a Special Section devoted to his contribution and legacy, the *relational* approach helps to highlight the enduring struggle to break from substantialism and offer a productive contribution that is a viable alternative to describing and explaining unfolding activities without defaulting to an analysis that starts and ends with critique or uncritical advocacy.

In crafting my argument I draw on the three key concepts of the *relational* approach: *organising activity*, *actor*, and *spatio-temporal conditions*. The very genesis of relational sociology is a break from substantialism. To adhere to this break means it is inappropriate to consider François Dépelteau and/or the relational research community as a static external and knowable entity. Instead, there is a need to focus on how the very idea of François and the relational research community organises the social world or in *relational* terms serves as an *organising activity*. In doing so, there is a move away from, or more specifically a dissolving of, the perceived distance between activities and context. This leaves traditional ideas of actors (those acting upon) or agents (those exercising agency over) and a separate context constrained by substantialism. To overcome this perceived distance between substances we have the concept of *actor*. Meaning 's/he who generates',³ this shifts the focus from the interactions among entities (a variable-based approach to understanding the social world), to one based on relations. Having dissolved the distance between activity and context, or more specifically denied its existence in the first place, we similarly cannot talk

2. As stylistic points, *relational* when referring to the explicit research programme is always italicised. The concepts of *actor*, *organising activity*, and *spatio-temporal conditions* are in lower case, and the latter is always plural. Such specificity may appear as prescriptive, and to some extent is it, however, it is also important for establishing distinctions, maintaining theoretical coherence, and reminding the reader that there is a sophisticated set of ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions in such terms.

3. Pierpaolo Donati (2015) has a single, in parentheses, reference to the concept 'actor' including the definition of 's/he who generates' (p. 88), but I am unaware of any other publications where he further develops this idea.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

François Dépelteau and the generation of a relational intellectual community

of time and space as separate to activity. To this end, I mobilise *spatio-temporal conditions*. Taken together, the three *relational* concepts have the logic of *auctors* generating *spatio-temporal conditions* through *organising activity*. Embedded and embodying a relational ontology, the logic of the *relational* as a methodology proves a framing that concerns both description and explanation of how our understanding of the contribution and legacy of François Dépelteau and the relational research community is at once constitutive of and emergent from our image of relations.

An embedded and embodied auctor

François completed his doctorate in political science with Carol Levasseur at Laval University (Québec City)⁴, but his interest in relational scholarship was heightened following reading Norbert Elias' (1978[1970]) 'What is sociology?' and Mustafa Emirbayer's (1997) manifesto for a relational sociology (Guy, 2019). Most influential in his ongoing scholarship, at least from my reading, is the work of John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley (1949). It is this pragmatist influence that leads François in a 2015 paper to raise what he sees as two fundamental questions for the unfolding development of relational scholarship: i) the practical question of why do we need relational sociology?; and ii) the ontological question of what do we study in relational sociology? (Dépelteau, 2015). In addition, this 2015 paper featured in a Special Section of *International Review of Sociology / Revue Internationale de Sociologie* that featured Pierpaolo Donati, Nick Crossley, Jan Fuhse, and Riccardo Prandini. Jean-Sébastien Guy (2019) notes that appearing among this group of scholars confirmed François' status within this emerging intellectual movement. The two questions that François asks, what I would label the explanatory (ontological) and the empirical (practical) questions, serve as an *organising activity* for the relational intellectual community and François is embedded in and embodying of these questions.

Despite the contemporary interest, there is a long history to relational scholarship in the social sciences which Mustafa Emirbayer (1997) traces back to at least the preSocratic thinker Heraclitus. Even with this lengthy history, orthodox approaches remain substantialist. This is what makes an analysis of François' contribution so interesting. There is little doubt that François is deeply embedded in the contemporary rise of relational scholarship through the edited collections with Christopher Powell (Dépelteau & Powell, 2013; Powell & Dépelteau, 2013), the establishment of the Relational Sociology Cluster in the Canadian Sociological Association, launching the book series with Palgrave⁵, and notably,

the Handbook of Relational Sociology (Dépelteau, 2018b). As Frédéric Vandenberghe (2018) notes, Dépelteau is 'the man who put RS [relational sociology] on the agenda' (p. 638). The name 'François Dépelteau' has become synonymous with relational sociology, and in particular the Canadian-centric community of scholars – more than just corresponding to a real person, the very idea of François is relational. These relations are emergent from his approach to working, both the product of those activities and the accounts of those who worked with him, and are central to how we understand relational scholarship. In many ways, this is not surprising. As François (2018a) notes, 'relational thinking is much more than a call for studying relations. It is a worldview insisting on our interdependency rather than our independence' (p. 30). The strength of this claim can be evidenced in a series of tributes at the time of his passing,⁶ Peeter Selg notes:

I was always fascinated by how quickly he organized things and how unfeigned his working style was. I dare say that we became friends immediately, spending long hours in the pub and actually discussing – not just presenting – different viewpoints on sociology and wider issues. ... Our debates would sometimes get quite heated, almost on the verge of shouting at each other. But that's how it is supposed to be between equals: you don't condescend; you don't dismiss the argument by quickly finding it 'interesting'; you actually take it seriously and engage in an agonistic debate with it with passion, irony and witty humour.

Jean-Sébastien Guy states something similar, adding that François remained very humble and that:

He was not interested in setting up a school of thought. He was not searching for disciples, but for colleagues or even friends – not people to boss around, but people to cooperate with as equals.

Tracey L. Adams describes François' approach at the Canadian Review of Sociology (where he was editor) as seeking 'to stimulate discussion and debate among sociologists'. These various observations are significant. The idea of François and his approach to both scholarship and being a scholar have become central to the unfolding intellectual movement of relational scholarship. My own work and identity is interwoven in the constitution and emergence of this relational intellectual movement. This vested interest and stake in any potential advancement and/or refutation of François' contribution and legacy and the wider relational movement is important. This is not about injecting myself into the narrative but rather to illuminate the relational – embedded and embodied

4. It is worth noting that Jean-Sébastien Guy also completed his doctoral studies with Carol Levasseur at Laval, although not at the same time.

5. See: <https://www.palgrave.com/us/series/15100>

6. See: <https://www.csa-scs.ca/index.php?p=news.ViewStory&story=118>

– nature of intellectual work. My introduction to and activities within the relational sociology community are “explicitly tied” to François. In the very act of writing about François and adding to the Special Section I am further embedded and embodying of the relational scholarly community. While there is a long history of social scientific research stressing the embeddedness of the author in analysis, rarely are our complicity and orientations made explicit in our writing. This is more than a comment on the construction of knowledge; rather it speaks to me being at stake in my own argument and the construction of the focus of inquiry. My relations with François without having ever physically met him illuminates the potential of relational analysis while also highlighting how my experiences of François and his curated outputs are correlated with the accounts of others whom I know (e.g., Peeter Selg, Jean-Sébastien Guy) and know of (e.g. Tracey L. Adams).

This highlights the potential of *auctor*. Rather than an outsider looking in, I am embedded and embodying of the argument of this paper. Destabilising the ontological security of François and the relational research community that I am focused on necessitates the shift from a substantialist to a relational ontology. Seeing the world as relations and not things heightens the importance of acknowledging positionality. Relational scholarship only functions insofar as it generates a belief in the value of its work (why we need relational scholarship) and its means of analysis (both what and how we study relation). Positionality matters here; as *auctors* we are at once constitutive of and emergent from the *organising activity* of the relational research community. As Christopher Powell (2013) notes, positionality is a strength and not a weakness of scholarship. He goes so far as to suggest that this positionality as opposed to objectivity should be the standard for validity of social scientific knowledge claims. For me, François is central to my understanding of relationalism, both as an organiser of major events/outputs but also the ideal form of him built up through accounts of his way of working in building momentum for an intellectual movement.

A social epistemology

While there has been debate concerning whether there has been / is a ‘relational turn’ in the social sciences (e.g., Dépelteau, 2018b; Prandini, 2015), identifying such an event or movement is far less important than describing and explaining how working relationally plays out. Not surprisingly, the relational scholarly community is relational. François is central to this, with Frédéric Vandenberghe (2018) stating that without him relational sociology ‘would not

have been so relational, and the international network he weaved together would only have been an academic network and not a friendly society’ (p. 637). The strength of the explanatory and empirical questions as the *organising activity* of relational scholarship is that it does not require commitment to a singular version of what is (or is not) a relational approach. Nor does it centre entirely on any one person. Instead it remains focused on dialogue and debate concerning the explanation and description of the social built on a plurality that lays the foundations of a social epistemology.

This organising around fundamental questions rather than a singular coherent research programme is a challenge for orthodox ways of understanding scholarly movements. In her review of the 2013 Dépelteau and Powell edited collections, Emily Erikson (2015) highlights the apparent lack of an identifiable theory of relations – more than just a commitment to a relational approach – bringing a sense of coherence to a larger project. She also queries the periphery of relationalism in sociology, which is not entirely removed from the coherence argument, and illuminates how Mustafa Emirbayer’s manifesto is based on a coherent relational interpretation of pragmatism. However, while a sense of coherence and a singular framing may hold an appeal for developing large-scale research programmes, it is not the only way to organise research at scale. The *organising activity* of the relational research community that is the focus of this paper⁷ is concerned with dialogue and debate of the explanatory and empirical questions of relationality. This is captured for example in a published discussion in ‘Theory’, the newsletter of the research committee on sociological theory of the International Sociological Association (Dépelteau, Fuhse, et al., 2015) where community members debated fundamental ideas in the spirit of collegiality and engagement with the core issues. As *auctors* working through this *organising activity*, the relational research community does not necessarily require an overarching coherence beyond the commitment to the fundamental questions.

The enduring project of the relational research community is therefore not built on a singular version but the opportunity for ongoing relations. This is how the ideal form of François has become so central to the community. From establishing the research cluster, the edited collections, dialogues, and the handbook, his legacy is sustained courtesy of the traces of his relations throughout the community. By not imposing a single version of relationality, the community is at once constitutive of and emergent from ongoing relations. Not aligning with an orthodox Kuhnian version of paradigmatic thought built on the accumulation of knowledge production and significant ruptures, the genesis of

7. I state this as I am aware that there are other communities, such as the one primarily built around Pierpaolo Donati in Italy (see: <https://www.relationals-tudies.net/>). This is not to say there are not overlaps, as François notes Donati’s attendance at events, but my focus remains on one, not the only relational research community.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

François Dépelteau and the generation of a relational intellectual community

relational thought was the rupture. While new techniques may advance scholarship (e.g., the increasing sophistication of social network analysis), and multiple variants of approaches emerge, the *organising activity* holding the community together is ongoing dialogue – unfolding activity. The relational will always be a little fuzzy and illdefined. There is arguably never going to be a major rupture of the status quo, just an ongoing project. The relational research community is generated through unfolding activity and relating that activity to other unfolding activity (including those labelled substantialist) all the while recognising the embedded and embodied nature of this understanding. Working through relations means that *auctors* (community members) generate the *spatio-temporal conditions* through which the *organising activity* is sustained.⁸ A community built on a social epistemology focused on explanation and description dissolves the artificial partitions erected around traditional fields and replaces them with dialogue.

A social epistemology is a relational space. As noted earlier, François (2018a) insists that a relational worldview concerns interdependency rather than independence. The parallel monologues that are evident in many fields, where researchers can continue throughout their careers by ignoring those with whom they disagree, do not work in relational scholarship as it requires engagement. Significantly, there are no clearly defined boundaries for relational scholarship. While sociology makes some claims to the relational, there is no single field that can lay definitive claim to being the sole proprietor of relationality. Through a focus on relations rather than substances (e.g., academic fields), boundaries between fields are blurred. The relational as an approach to knowledge production and consumption recasts orthodox field dynamics. Although François defaults to identifying sociologists, and this is understandable given his specific work around relational sociology, the larger point about the nature of relational work is important. In the Handbook of Relational Sociology (2018b) he notes ‘we find such a group of sociologists working on a broad and fundamental topic (the study of relations), who come to the discussion with so many influences and orientations’ (p. vi), adding:

This mixture of a general interest for relations and a high diversity of influences is a fertile soil for fundamental, rich and promising discussions, especially when competent specialists are willing to play the game. We have something in common and we have different ideas to bring to the table. We can compare and test various relational ideas thanks to discussions and empirical demonstrations. (p. vi)

A relational research community is held together by relations. To appropriate Pierpaolo Donati (2015), the community does not have

relations but is relations. The focus on explanatory and empirical questions means that it is an inclusive space. *Auctors* generate the community and by not focusing on a particular suite of methods and/or content area, contribute to its ongoing expansion. As the contemporary interest expands, so too do the *spatio-temporal conditions* of the community. With the *organising activity* of the community based on a commitment to relations, diversity of empirical foci generates a richness of contributions while reducing the competition of orthodox fields. These contributions exist within unfolding relations and not in a competition to offer ‘the’ best or dominate explanation of the social world.⁹ It does not mean there is not a desire to advance scholarship, but it is less about winners and losers and more about being in relation. This is challenging to the orthodoxy of individualism and substantialism that dominates much of Western social thought and analysis. However, the relational research community has demonstrated this diversity and richness through the diverse foci of contributions to the book series and across the handbook and edited collection initiated by François.

The constitution and emergence of a relational community

Shifting focus from substances to relations does not negate the value of specific empirical questions. As Dépelteau (2015) argues, relational scholarship is only useful ‘if it can propose a new solution to some fundamental issues in comparison to previous theories’ (p. 47). The value of relational scholarship is however already obvious to its advocates. Its significance comes from being able to offer not iterations of existing positions but genuine alternatives. Mustafa Emirbayer’s (1997) manifesto raises the idea that relational scholarship offers a viable alternative to substantialism for understanding the social world. Rather than seeing the world as a collective of things, relationalism seeks to not only acknowledge but capture the complexity and dynamism of the social as best it can be through relations. What is studied are relations, so whatever empirical example is chosen the relational focus means that research engages with many of the key debates in the social sciences.

In recent papers in the British Journal of Sociology, Nicholas Gane (2020) and Mike Savage (2020) engage in an exchange about the value of analysis, explanation and causality (Gane) and description (Savage). While there is a robust and rigorous argument underway, relational research offers a potential resolution to the problem by not seeing them (explanation and description) as

8. In doing so, the *relational* approach speaks to both the explanatory and empirical (causal) questions.

9. Not to mention that such a position assumes there is an external knowable reality that can be known separate to the individual – a position at odds with a relational ontology.

separate tasks. If contemporary conditions are at once constitutive of and emergent from our image of the social, then description and explanation are embedded in scholarship. The methodologies that mobilise relational theory through methods to describe the social world are at once describing and explaining. For example, it is imperative in this paper that I do not simply describe François and/or his work as this would illuminate little that was not already known. Importantly, it does little to explain why a special section is dedicated to him. However, mobilising relational thinking, and in this specific case the *relational* approach, we can show how the *organising activity* of the explanatory and empirical question generates the *spatio-temporal conditions* of a relational research community through *auctors* engaging in ongoing activity. Rather than a circular logic, it is a means of embedding constitution and emergence in description. In other words, work that analyses, explains, describes and includes causality.

It is difficult to define or name a relational research community without defaulting to a substantialist position. To avoid this, I argue that the relational research community that I am focusing on is constituted by activity – not a person (even if François is the stimulus for the paper) or structural arrangements (such as the research cluster). Shifting from a human- or structural-centric approach to activity integrates *spatio-temporal conditions* in ways that material accounts do not. The work of relational scholarship here is to describe temporary – even if patterned and durable – activities (e.g., conferences, publications, scholarly discourse) and relate those to other unfolding activities without necessarily granting ontological security to ‘the community’. Peeter Selg (2020) argues that constitution and causality is what relational sociologists aspire to in committing to relations in social research. By relating unfolding activity to other unfolding activity without granting ontological status to a community, the *relational* approach meets the requirement of constitution and causality (emergence).

The edited collections, handbook, establishing the research cluster, annual conference sessions and online meetings are the activities that constitute the relational research community, but they are not ‘the community’. The community is the relations. These relations generate ongoing activities – therefore have a reality of their own, not simply derived from something else (e.g., interactions) nor psychic or merely in the minds of the observer. François was, and remains, central to these relations, but he was not alone. The ongoing work is evidence that it is difficult, if not impossible to identify a point of genesis for a community even if significant events can be named. This takes us back to our complicity with relations as it is this commitment to relations that enables a relational research community to

exist. This means that the focal community of this paper is not solely the outcome of François’ efforts, but at the same time, it was not possible without him either. François, both the person and the ideal form, is both embedded and embodied in this community. His name has become synonymous with relationalism.

Currently, the relational sociology cluster has over 130 members, from more than 25 countries. In discussing its activities François (2018b) noted that ‘nothing was really planned. Just one interaction leading to another’ (p. ix). It is this emergence of activity that has become pivotal to the enduring project of the relational research community. François, and others, proposed ideas that he wanted discussed and improved. This serves as an invitation – one to think with, through, and where necessary against relational theorising in the interests of advancing understanding of the social world. This would deliver on the promise of relational research where real discussions would happen and a critical mass of scholars (*auctors*) would reinforce the *organising activity*. Contestation does not disappear, as relationalism is not about consensus, but as François (2018b) argues, the community opens up ‘a space of sociological deliberation where different and rigorously developed relational views are expressed to be discussed, compared and evaluated according to their capacity to improve our understanding of social processes and relations’ (p. xii). The ongoing dialogue and debate, not dependent on any particular members, is generative of *spatio-temporal conditions* and sustains a richness and diversity in the community. Not one built on competition (e.g., winners and losers) but relations.

The handbook, as a major touchstone of the community, serves a larger purpose than simply being an academic output. As François notes, it aims to ‘contribute to setting the agenda for future developments within the discipline’ (Dépelteau, 2018, p. v). The reach of the work, representative and generative of *spatio-temporal conditions*, is impressive – capturing some 32 contributors from 27 different institutions from 13 different nations.¹⁰ The production of the handbook solidifies François’ centrality within the relational research community. As noted previously, he is both embedded and embodied in relationalism, and therefore his name is both constitutive of and emergent from the community. What we study, relations, and how we go about studying them allows us to think about the organising of the community in ways not otherwise possible. Thinking relationally provides a breakthrough for understanding the relational research community and the relations that constitute it. As *auctors* working through the *organising activity* of the community it is possible to avoid hyper-differentiation.

10. Countries represented in the Handbook include Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Israel, Italy, Spain, Sweden, the UK, and the USA. This geographic spread indicates that relational scholarship is not the domain of any particular region or national border.

From hyper-differentiation to community

François drew on Jonathan Turner's (2001) notion of hyper-differentiation and the increasing atomising of scholarly fields as a cautionary tale for the relational research community. The concern being that relational research becomes just another perspective competing for attention. Significantly, the proliferation of increasingly niche areas in the social sciences means that it is more likely that researchers can carve out careers and students generate theses without engaging with alternate explanations. In Jonathan Turner's (2001) words it allows 'scholars and their students to operate without having to justify their importance vis-à-vis other theories' (p. 1). What is distinctive about relational research, and at least the focal community of this paper, is that the *organising activity* constituting and emerging is a social epistemology. Rather than an individual endeavour or seeking to homogenise members at scale, the work of community members as *auctors* requires engagement. This engagement with alternatives (including substantialist accounts) and justifying claims is achieved by relating them to unfolding activities. François consistently demonstrated this by engaging with many colleagues from diverse perspectives.

There is no single right method for the study of relations. François was clear on this. The relational community is a pluralistic social epistemology. It is not however a relativistic space either. The core explanatory and empirical questions generate the *organising activity* that gives a sense of form to the community without imposing a durable structure. Through the ongoing engagement with the *organising activity* of what is and why we need relational scholarship, *auctors* generate *organising activity* in a way which is irreducible to individual *auctors*. While it may be possible to identify various schools of thought or collectives within the broader relational research community such as the New York School (see: Mische, 2011), the critical realists around the work of Pierpaolo Donati, pragmatists building on the work of Dewey and Bentley (where I would locate François), the Manchester School currently led by Nick Crossley, among many others, these communities owe much, if not all, of their distinctive constitution to their relations with alternatives. They exist in relation.

Relationality is the counter narrative to hyper-differentiation. In arguing for the need for relational approaches (François' first question) and explaining what we study when we do (François' second question), scholarship is required to be located within broader dialogue and debate. It cannot simply ignore alternatives, as by articulating the need for and what of relationality it justifies itself against alternatives – responding directly to Jonathan Turner's concern. In constantly justifying its value for understanding the social world, relational research has an embedded safeguard against establishing niches and parallel monologues.

What makes this even more interesting is that in turning relationality on itself, it opens greater possibilities for explanation

and description. For example, while relational scholarship finds its genesis as an alternative to substantialism, the *relational* approach can explain how and why substantialism remains orthodoxy. In what may seem contradictory, the *relational* can be mobilised to explain substantialism and how it remains the hegemonic *organising activity* in social thought and analysis. In contrast, the same cannot be said in reverse. Substantialism cannot explain and/or understand relationalism as it is ontologically incompatible. Yet, for the *relational* approach, it is possible to demonstrate how substantialism is our orthodox way of understanding the social world (*organising activity*), and advanced as *auctors* legitimise and sustain it, expanding its reach and scope (*spatio-temporal conditions*). Being able to locate itself within broader discourses means through attention to the two key questions that François asked concerning why it is needed and what it studies, relational scholarship embodies a constant vigilance against its own importance.

Unfolding intellectual relations

The genesis of relational scholarship is often portrayed as a rupture from substantialism. It is promoted as an alternative that addresses the limitations and constraints of thinking about the world as a constellation of things. However, relational research is more than a critique of substantialism. It offers a generative space for 'productive discussions on fundamental principles and issues' (Dépelteau, 2018b, p. viii). Unlike radical research which seeks to sustain an existence on the periphery of scholarly fields, never achieving orthodox status, relational theorising does not necessarily seek to remain peripheral. Relational research engages with fundamental issues for the social sciences and in the words of François Dépelteau and Christopher Powell (2013), 'analysis is always "conceptual" since it involves recasting the basic terms of our perception, and always "applied" since it invites us to use different modes of perception and orientation in this world' (p. xvi).

More than just critique, relational scholarship offers many of the hallmarks of a 'turn' – an epistemological breakthrough offering a blueprint for the development of a field. However, the strength of the relational research community is also its weakness. As the account presented in this paper has shown, the intellectual movement as the community I have focused on does not have a singular suite of theoretical resources and/or methods. However, what relational research shows is that there is a need to move beyond the idea of seeing the world as static, external knowable things (substances) and embrace the dynamic unfolding of activities. Describing unfolding activity and relating that to other unfolding activity recasts our understanding of causation and, for the reasons outlined by François Dépelteau and Christopher Powell in the previous paragraph, makes a generative contribution. It is not a critique of substantialism, although that is part of it, nor is it a normative appeal for how we should do analysis. Rather, it is

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

François Dépelteau and the generation of a relational intellectual community

a generative space that challenges our understanding and role in the ongoing generation of society.

As *auctors*, members of the relational research community are constantly justifying the need for our analysis through our commitment to the *organising activity* of the community – meeting the requirements of François' explanatory and empirical questions and also Jonathan Turner's concern. In other words, the *organising activity* that is at once constitutive of and emergent from the relational research community generates a belief in the value of its work (why we need relational scholarship) and its means of analysis (both what and how we study relations). Through its own expansion, generating *spatio-temporal conditions*, relational research effectively writes itself into history. This does raise a significant issue, one that I believe remained central to François' work – what is the purpose of the relational project?

There is clearly an appetite for relational scholarship evidenced through the proliferation of the usual academic outputs and it is quite possible that many researchers will be able to carve out careers and be successful academics on the basis of those outputs. However, the purpose of relational research must be more than simply producing more research. For example, has the relational research community been persuasive in convincing anyone who was not already advocating for relationality (in any form)? This is an agenda made even more problematic by the appropriation of the descriptor 'relational' being applied to many approaches, including those based on substantialist ideas, further diluting the distinctions with existing orthodoxy.

The necessary resources for meeting this challenge of purpose being beyond mere production of research are found in the *organising activity* of the community. Describing and explaining the social world through relations is not an individual endeavour. It is achieved through relations. Scholarship is more than the singular relations of the observer and observed. Through what Pierpaolo Donati (2020) refers to as the 'relational gaze', research opens up to alternate points of view. Being open to the messiness of the social world, without necessarily seeking to impose a singular version, is distinctive to the relational. Here is the strength and generative nature of the relational research community. Privileging the why we need it and what we study and relating those alternatives illuminates the problems and possibilities of the social world. It does not uncritically accept a stable knowledge base and seek to proselytise. Instead, what it offers is an invitation. An invitation to join a conversation, an enduring conversation explicitly focused on the relations that constitute and emerge from the social world. In the generation of key texts, the handbook, book series, and key forums (e.g., the cluster), François' work is pivotal to the unfolding activity of the relational research community.

Conclusion

This paper has engaged with a fundamental challenge for relational scholarship, how an analysis of the contribution and legacy of

François Dépelteau might be crafted relationally. Undertaking such a task requires confronting the explanatory and empirical questions of why we need relationality and what it is that we study when we do. Mobilising the *relational* approach, I have turned relational scholarship upon itself to generate my analysis. This has been no easy task as I am embedded and embodying of the community that I focus on and therefore at stake in the analysis. However, this also highlights the strength of the relational research community. Relationality is a way of seeing (ontological), knowing (epistemological) and being (empirical) in the world. It is not a conceptual framework to be applied but a methodology. It is also not an individual endeavour. The relational research community is constituted by and emergent from relations. François Dépelteau's untimely passing is tragic. Through his scholarship – not just his outputs, but his way of going about being a scholar – he embodied relationalism. In honouring his contribution and legacy I see two major courses of actions: first, we continue to see the work of the relational research community as one of an invitation – an invitation to think with, through and where necessary against relationalism in the interests of advancing our descriptions and explanations of the social world; and second, we maintain a focus on being relevant. The many tributes to François at the time of his passing are demonstrative of his contribution to the contemporary relational project. He has generated the conditions for many previously disparate researchers to come together in new relations. The challenge has now shifted to us, the relational research community, to honour François Dépelteau and continue this research agenda.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge colleagues, in particular Mónica J. Sánchez-Flores, Zoltán Lakatos, Jean-Sébastien Guy, Peeter Selg, Richard Niesche, Colin Evers, and participants in the Relational Inquiry in the Social Sciences course I teach in the Faculty of Education of Arts and Social Sciences at UNSW Sydney who have challenged and pushed my work further than would have otherwise been possible.

References

- DÉPELTEAU, François. Relational sociology, pragmatism, transactions and social fields. In: *International Review of Sociology: Revue Internationale de Sociologie*. 2015. Vol. 25, no. 1, pages 45-64. ISSN: 2278-2141. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2014.997966>.
- DÉPELTEAU, François. Relational Thinking in Sociology: Relevance, Concurrence and Dissonance. In: DÉPELTEAU, François (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Cham:

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

François Dépelteau and the generation of a relational intellectual community

- Springer International Publishing, 2018a. Pages 3-33. ISBN-10: 3319660047 ISBN-13: 978-3319660042. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9>.
- DÉPELTEAU, François (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018b. ISBN-10: 3319660047 ISBN-13: 978-3319660042. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9>.
- DÉPELTEAU, François, FUHSE, Jan, et al. Invitation to an ongoing experiment: discussing what relational sociology is. In: *Theory: The Newsletter of the Research Committee on Sociological Theory* (International Sociological Association). 2015. Summer, pages 25-53.
- DÉPELTEAU, François, and POWELL, Christopher (eds.). *Applying Relational Sociology: Relations, Networks and Society*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. ISBN-10: 1137379917 ISBN-13: 978-1137379917.
- DEWEY, John, and BENTLEY, Arthur F. *Knowing and the Known*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1949. ISBN 978-0837184982.
- DONATI, Pierpaolo. Manifesto for a critical realist relational sociology. In: *International Review of Sociology: Revue Internationale de Sociologie*. 2015. Vol. 25, no. 1, pages 86-109. ISSN 2278-2141. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2014.997967>.
- DONATI, Pierpaolo. Fluxes and Structures: Which Relational Gaze? A Comparison between Relational Sociologies. In: *Polish Sociological Review*. 2020. Vol. 2, no. 210, pages 179-197. ISSN 1231-1413. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26412/psr210.03>.
- EACOTT, S. *Beyond Leadership: A Relational Approach to Organizational Theory in Education*. Singapore: Springer, 2018. ISBN 978-981-10-6567-5 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-6568-2>
- ELIAS, Norbert. *What is Sociology?* (Translated by MORRISSEY, Grace, MENNELL, Stephen and JEPHCOTT, Edmund). New York, NY: Columba University Press [Originally published as *Was ist soziologie?* München: Juventa], 1978 [1970]. ISBN-10: 0231045514 ISBN-13 978-0231045513.
- EMIRBAYER, Mustafa. Manifesto for a Relational Sociology. In: *American Journal of Sociology*. 1997. Vol. 103, no. 2, pages 281-317. ISSN 0002-9602. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/231209>.
- ERIKSON, Emily. Relationalism Emergent. In: *Contemporary Sociology*. 2015. Vol. 44, no. 1, pages 3-7. ISSN 0094-3061. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0094306114562200>.
- GANE, Nicholas. Against a descriptive turn. In: *The British Journal of Sociology*. 2020. Vol. 71, no. 1, pages 4-18. ISSN 0007-1315. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12715>.
- GUY, Jean-Sébastien. François Dépelteau (1963-2018). In: *Figurations: Newsletter of the Norbert Elias Foundation*. 2019. Vol. 50 (March), no. 24.
- MISCHE, Ann. Relational Sociology, Culture and Agency. In: SCOTT, John and CARRINGTON, Peter J. (eds.). *The SAGE Handbook of Social Network Analysis*. London: SAGE, 2011. Pages 80-97. ISBN-10: 1847873952 ISBN-13: 978-1847873958. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446294413.n7>.
- POWELL, Christopher. Radical Relationism: A Proposal. In: DÉPELTEAU, François and POWELL, Christopher (eds.). *Conceptualizing Relational Sociology: Ontological and Theoretical Issues*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Pages 187-207. ISBN-10: 1349479020 ISBN-13: 978-1349479023.
- POWELL, Christopher, and DÉPELTEAU, François (eds.). *Conceptualizing Relational Sociology: Ontological and Theoretical Issues*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. ISBN-10: 1349479020 ISBN-13: 978-1349479023.
- PRANDINI, Riccardo. Relational sociology: a well-defined sociological paradigm or a challenging 'relational turn' in sociology? In: *International Review of Sociology*. 2015. Vol. 25, no. 1, pages 1-14. ISSN 2278-2141. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2014.997969>.
- SAVAGE, Mike. What makes for a successful sociology? A response to "Against a descriptive turn". In: *The British Journal of Sociology*. 2020. Vol. 71, no. 1, pages 19-27. ISSN 0007-1315. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12713>.
- SELG, Peeter. Causation Is Not Everything: On Constitution and Trans-Actional View of Social Science Methodology. In: MORGNER, Christian (ed.). *John Dewey and the Notion of Trans-action: A Sociological Reply on Rethinking Relations and Social Processes*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020. Pages 31-53. ISBN-10: 3030263797 ISBN-13: 978-3030263799. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26380-5_2.
- TURNER, Jonathan H. Sociological Theory Today. In: TURNER, Jonathan H. (ed.). *Handbook of Sociological Theory*. Boston, MA: Springer US, 2001. Pages 1-17. ISBN-10: 0387324585 ISBN-13: 978-0387324586. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-36274-6_1.
- VANDENBERGHE, Frédéric. Relational Sociology as a Form of Life: In memoriam François Dépelteau (1963-2018). In: *Canadian Review of Sociology / Revue canadienne de sociologie*. 2018. Vol. 55, no. 4, pages 635-638. ISSN 1755-618X. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/cars.12226>.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

François Dépelteau and the generation of a relational intellectual community

Scott Eacott

UNSW Sydney

s.eacott@unsw.edu.au

Scott Eacott is Associate Professor and Deputy Head of School, Research in the School of Education at UNSW Sydney and Adjunct Professor in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Saskatchewan. He leads the Advancing Relational Theorising Lab and has developed a distinctive relational approach that has led to invitations to run workshops and give talks in Norway, Canada, the USA, Indonesia, South Africa, Mexico, and throughout Australia. Scott has authored over 100 publications, led major research projects (funding > \$1.7m) and successfully translated his research into policy and practice. Further details of his work can be found at www.scott.eacott.com and you can connect with him on Twitter @ScottEacott

UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Sección especial: «El profesor Peeter Selg es el editor invitado del número especial sobre el trabajo de François Dépelteau»

Reflexiones sobre la sociología relacional-procesual de François Dépelteau

Mariana Leoni Birriel

Universidad de la República (Uruguay)

Marcia Grisotti

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (Brasil)

Fecha de presentación: febrero de 2021

Fecha de aceptación: abril de 2021

Fecha de publicación: mayo de 2021

Cita recomendada:

LEONI BIRRIEL, Mariana; GRISOTTI, Marcia (2021). "Reflexiones sobre la sociología relacional-procesual de François Dépelteau". En: SELG, Peeter. "El profesor Peeter Selg es el editor invitado del número especial sobre el trabajo de François Dépelteau". [online article]. *Digithum*, n.º 26, pp. xx-xx. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya y Universidad de Antioquia. [Fecha de consulta: dd/mm/yy]. <http://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.383702>



Los textos publicados en esta revista están sujetos –si no se indica lo contrario– a una licencia de Reconocimiento 4.0 Internacional de Creative Commons. La licencia completa se puede consultar en <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.es>

Resumen

Este texto está inspirado en el trabajo de François Dépelteau. Busca dar continuidad al diálogo y a los intercambios que tuvimos con él, honrando su legado. Especialmente, nos proponemos reflexionar sobre su propuesta relacional, focalizando nuestra atención en su valor explicativo y pragmático. La obra de Dépelteau muestra una manera de ver el mundo (la ontología plana), lo que implica redefinir el objeto de la sociología y, en consecuencia, el modo de actuar relacionalmente. Al respecto, proponemos diversas reflexiones que resaltan el valor de su propuesta como herramienta para el quehacer sociológico, colocando el foco en el mundo, en los procesos y relaciones que se suceden en la vida de los individuos, donde, desde la perspectiva de Dépelteau, *todo realmente sucede*.

Palabras clave

sociología relacional procesual, ontología plana, egocentrismo, transacciones

Reflections on the relational-processual sociology of François Dépelteau

Abstract

This text is inspired by the work of François Dépelteau. It seeks to continue the dialogue and conceptual interactions we had with him and to honour his legacy. Specifically we intend to reflect upon his relational proposal, focusing on its explanatory and pragmatic value. Dépelteau's work shows a way of seeing the world (the flat ontology), which implies a redefinition of the subject of sociology,

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Reflexiones sobre la sociología relacional-procesual de François Dépelteau

and consequently of the way of thinking relationally. Reflections are suggested that highlight the value of this approach as a tool for sociological work, putting the focus on the processes and relationships that take place in the lives of individuals, where Dépelteau argues that everything really happens.

Keywords

processual-relational sociology, flat ontology, egocentrism, transactions

Us: Encuentros

[...] no dejar morir la fuerza de existir que desplegaban en su generosidad de ser, retomándola como quien alza un estandarte caído en tierra después de un combate, actuar bajo sus miradas inexistentes y permanecer fieles a ellos encarnando sus virtudes, cultivando el arte, que ellos cultivaron, de producir cordialidad (Onfray, 2016, p. 23).

El presente texto busca ser expresión de continuidad de una relación, de permanencia en el vínculo. Es una forma de duelo de quien percibe la muerte como legado. Haciendo nuestro el pensamiento de Michel Onfray: no *haremos* el duelo como quien hace cualquier otra cosa. Sobreviviremos, desplegando las relaciones más allá del tiempo y el espacio, aceptando el *convite*, cultivando el arte de coproducir.

François Dépelteau llegó a Florianópolis pocos meses después de que iniciara el 2018, convocando a encuentros de idiomas mezclados, con una propuesta directa: pensar sobre la sociología relacional. Conversábamos en clase y en bares, con acuerdos y desacuerdos de por medio, pero compartiendo sin excepción un interés por producir algo. Dépelteau no impartía clases, abría espacios de producción: compartía *forthcomings*, con dudas y consultas pendientes; criticaba abiertamente nuestros posicionamientos, con cordialidad y sin juego de egos. Proponía un modo no tan usual de formación profesional; algo diferente permeaba las discusiones. El foco estaba puesto en pensar la sociología relacional; entre telones, experimentamos un modo relacional-procesual de actuar sobre las realidades. *Theory is not only to understand reality, but to act on it*: y así fue. El cultivo de este arte dejó huella por estos pagos. Su propuesta teórica, su modo de estar con el otro, mostraban una coherencia llamativa: la sociología relacional se presentaba como *approach*, como modo de aprendizaje y modo de vida.

Mediante este artículo, queremos dar continuidad al intercambio con Dépelteau. Aceptar su invitación a pensar la sociología relacional como *fellow travellers*. Fundamentalmente, por legado, nos proponemos conversar sobre las *intenciones* de su propuesta, buscando reflexionar en torno a los aspectos que convierten la teoría relacional-procesual en un antídoto contra el egocentrismo y pensando el carácter de ontología *flat*

como estrategia de base para tal *empreitada*. Habrá acuerdos y desacuerdos, consultas pendientes, puertas abiertas, algo que sigue.

Nuestro objetivo, en un primer momento, será considerar el lugar que Dépelteau fue generando en la sociología relacional, reconociendo su lectura del “espacio de deliberación” y, de este modo, ubicar así su peculiar propuesta. No entraremos en problematizaciones profundas de los argumentos de Dépelteau. No es nuestra intención aquí posicionarnos en el debate que él ha iniciado, sino considerar los puntos que destacaba como esenciales, respondiendo teóricamente a sus intenciones. Habiendo reconocido los sentidos a partir de los cuales transitaba por el debate relacional, queremos abordar su propuesta de ontología plana, identificando las principales formulaciones de su pensamiento: enfatizando el valor que tal abordaje presenta para el quehacer sociológico. De este modo, el punto central de la reflexión que en este escrito pretendemos articular no refiere a cuestionamientos de la propuesta de Dépelteau en un sentido metateórico; nuestro propósito es argumentar sobre el valor pragmático de tales formulaciones, visto en estrecha conexión con su posicionamiento sociológico ante la vida social. De la ontología plana se desprende la relevancia de focalizar el análisis sociológico en el *Us* como elemento explicativo y de acción, de desarrollar una propuesta que nos permita comprender y actuar en el mundo. Con esto, es posible encontrar en su obra un componente central que invita a revivir la sociología, a considerarla en su nexo más estrecho con la vida social, como apertura para la comprensión y como creadora de realidades. Reflexionar sobre su legado intelectual es una manera de mantener continuamente nuestras relaciones con François. Este fue su modo de existir, por el cual aún existe.

Dépelteau en la sociología relacional

Decir que la sociología es área de disidencias no es una novedad: casi dos siglos después de que Comte acuñara el término *sociologie*, continuamos sin encontrar consenso sobre cómo comprender las realidades sociales. Las múltiples teorías *sociales* y *sociológicas* (Van-denberghé, 2013) se distinguen en niveles ontológicos, epistemológicos y metodológicos, de modo que los diálogos, y consecuentemente los potenciales entendimientos, son muchas

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Reflexiones sobre la sociología relacional-procesual de François Dépelteau

veces frustrados. Entre las formas para categorizar los distintos abordajes, la polarización en función de la cuestión micro/macro es una de las más reconocidas y polémicas en el contexto sociológico: ¿reconocemos la existencia de individuos o estructuras? ¿Cuál de estos elementos tiene más poder explicativo? ¿Cómo accedemos a la comprensión sociológica? ¿El todo o las partes?

Tomando como base estas distinciones, encontramos definiciones de teorías holistas e individualistas, reduccionistas y emergentistas, con énfasis en lo colectivo o en el individuo. Estos modos de categorizar el pensamiento teórico son un tanto problemáticos, habida cuenta de que todo ejercicio taxonómico puede volverse rígido y eliminar la problematización previa de sus categorizaciones, derivando en una comprensión equivocada y por momentos simplista de las propuestas teóricas (Leoni y De Freitas, 2019).

Buscando superar los esquemas polarizados, en la década de 1980 la sociología fue escenario de movimientos teóricos que pretendían, explícitamente, desarrollar un entendimiento integral: un "nuevo movimiento teórico", en palabras de Jeffrey Alexander (1986). Encontramos, en este contexto, propuestas teóricas que buscan superar las distinciones entre acción y estructura, individuo y sociedad, acción y orden. Obras destacadas como las de Gabriel Tarde, Karin Knorr Cetina, Randall Collins, el abordaje genealógico de Michel Foucault, la sociología figuracional de Norbert Elias, la teoría del actor-red de Michel Callon y Bruno Latour, el pragmatismo de John Dewey y George Herbert Mead, el interaccionismo simbólico de Howard Becker y Anselm Strauss, así como muchos otros sociólogos influenciados por el estructuralismo como Pierre Bourdieu, se muestran como algunos ejemplos de esfuerzos por superar los viejos dualismos, promoviendo la utilización de conceptos sintéticos que develen las conexiones recíprocas entre lo macro y lo micro. Exitosos o no, tales emprendimientos nos hablan de la necesidad de reconocer la complejidad de lo social, convocándonos a reconocer las limitaciones derivadas de las categorizaciones cerradas y ofreciéndonos un marco conceptual que piense las realidades sociales de modo dinámico.

La sociología relacional (de ahora en adelante: SR) comparte las intenciones de este "nuevo movimiento teórico". Tomando fuerza también en la década de los ochenta, *the relational turn*, como "movimiento intelectual" (Dépelteau, 2018a, p. viii), busca una renovación de los abordajes sociológicos, invitándonos a reconsiderar los modos de pensar la realidad: "*Social life has always been messy, [...] sociologists can and must do better, even if they did good work in the past*" (Dépelteau, 2018a, p. v).

Más allá de que es posible identificar intenciones y argumentos relacionales en las teorías sociales clásicas y contemporáneas (Powell y Dépelteau, 2013, pp. 1, 2), las referencias explícitas a una SR se condensan en el "Manifiesto for a Relational Sociology" de Mustafa Emirbayer, de 1997. Con tono de protesta, el manifiesto de Emirbayer se ubica en la contienda teórica, buscando estructurar los aportes que suman a la comprensión del dilema

sociológico «sustancia versus proceso». En palabras del propio autor (1997, p. 282):

What I have done here is merely to bring together the various lines of reasoning on this perspective (philosophical, theoretical, and empirical); to clarify how they present and overarching challenge to reigning assumptions, and to seek thereby to prevent the sort of eclecticism, the easy mixing together of substantialism and relational assumptions [...].

En sociología, el esfuerzo relacional se vincula al retorno a los grandes dilemas de la disciplina: ¿consideramos la realidad como sustancia o como proceso? ¿Cómo posicionarse ante dualismos tales como acción/estructura? ¿Cómo pensar el poder causal en la sociología? (Dépelteau, 2018a, p. vi). Con estas cuestiones como punto de partida, el movimiento relacional se concentra en proponer modos alternativos de pensar la realidad social, focalizando su atención, como su nombre indica, en las relaciones sociales. La intención común de presentar una relectura de los grandes dilemas de la disciplina, así como la consideración de las relaciones sociales como "objeto" de la sociología, parecen ser los puntos centrales que definen la SR. A parte de esto, siguiendo a Dépelteau, lo que encontramos en este movimiento intelectual no supone acuerdos: los modos de entender las relaciones sociales y los caminos metodológicos para generar explicaciones sociológicas divergen en el interior de la SR. Dépelteau insistía en la aún incipiente especificidad de la SR, en cómo las conexiones y asociaciones reflejaban distintos abordajes y teorías. Tal diversidad no expresa una desventaja, sino un punto que suma a la construcción; a partir de intenciones comunes y por la definición de un objeto, la comunicación y posibilidad de coproducción de conocimientos se desarrolla a favor de la disciplina sociológica:

Relational sociology is thus becoming a sort of inclusive space of deliberation over fundamental issues in sociology; a space co-produced by competent colleagues sharing a general interest in the study of social relations, and bringing different theoretical and methodological orientations. This mixture of one general interest, competency and diversity is a good recipe for such an intellectual movement. We could end up having a great balance between discipline and controversy, especially if a significant number of relational sociologists are looking for a movement of this kind (Dépelteau, 2018a: p. viii).

La SR se plantea como un «espacio de deliberación» que no se define como paradigma ni como teoría cristalizada para comprender el mundo (Dépelteau, 2018b, p. 7), sino como espacio de reflexión y acción en un marco de entendimientos de base. Cabe ahora aclarar esta diversidad interna: ¿estamos hablando de distintos modos de proceder en el nivel metodológico? ¿De diversos caminos para alcanzar la comprensión? ¿O las distinciones se encuentran en la forma de pensar la realidad social? Según Dépelteau, las divergencias internas fundamentales de la SR se encuentran en este último sentido, en el nivel ontológico de las problematizaciones:

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Reflexiones sobre la sociología relacional-procesual de François Dépelteau

[...] there are three different types of relational sociologies based on incompatible social ontologies: deterministic (or structuralist) RS, co-deterministic (or dialectical) RS, and "deep" RS. I am not saying that we can see three organized and conscious groups of relational sociologists. I am thinking more about three constellations made by subnetworks of social scientists and hermits who proposed more or less similar ontological worldviews and principles (Dépelteau, 2013, p. 164).

La distinción de tres "constelaciones" en el contexto de la SR tiene la función de organizar el debate y contrarrestar la banalización del término "relacional". A fin de superar los dualismos en el campo sociológico, la categoría "relacional" se ha vuelto una salida ampliamente utilizada, «a fashionable label» (Dépelteau, 2013, p. 165) que, en muchas ocasiones, a fin de cuentas, no nos presenta contenidos explicativos. Si bien la diferenciación de constelaciones en el pensamiento relacional a partir de incompatibilidades en las formulaciones ontológicas permite ordenar el intercambio, es fundamental destacar, como bien hace Dépelteau (2013, pp. 164, 165), que dentro de cada una de estas constelaciones las diferencias metodológicas y epistemológicas son múltiples.

Dépelteau celebra la pluralidad de visiones sociológicas, abogando por incorporar los desacuerdos al debate y hacerlos parte en la reflexión. No obstante, como nos invita a pensar Olli Pyyhtinen en su texto «Friends of Relational Sociology? The relational current as a space of hospitality» (Pyyhtinen, 2021; en este mismo dossier), no se trata de una hospitalidad incondicional: no todo puede hacer parte de la sociología relacional, siendo preciso alcanzar un cierto acuerdo en relación con algunas cuestiones fundamentales a fin de dejar de verter "vino viejo en botellas nuevas" (Dépelteau, 2013, p. 183). Así, respondiendo a la necesidad de redefinir la sociología tal cual la conocemos, se vuelve inminente aventurarnos en cuestionar nuestros modos de pensar la vida social:

[...] the emergence of RS is useful only if it can propose a new solution to some fundamental issues in comparison to previous theories. It must also assist all of us, social and reflexive animals, when we deal with social problems (Dépelteau, 2015, p. 47).

En este camino, Dépelteau dedicó varios escritos a tratar las distintas constelaciones relacionales en sociología (Dépelteau, 2008; 2013; 2018), problematizando y criticando abiertamente las propuestas que él incluye en las categorizaciones ontológicas deterministas y codeterministas. Sobre la base de estos argumentos presenta su propuesta, que se distingue principalmente por partir de la consideración de una ontología plana. La cuestión micro/macro se diluye:

Maybe all we can know happens at the only «level» of social reality we have: the level of very specific fields of transaction where we make each other as lovers, friends, caring people,

haters, enemies, or egocentric persons who can support or hurt each other. Maybe there is nothing else than us making our way through these various, complex, and quite unstable fields of transaction (Dépelteau, 2013, p. 177).

Lo propuesto por Dépelteau, su sociología relacional-procesual (SRP), busca ir más allá de los dualismos ontológicos, inclusive de los analíticos, proponiendo una ontología plana que ubique el foco en las transacciones y elimine del interés sociológico el modo en el cual A y B o *ego* y *alter* interaccionan. La cuestión no está en comprender cómo dos partes se relacionan, ni en lo que puede desprenderse de ello. La intención, por el contrario, radica en reconocer a las partes en su vínculo de interdependencia, como individuos que son *únicamente* en relación con el otro, en procesos, transacciones, memorias e historias. La existencia de imperativos categóricos se niega, la definición dualista de los fenómenos sociales se descarta; para comprender lo social es necesario poner el énfasis del análisis en el *Us*, entendido como proceso fluido:

Relationism also recognizes that no specific and detached actor can change one structure only on the basis on his/her desire and knowledge. The main point is that we do not need dualism (and some form of reification) to explain that actors face real people and other environmental features they did not choose and design. The notion of transaction implies that the production of the world is not based on free will and self-action. The principle of transaction is founded on the idea that the production of the social world happens through social relations and in a physical environment (Dépelteau, 2008, p. 65).

Desde esta perspectiva, Dépelteau nos invita a seguir los procesos: a reconocer las experiencias de los individuos interdependientes en sus transacciones, advirtiendo las complejidades inherentes a este objeto. Es un camino con muchos referentes. En términos metodológicos, dialoga con Latour sobre el seguimiento a los actores, aproximándose a la etnografía, al *process-tracing method*, a la historia y la antropología social, aprendiendo de la *grounded theory* y tendiendo fuertes vínculos con la obra de Elias. Las influencias son múltiples, el desafío es estar cada vez más cerca de las "experiencias de vida": es, enfáticamente, una propuesta procesual que entiende la realidad como un fluir de transacciones en las cuales, quienes en ellas se ubican, son siempre y necesariamente interdependientes. El universo social, compuesto por una multiplicidad de campos más o menos interconectados (también llamados redes, configuraciones, *assemblages*, asociaciones, etc.), los campos sociales en tanto procesos dinámicos y fluidos, siendo por las interacciones humanas e interactuantes no humanos. En este sentido, la SR sería el estudio de la emergencia y la desaparición de varios campos sociales.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Reflexiones sobre la sociología relacional-procesual de François Dépelteau

En esta contienda teórica, la presentación de una propuesta de ontología plana tensiona el debate, siendo objeto de críticas y cuestionamientos por parte de otras miradas que piensan desde la perspectiva de una estratificación de realidades o inclusive de distinciones analíticas de lo real, exponiendo cuestionamientos de base a nuestra forma de ser y pensar el mundo social.¹ En el plano metodológico, observamos que la propuesta de Dépelteau se conecta con diversas tradiciones y gana fuerza. De este modo, es una mirada que *conecta*: en el debate que genera desacuerdos, en los diálogos que piensan en un mismo proceder. Propiciando síntesis, abriendo espacio al desacuerdo. Acordamos con Dépelteau que este devenir, este intercambio de reflexiones y percepciones, enriquece y promueve la generación de miradas atentas a nuestros contextos. Sin duda, esta forma de producción sociológica ha sido marca distintiva en el lugar que Dépelteau ha ocupado en la sociología relacional. Más allá de esto, como se apuntó a inicios del presente escrito, nos interesa aquí resaltar un aspecto que trasciende el espacio de discusión acerca de estas cuestiones teóricas y metodológicas. Hay un gran punto fuerte en la obra de Dépelteau que le da fertilidad, que revela su relevancia para el presente en el cual transitamos: nos referimos al carácter pragmático de su quehacer intelectual, a un pragmatismo con foco claro, con metas, como antídoto: vinculado con valores, proponiendo una forma de vida. Fuerte y *libremente* inspirado por Dewey (Dépelteau, 2015, p. 48), la propuesta de Dépelteau niega la existencia de formas puras, de verdades y absolutos más allá de los contextos concretos. De este modo, toda lectura y acción sobre el mundo parte de la asunción de las contingencias, de lo que cambia o puede cambiar. La propia práctica científica se piensa así: en relación con las experiencias de vida de quienes hacen ciencia, en relación con los motivos diversos que inciden en los procesos por los cuales se construye el conocimiento científico. No existen conocimientos definitivos, la distinción teoría/empiría nos dice poco (Dépelteau, 2015, p. 50). Necesariamente, toda teoría se refiere a una empiría: la producción de conocimiento no puede separarse de las experiencias de vida que integran los procesos:

Doing science with consciousness is less about being aware that our subjectivity influences our knowledge and trying to control the distorting effects of our interests, desires, values, and so on. It is more about realizing, and accepting, that with our unscientific and scientific experiences we are a part of the reality. [...] Knowing is not really about reflecting the Reality. In this logic, the full potential of relational sociology resides in its capacity to help us, interdependent human beings, to develop our social intelligence by directing our complex social experiences according to some chosen goals (Dépelteau, 2015, p. 50).

François se despidió de nosotros en 2018. Hoy, en 2021, caminamos por espacios de encuentros reconfigurados, en un mundo impactado por una pandemia que ha generado múltiples procesos de desencajes sociales y analíticos. Se hacen latentes problemas teóricos y sociales antes negligenciados u olvidados. Las relaciones entre humanos y no humanos, el diálogo y trabajo conjunto entre las distintas áreas de conocimiento científico, las conexiones entre las diversas percepciones y estrategias de legos y expertos, son algunos ejemplos que muestran los desencajes en los abordajes analíticos disponibles para comprender las relaciones ambiente-sociedad. Se precisan nuevos caminos, nuevas perspectivas: reconocer la complejidad del ser humano y nuestro mundo, la importancia del convivir, de un mirar que vaya más allá del ego. Aquí encontramos a François. Su propuesta de una ontología plana se expresa como una lucha ante las cristalizaciones: es un convite a dar cuenta de más posibilidades y responsabilidades, en pro de una sociología que fluya en contra del egocentrismo, que busque vida y conexión.

Ontología plana para una sociología pragmática

He did order her to marry, and she knew she had to obey; but she struggled, and he relented. A nearly model household of patriarchal, slave-owning order became problematic when Caetana said, «No.» Because of her the entire hierarchy of males –owner, uncle, husband, and church– was thrown into turmoil (Graham, 2002, p. 4).

El punto principal que distingue la SRP de las restantes constelaciones identificadas por Dépelteau es la negación de la existencia ontológica de todo lo que no sean individuos interdependientes. De este modo, la única forma de comprender los fenómenos sociales es mediante la consideración de las transacciones entre individuos. No existen estructuras que determinen o interactúen con individuos; en palabras de Dépelteau, “this is logically and empirically impossible” (Dépelteau, 2013, p. 179).

Para ilustrar esta perspectiva, en una de sus clases, Dépelteau nos presentó la historia de Caetana, relatada en la obra *Caetana says No. Women's stories from a brazilian slave society*, de Sandra L. Graham (2002): una mujer esclava, en el Brasil de 1836, pide anulación de su matrimonio. Sin precedentes reconocidos por la autora, esta transacción entre Caetana, su entendido propietario, momentáneo esposo y sistema judicial, muestra un jaque a las miradas deterministas. En el relato se narra una historia, se trazan transacciones, un *fluir* de los procesos en un contexto peculiar donde diversos individuos interdependientes, en su transcurso

1. Encontramos en el artículo de Donati (2020) una discusión profunda que ilustra la complejidad de este debate.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Reflexiones sobre la sociología relacional-procesual de François Dépelteau

por la vida, van configurando y reconfigurando los caminos por los cuales transitar. Caetana dice que *no* con una dosis de enfrentamiento a lo pretendidamente establecido, cuestionando lo dado por hecho, proponiendo nuevas posibilidades. Lo que se podría esperar según tendencias, no sucede. Se concreta la anulación del matrimonio: lo cosificado se desvanece. Algunos podrán alegar que se trata de un desvío de la norma, de una variación entre tantas tendencias; puede ser. Sin embargo, este ejemplo revela con claridad la intención de la sociología relacional procesual: no existen cosas tales como estructuras o macros que incidan en las personas, que definan sus experiencias de vida como quien enmarca un destino. Lo que tenemos, sin más, son individuos interdependientes que, en sus diversas transacciones, responden a lo esperado, lo niegan, trascienden, crean. En sus obras, Dépelteau nos invita a seguir a los actores, a observar la pluralidad y diversidad del mundo de la vida, lo que implica, necesariamente, percibir el desencaje de padrones analíticos previos en las distintas estrategias y *assemblages* utilizadas por los actores sociales.

El punto central se destaca aquí si retomamos las intenciones apuntadas por Emirbayer en su "Manifiesto for a Relational Sociology": considerar el gran dilema entre sustancialismo y relacionismo. Con esta preocupación en la base de las reflexiones, lo que parece ocupar a Dépelteau, incentivando su producción teórica, es la necesidad de reconocer que lo social no puede ser considerado ni como objeto ni en tanto objeto,² pues esta solidificación o cosificación de lo social va en contra del *fluir* que caracteriza la propia vida social. Las estructuras sociales, en todo caso, son consecuencia de transacciones, razón por la cual no pueden, ni lógica ni empíricamente, incidir en los actores.

La SRP propone considerar las estructuras sociales, o *social patterns*, como efectos más o menos estables de las transacciones. Esta cuestión de estabilidad en el tiempo y el espacio se vincula, en la propuesta de Dépelteau, con la idea de "memoria" (Dépelteau, 2018c, p. 515) y nos permite reconocer tendencias en las transacciones, detectar emergencias en el tiempo y el espacio. Dando continuidad al intercambio relacional, en referencia y contrapunto al argumento señalado por Donati (2020) valiéndose del conocido "todo fluye" de Heráclito, podemos pensar que, más allá del *fluir* del agua, existe un río que determina su curso, sus límites, sus posibilidades. Si bien el agua fluye y en su *fluir* toma distintas formas el río, sin embargo no hay río que determine el movimiento del agua cuando detenemos la atención en las transacciones. Entendemos que se trata aquí de una cuestión de enfoque: a grandes rasgos, podemos utilizar la noción de río como escala mayor para el *fluir* del agua, pero esto no es más que una estrategia para ver tendencias, que, por cierto, desconsidera la permanente reconfiguración del río por el pasar del agua. Una

serie de microrreconfiguraciones que pierden lugar si asumimos la existencia del río como algo en sí mismo. De este modo, y volviendo a Dépelteau, no por ser más o menos reproducible o estable un patrón o una estructura social pasa a transformarse en un algo distinto a las transacciones en el nivel empírico: el río solo es por el agua que pasa. En palabras del autor:

Moreover, we should never say that (interdependent) actors are affected by initially structured transactions since transactions do not exist outside, beside, or prior to actors who act. Real, empirical structures are real, empirical transactions. The fact that some transactions can be memorized and more or less reproduced in similar ways does not transform real social structures into something other than empirical transactions (Dépelteau, 2008, p. 61).

Encontramos aquí un elemento crucial de la propuesta de François. Considerar las estructuras sociales como realidades reificadas no únicamente dificulta la comprensión sociológica, en tanto nos aleja del estudio de los procesos relativos a nuestra vida social. También genera consecuencias sobre la misma. Esto tiene que ver con cómo Dépelteau entiende el vínculo entre la construcción de abordajes para la comprensión de las realidades y el vivir en el mundo. En el ámbito del lenguaje y del modo de comprender las realidades, cuando tomamos como base el sustancialismo, las estructuras están dotadas de un poder y de una existencia *per se*. Si pensáramos que la propuesta de Dépelteau gira en torno a una mera precisión conceptual, él mismo posiblemente nos respondería, como en un tiempo anterior hizo en clase, lo siguiente: en la vida cotidiana podemos argumentar en el sentido de "the wind blows", o "la sociedad me lleva a hacer tal cosa", pero, en el ámbito de la ciencia, tales permisos son peligrosos. Es el peligro de la limitación por simplificación; de la pérdida de libertad por simplificar.

Retomando la historia de Caetana y la expresión de su *No inesperado*, ¿qué habría sido de esta situación si se hubiera asumido como inminente la incidencia rotunda, o bien con gran potencia, de estructuras sociales que limitan o permiten?, ¿qué posibilidades le quedarían a Caetana en un escenario de características inamovibles? Y también, ¿qué de esta historia queda fuera si optamos por un abordaje que cristaliza padrones? Podrían entablarse interesantes conversaciones sobre estas cuestiones, pero lo que aquí nos importa es enfatizar lo siguiente: cuestionable por aquí o por allá, la propuesta relacional de Dépelteau nos invita a reconocer y dar posibilidad, responsabilidad y conexión. De este modo, más allá de las ventajas que la propuesta relacional-procesual pueda presentar para el entendimiento de casos como el de Caetana, encontramos un punto crucial que tiene que ver con el cambio de perspectiva, con su condición práctica: esta lectura

2. Para ahondar en esta segunda precisión, recomendamos revisar el texto en el cual Dépelteau aborda la obra de Émile Durkheim (Dépelteau, 2017).

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Reflexiones sobre la sociología relacional-procesual de François Dépelteau

propone actuar por interdependencia como única forma posible de acción, y, de este modo, nos retorna a la vida social... la única vida que sabemos vivir.

Las propuestas teóricas no son únicamente herramientas para comprender las realidades, sino también para actuar en ellas. En este sentido, la SRP pretende ubicarse en el mundo como antídoto contra el egocentrismo. Una vez más, el lema gana fuerza: *We are not egos, we are interdependents*. Desde esta perspectiva de ontología plana, se observan los individuos interdependientes en sus transacciones. De aquí se desprende la comprensión de las realidades, una nueva forma de pensar la vida social y las experiencias a construir.

Hay también otro elemento distintivo de la obra de Dépelteau que enriquece aún más su propuesta: al considerar las relaciones, se busca eliminar toda forma de dualismo explicativo o analítico; la mirada procesual es consistente de inicio a fin. Con el propósito de ser respuesta al egocentrismo, de contrariarlo, la propuesta relacional-procesual busca proveer de herramientas para pensar más allá del ego en sus interacciones. Los fenómenos sociales se perciben en su coproducción, con referencia a la interdependencia que los individuos generan en su vida social. Se niega así toda lectura del actor en su singularidad, generando efectos en otros en una lógica lineal. De resultas, se problematizan las lecturas relacionales que mantienen una mirada dual, de interacciones entre partes distintas, con fuerzas peculiares en su independencia. Lo que tenemos, para una mejor comprensión y para un consecuente actuar, son herramientas que nos conectan en los procesos, donde solo hacemos lo que hacemos o pensamos lo que pensamos por relación de interdependencia con otros en nuestro fluir.

Reconociendo que necesariamente hacemos por coproducción, avanzamos en la posibilidad de dar cuenta de los procesos que conforman nuestra compleja vida social. Damos así abertura para visualizar que inclusive aquellas definiciones que nos parecen dadas, por su amplio espectro y tradicional aceptación, devienen de transacciones de individuos interdependientes en nuestra historia de vida. De este modo, se vuelven posibles de cambio, de ruptura, de continuidad en un proceso de transacciones presentes y futuras. La ontología plana es fuertemente pragmática, clama por una sociología de las experiencias, nos invita a construir una sociología plena de imaginación, creación y vida.

Con estas cartas en juego, es asimismo una invitación a pensarlos en nuestra práctica profesional. El mundo está repleto de particularidades y variaciones, de disidencias; entonces, ¿por qué invertir esfuerzos sociológicos en definir estructuras *artificiales*? Tales estructuraciones, tal definición de tendencias, ¿nos ayuda realmente a comprender el mundo y su complejidad? ¿O se trata más bien de una simulación para ocultar el carácter desordenado de la propia disciplina, en un espacio en el cual se gratifican los conocimientos exactos y la capacidad predictiva? Más aún, el devenir de la práctica sociológica a partir de la consideración de regularidades y tendencias, ¿cómo se ubica en relación con la

responsabilidad social de los científicos? Queremos decir, ¿permite aplicaciones o resoluciones que ayuden efectivamente a lidiar con los problemas que se manifiestan en nuestra vida social? ¿Qué tanto estamos aportando a generar mejoras en la vida que nos toca vivir? ¿Qué tanto estamos reproduciendo limitantes y simplificaciones brutas?

A fin de cuentas, somos individuos interdependientes que fluyen en procesos de coproducción: una gran parte de la historia de nuestro universo social está en nosotros:

For the better and the worst, until we put an end to human life, or until it is destroyed in one way or another, we constantly co-produce this social universe in multiple relational ways. In conclusion, a major part of its historicity is on us, interdependent people (Dépelteau, 2018c, p. 517).

Algunas reflexiones finales

La propuesta de ontología plana de Dépelteau, como adelantamos, trae nuevas posibilidades de comprensión sociológica y de acción en la vida social: existiendo únicamente individuos interdependientes, las posibilidades de creación se ubican fácilmente. Los *modos de percepción y acción* son coproducidos en la transacción por un *nosotros*, como elemento de conexión, que habilita y limita. No hay un *yo* que pueda hacer y deshacer, ni un *tú* que actúe en su singularidad: necesariamente, toda posibilidad de cambio o continuidad radica en las relaciones.

En la propuesta de Dépelteau, la comprensión y acción se da si colocamos el foco en el *Us*. Este *nosotros* no es una interacción entre *ego-alter*; es una propuesta de relectura, de nuevos posicionamientos: es un antídoto al egocentrismo. Pensemos en los extremos de un *ego* y un *alter*, de dos individuos en su relación: para entender los procesos, podemos ver qué hizo uno o el otro, cómo respondieron en sí a la interacción, cómo cada uno se constituye en el diálogo. Conseguiremos de este modo detenernos en su relación. Sin embargo, la mirada egocéntrica permanece: observamos al yo en su relación con otro; consideramos al otro por distinción al yo. Damos continuidad a una lectura –y acción– que parte de lo desconexo, por realidad o estrategia analítica.

Dépelteau propone algo distinto. Se admite la única existencia de individuos en transacciones, pero tales individuos no son por definición que separa, sino por relación que conecta. Solo actuamos en relación *con* un otro: lo que pesa, lo que define, es la conexión. Mirar lo que conecta, el *Us*, nos saca del lugar de la oposición: nos aleja de lo que distingue para darnos entrada en lo que une; nos invita a sortear todo cuanto aleja para dar paso así a una percepción de las cercanías. De este modo, se plantea una propuesta sociológica que nos habilita para comprender la vida social deteniéndonos en lo que *sucede*: con sus complejidades, movimientos, disidencias y tendencias.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Reflexiones sobre la sociología relacional-procesual de François Dépelteau

Se contrarresta todo abordaje que piense en términos dualistas; es un camino que nos hace cuestionar todo intento de captar lo que huye por movimiento: el fluir del río, su incesante proceso, hace del río una noción que no se agota nunca en su conceptualización definitiva. Los conceptos, definiciones y formas escogidos para hacer asequible lo que se nos escapa en su fluir podrán brindar luz sobre tendencias y permanencias. Dépelteau plantea en sus escritos la importancia de reconocer lo que perdura, con sus tradiciones, limitaciones y aperturas. Sin embargo, una vez más, por muy provechoso que esto resulte para el reconocimiento de procesos en nuestras realidades, hemos de estar atentos a que lo definido como existente o como *as if* (volviendo al caso de Durkheim) no es nada que pueda tener cauce, como externalidad, en nuestros procesos relacionales.

En su intención de volver a una sociología con vida, Dépelteau nos invita a reconocernos en nuestras transacciones: cargadas de motivos, historias, memorias, deseos y experiencias. Fundamentalmente, se plantea una forma peculiar de hacer: las limitaciones y posibilidades no están en un *ego alter*, y menos aún en cosificaciones artificiales. Se abre o se bloquea únicamente en la transacción. Con esto, mapeamos procesos en donde es posible identificar responsabilidades, condiciones de posibilidad, oportunidades. El ego se vuelve débil en su unicidad. El *Us* se torna intenso y nos invita a convivir. François, como parte de las contingencias de la vida, nos dejó sus obras y reflexiones, abiertas para la coproducción, haciendo del *encuentro* la única permanencia.

Bibliografía

- ALEXANDER, J. (1986). "O novo movimento teórico". Texto presentado en el X Encontro Anual da ANPOCS.
- DÉPELTEAU, F. (2008). "Relational thinking: a critique of co-deterministic theories of structure and agency". *Sociological Theory*, vol. 26, n.º 1, pp. 51-73. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2008.00318.x>
- DÉPELTEAU, F. (2013). "What is the direction of the 'Relational Turn'?". En: POWELL, C. y DÉPELTEAU, F. (2013). *Conceptualizing relational sociology: Ontological and theoretical issues*. Estados Unidos: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 163-186.
- DÉPELTEAU, F. (2015). "Relational sociology, pragmatism, transactions and social fields". *International Review of Sociology-Revue Internationale de Sociologie*, vol. 25, n.º 1, pp. 45-64. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2014.997966>
- DÉPELTEAU, F. (2017). "Toward a processual-relational adaptation of 'substantialist' sociology: Starting with Durkheim". *Sociologia*, vol. 54, n.º 4, pp. 410-425.
- DÉPELTEAU, F. (2018a). "The promises of the relational turn in Sociology". En: DÉPELTEAU, F. (ed.) (2018). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. v-xiv. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9>
- DÉPELTEAU, F. (2018b). "Relational thinking in Sociology: Relevance, concurrence and dissonance". En: DÉPELTEAU, F. (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 3-33. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_1
- DÉPELTEAU, F. (2018c). "From the concept of 'transaction' to a process-relational approach". En: DÉPELTEAU, F. (ed.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 499-519. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_25
- DONATI, P. (2020). "Fluxes and structures: Which relational gaze? A comparison between relational sociologies". *Polish Sociological Review*, n.º 210, pp. 179-197. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26412/psr210.03>
- EMIRBAYER, M. (1997). "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology". *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 103, n.º 2, pp. 281-317. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/231209>
- GRAHAM, S. L. (2002). *Caetana says No. Women's stories from a brazilian slave society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- LEONI, M.; DE FREITAS, A. (2019). "Micro e macro nas teorias sociais de Parsons e Luhmann: uma discussão metateórica". *Estud. Sociol. Araraquara*, vol. 24, n.º 47 pp. 235-260.
- ONFRAY, M. (2016). *Cosmos. Una ontología materialista*. Buenos Aires: Paidós.
- POWELL, C.; DÉPELTEAU, F. (2013). *Conceptualizing relational sociology: Ontological and theoretical issues*. Estados Unidos: Palgrave Macmillan.
- PYYHTINEN, O. (2021). "Friends of relational sociology? The relational current as a space of hospitality". En: SELG, P. (2021). "Special Issue guest edited by Prof. Peeter Selg around the work of Francois Dépelteau". *Digithum*, n.º 26, pp. 1-x12. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya y Universidad de Antioquia. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.3199>
- VANDENBERGHE, F. (2013). "Metateoria, teoria social e teoria sociológica". *Cadernos de Sociófilo*, vol. 3.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Reflexiones sobre la sociología relacional-procesual de François Dépelteau

Mariana Leoni Birriel

(mariana.leoni@udelar.edu.uy)

Universidad de la República (Uruguay)

Integrante del Equipo de Prorectorado de Gestión de la Universidad de la República (Udelar) (Uruguay). Licenciada en Sociología por Udelar (2010), magíster en Sociología Política por la Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (2014) y doctora en Sociología Política por la Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina (2019). Investiga en el área de la Sociología de la Ciencia y Sociología de la Salud.

Marcia Grisotti

(marcia.grisotti@ufsc.br)

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (Brasil)

Profesora titular del Departamento de Sociologia e Ciência Política/UFSC. Graduada en Ciencias Sociales por la Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (1987), magíster en Sociología Política por la Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (1992), doctorado en Sociología por la Universidade de São Paulo (2003) y posdoctorado realizado en la École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) y el Collège de France (2015). Tiene experiencia de investigación en el área de la Sociología de la Salud. Es coordinadora del Núcleo de Pesquisa: Ecologia Humana e Sociologia da Saúde de la UFSC.

UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA

D I G I T H U M

A RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON CULTURE AND SOCIETY

No. 26 (July 2020)

ISSN 1575-2275

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

REFEREED ARTICLES



UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Westworld: “Los placeres violentos poseen finales violentos”

Vicente Díaz Gandasegui
Universidad Carlos III de Madrid

Fecha de presentación: octubre de 2019
Fecha de aceptación: marzo de 2020
Fecha de publicación: julio de 2020

Cita recomendada:

DÍAZ GANDASEGUI, Vicente (2020). “Westworld: “Los placeres violentos poseen finales violentos”” [artículo en línea]. *Digithum*, n.º 26, pp. 1-11. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya y Universidad de Antioquia. [Fecha de consulta: dd/mm/aa]. <http://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.374135>



Los textos publicados en esta revista están sujetos –si no se indica lo contrario– a una licencia de Reconocimiento 4.0 Internacional de Creative Commons. La licencia completa se puede consultar en <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.es>

Resumen

El presente artículo analiza los veinte capítulos de las dos primeras temporadas de la serie *Westworld* (Nolan y Joy, 2016) mediante un análisis de contenido. La acción de *Westworld* se sitúa en un parque temático del Oeste en el que la tecnología ha permitido crear simulaciones indistinguibles de los humanos para que los visitantes satisfagan sus instintos más primarios interactuando con ellos. En este sentido, uno de los ejes que han guiado la investigación ha sido explorar las posibles relaciones entre los humanos y los poshumanos, criaturas artificiales que superan en capacidades intelectuales y físicas a sus referentes biológicos. La confusión que genera la (re) creación tecnológica de lo conocido produce una constante confusión entre los visitantes humanos, los anfitriones poshumanos y los espectadores, indagando a través de imágenes, diálogos y argumentos en ideas posmodernas en torno a la relación entre la realidad y el simulacro. Asimismo, la serie examina y aporta una nueva perspectiva acerca de la singularidad y la posibilidad de que se revierta el dominio actual sobre las máquinas y la tecnología que creamos deje de estar a nuestro servicio. De esta manera, *Westworld*, a partir de diferentes líneas argumentales, da forma a las inquietudes sociales y culturales que provoca el actual y potencial desarrollo tecnológico, prestando también atención al poder que subyace en el control de toda la información que generan los individuos, en conocer lo que hacen, manifiestan y piensan las personas.

Palabras clave

Westworld, poshumanismo, singularidad, tecnología, simulacro, sociedad de la información, círculo mágico

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Westworld: “Los placeres violentos poseen finales violentos”

Westworld: “These violent delights have violent ends”

Abstract

This article analyses the 20 episodes of the first two seasons of *Westworld* (Nolan and Joy, 2016) through a content analysis. *Westworld* is based on a Western theme park in which a highly-developed technology has created simulations indistinguishable from humans, allowing visitors to satisfy their primary instincts by interacting with them. In this sense, one of the main ideas that have guided the research has been to explore the possible relationships between humans and posthumans, artificial creatures that surpass their biological referents in intellectual and physical capacities. The confusion generated by the technological (re)creation of the known reality causes constant confusion among human visitors, posthuman hosts and spectators, connecting the images, dialogues and plot with postmodern ideas about the relationship between reality and simulacrum. Also, the series examines and provides a new perspective on the singularity hypothesis, the possibility that our current control over machines will be reversed, meaning that the technological products will no longer be at our service. In this regard, *Westworld*, through different lines of argument, gives shape to the social and cultural concerns caused by current and potential technological development, while it also pays attention to the power that underlies the control of the information generated by individuals, in order to gain knowledge about what people do, manifest and think.

Keywords

Westworld, posthumanism, singularity, technology, simulacra, information society, magic circle

Humo y espejos

Westworld (Nolan y Joy, 2016) es una serie estadounidense que adapta el clásico de Michael Crichton de 1973 y cuyas tres primeras temporadas, de diez capítulos cada una, de las cuales en este artículo se analizan las dos primeras, se han emitido en la plataforma HBO. La serie ilustra la implosión de lo real y lo hiperreal, lo humano y lo poshumano y, al mismo tiempo, mezcla géneros tan distintos como la ciencia ficción y el wéstern. *Westworld* es una distopía en la que la oscuridad de un futuro temido, similar al descrito en *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982), *Terminator* (Cameron, 1984) o *The Matrix* (Wachowski y Wachowski, 1999), ha sido reemplazada por la luminosidad del Oeste, un escenario en el que no se aprecian los efectos de la tecnología en la sociedad y la cultura de manera directa, pero en el que sutilmente se combinan las preocupaciones sociales y culturales acerca de los robots, relacionadas con la dominación y el control, con el imaginario colectivo sobre un entorno y un momento en el que prevalecía la supervivencia del más fuerte y la violencia. De esta forma, en *Westworld* una tecnología muy sofisticada proyecta los últimos avances en ingeniería genética y presenta un parque temático del Oeste en el que los anfitriones, unas criaturas indistinguibles de los humanos, sacian los impulsos más básicos de los visitantes humanos (Simut, 2017).

La buena acogida de la serie se debe, en gran parte, a que el argumento y la estética colaboran de manera conjunta para que los nuevos mitos enlacen con la iconografía del wéstern, un género construido con imágenes que forman parte de la retina colectiva. Así, las tonalidades que asociamos a las películas de

este tipo se conjugan con una paleta de colores monocromáticos cuando se muestra la realidad fuera del parque (Wilkins, 2019). Asimismo, la estética visual se combina con una banda sonora en la que la música actual (Radiohead, The Rolling Stones, Amy Winehouse o Soundgarden) suena en una pianola del salón en el que sucede gran parte de la acción. De esta manera, viejos y nuevos mitos occidentales se fusionan en un pastiche que define la posmodernidad en términos de Jameson (1991), referido a la creación de narraciones que resultan coherentes a partir de fragmentos o ideas aparentemente contradictorias, confusas o estereotipadas sobre el pasado y el presente (Reeves, 2019). De esta forma, la (con) fusión de la nueva tecnología y los antiguos relatos crean un escenario ambiguo, fundamentado en lo conocido, pero que nos desconcierta cuando las fronteras entre lo biológico y lo tecnológico son permeadas. Así, el contexto que ofrece *Westworld* permite distanciarse de la realidad a través de lo reconocido, familiarizando al espectador para luego sorprenderle con lo imprevisto, con una tecnología que apenas imaginamos.

La confusión en la que se vertebra el argumento permite examinar el potencial desarrollo tecnológico de lo humano en un plano práctico, en un entorno que recuerda a un videojuego, con inmersión completa en el entretenimiento. No obstante, *Westworld* rompe el círculo mágico, el contexto lúdico proporcionado por el juego, un lugar y momento en el que las reglas son negociadas y aceptadas, sin que sean necesariamente compartidas en el espacio exterior, en la realidad (Huizinga, 1972). De esta forma, las fronteras del parque quedan difuminadas por la simulación de la realidad y la inmersión en un juego en el que el avatar y el jugador se fusionan, en el que el mundo diegético y el mundo

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Westworld: “Los placeres violentos poseen finales violentos”

real no pueden ser diferenciados, pues sus membranas, con los avances tecnológicos, son cada vez más porosas.

La ficción simula la realidad pretérita con un decorado y unos guiones que permiten que la experiencia de los visitantes sea diseñada y personificada para parecer imprevisible. Así, la belleza del mundo simulado y la finalidad lúdica del parque contribuyen a confundir a los humanos, poshumanos y espectadores acerca de la realidad que esconde ese escenario. *Westworld* actualiza de esta forma las tesis de Debord (2000) sobre la sociedad del espectáculo en un entorno en el que los visitantes no pueden ser dañados, los anfitriones son reparados constantemente y los espectadores consumen las imágenes con una mezcla de temor hacia el futuro que se mezcla con sorpresa y entretenimiento.

Así, en este escenario recreado, el simulacro supera a la realidad, la hace implosionar en una experiencia en la que el disfrute diluye la persistencia del referente (Baudrillard, 2001). *Westworld* muestra la capacidad de la tecnología para reproducir simulaciones humanas, indistinguibles y perfectas, y por todo ello seductoras. La serie da forma en imágenes a la hiperrealidad que imaginó Baudrillard (1983), la indiferenciación del mapa con el territorio, lo real y lo irreal, lo humano y lo simulado. La realidad y la copia, el símbolo y el referente carecen de sentido cuando los simulacros parecen más humanos que aquellos que reproducen, cuando las copias se han mezclado con el original hasta hacer que este carezca de lógica. La hiperrealidad de *Westworld* es un mundo de simulaciones en el que no existe la verdad, un conjunto de símbolos sin referente alguno, lo que nos impide el acceso a la realidad tal y como la conocíamos (Baudrillard, 2000). De esta forma, el parque temático supera el ejemplo paradigmático proporcionado por Baudrillard, Disneylandia, “un jugo de ilusiones y fantasmas” (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 12), de humos y espejos, en el que todo se confunde y aquello que había servido para distinguir la realidad de la ficción deja de tener sentido.

Westworld retoma y renueva la confusión provocada por la tecnología que reflejan producciones anteriores de ciencia ficción como *Desafío total* (Verhoeven, 1990), *El cortador de césped* (Leonard, 1992), *Días extraños* (Bigelow, 1995), *Johnny Mnemonic* (Longo, 1995), *eXistenZ* (Cronenberg, 1999), *The Matrix* (Wachowski y Wachowski, 1999) o *Ex_Machina* (Garland, 2015). En las dos últimas, como en *Westworld*, se desarrollan cualidades humanas mediante la tecnología y, simultáneamente, se transforma la condición humana por la interacción con máquinas que superan a lo humano. En este sentido, la perspectiva poshumanista resulta de gran utilidad, pues en la fusión de la tecnología y lo humano imagina seres futuros cuyas capacidades exceden a las biológicas (Bostrom, 2003).

Los anfitriones son una buena representación de la criatura poshumana: conjugan inteligencia y cualidades humanas con el potencial de la tecnología para superar ciertas limitaciones biológicas. Las capacidades poshumanas que muestran los anfitriones superan también cualitativamente a lo biológico, sobre

todo en la eficiencia de la gestión de la información, pues no solo hacen más, sino que también lo hacen mejor (Cascales y Fernández-Urtasun, 2019). De esta forma su naturaleza híbrida les permite habitar mundos ambiguos, en los que lo creado y lo natural se mezclan. La criatura poshumana comprende así una postura optimista y liberadora del pasado, que percibe con esperanza la alianza entre lo humano conocido y la tecnología que prevemos (Aguilar García, 2008), si bien todo ello se conjuga con la peor de las posibilidades posmodernas: la superación del hombre por la máquina.

El poshumanismo de *Westworld* comparte muchos de los ingredientes de *Frankenstein o el moderno Prometeo* (Shelley, 1818/2007), de la criatura que es diseñada y juzgada en referencia al creador y posteriormente, cuando se la concibe como a un otro distinto e inferior a lo humano, se rebela contra aquellos que la hicieron posible. El poshumanismo, en esta línea, propone nuevos mitos renovando los ya existentes: un *bon savage* que es pervertido por los humanos, una criatura inocente en sus orígenes pero que en su respuesta al trato cruel recibido por los visitantes se transforma en maligna.

A las criaturas artificiales de *Westworld*, como a Frankenstein, se les impone ser como nosotros, no se las acepta como algo diferente, con distintas capacidades y objetivos, y por ello no les queda más remedio que sublevarse contra los dominadores. De esta forma, en *Westworld* está muy presente el humanismo que persiste en el poshumanismo, pues al otro se le juzga por lo conocido y se le concibe como una amenaza cuando muestra características distintivas y propias. *Westworld* nos ofrece asimismo una perspectiva de los otros que nos permite examinar el devenir de lo humano en tiempos tecnológicos; los personajes que representan a los anfitriones nos hacen sentir más empatía que los visitantes humanos, los cuales se sitúan en el papel de monstruos por comportarse y tratar a las simulaciones con crueldad y sadismo. El poshumanismo que propone la serie constituye de esta forma una herramienta analítica que permite proyectar la situación actual de los hombres y la tecnología dando forma a criaturas que se originan, posiblemente, en un repensar de lo humano (Sharon, 2012).

Así, el prefijo del poshumanismo no alude necesariamente a un momento posterior en el sentido de avance; es un nuevo comienzo que nos devuelve al principio, a las tensiones y contradicciones del humanismo, a superar lo humano reconociendo las cualidades propias de la condición humana y las posibilidades que ofrece la tecnología (Simon, 2019). Las máquinas de *Westworld* están creadas para satisfacer a los humanos y dar forma a sus fantasías, renovando el mito de Pígalión con unas consecuencias parecidas: lo simulado supera a lo real, las copias sustituyen en el deseo a los referentes (Seaman-Grant, 2017).

A los anfitriones se les observa como a otros, temidos o deseados, pero distintos por su cuerpo artificial que semeja lo natural. En este sentido, la naturaleza híbrida de los anfitriones

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Westworld: “Los placeres violentos poseen finales violentos”

enlaza también con ideas más optimistas, como las de Donna Haraway, quien establece en su manifiesto *cíborg* (1990) que el desarrollo tecnológico permite imaginar versiones alternativas de lo humano, con una ética renovada que surge de la reconfiguración o fusión de algunas categorías modernas, como el género o las dualidades entre lo natural y lo artificial o la ficción y la realidad. De esta forma, el *cíborg* es utilizado por Haraway como una figura alegórica que representa y propone un mestizaje posmoderno que transgrede lo tradicional para avanzar en un contexto incierto, pero en el que las jerarquías y posiciones de poder se difuminan, liberándola también de las ideas e ideologías heredadas de la modernidad. Para Haraway, así como para Braidotti (2013), las nuevas criaturas híbridas son un reflejo de un mundo posmoderno y en transformación, en el que el otro desconocido se configura a partir de los fragmentos que conocemos.

Metodología: examinando *Westworld*

Westworld, como otras producciones recientes –*Black Mirror* (Brooker, 2011-2019), *Ex_Machina* o *Her* (Jonze, 2013)–, propone mirarnos a través de un espejo metafórico en el que poder comprender el devenir de la sociedad. El medio audiovisual representa un vehículo adecuado para reflexionar y visualizar el poshumanismo, constituyéndose como su “vanguardia estética” (Talavera, 2015, p. 281). En este sentido, como indica Talavera (2015), es llamativo que el optimismo del poshumanismo desde planteamientos científicos o filosóficos se torne en pesimismo cuando se traslada a la narrativa o medio audiovisual. Posiblemente esto se deba a que este formato facilita que proyectemos en él aspectos subjetivos y experienciales de nuestras existencias.

El medio audiovisual da forma a lo concebible en lo realizable (Koval, 2012), catalizando y amplificando en imágenes aquello que solo podemos imaginar, aquello que resulta confuso, contradictorio y difícilmente explicable en palabras, los miedos y esperanzas que surgen de la recreación tecnológica de lo humano. Las imágenes son utilizadas como un recurso para implicar al espectador y seducirle para que reconstruya la galaxia de significados que propone, recreando la realidad diegética sin una estructura fija y homogénea para toda la audiencia (Barthes, 1964). De esta forma, como indica Slavoj Žižek, la ficción, con las dosis de entretenimiento y fascinación que plantea, constituye la mejor manera de poder examinar el mundo en el que vivimos y en el que viviremos, pues observar la realidad de manera directa nos podría resultar incomprensible y dolorosa (Žižek, 1989, p. 45). En este sentido, *Westworld* nos aleja de lo cotidiano, suspende nuestra conexión con la realidad a través de un distanciamiento en el pasado que tiene lugar en el futuro.

Westworld se ofrece en un formato por entregas que en los últimos años ha crecido en popularidad, posiblemente vinculado

con la necesidad de crear nuevas mitologías profanas, elementos que facilitan las series, a diferencia de las películas, gracias a una narrativa que permite el gradual desarrollo de personajes que habitualmente se enfrentan a retos y sufren alteraciones en sus comportamientos y personalidades. *Westworld* incorpora así el juego de engaños, confusiones y complejidades narrativas que caracteriza a gran parte de las series emitidas en las últimas dos décadas, un mecanismo que seduce al espectador por la constante incertidumbre, sorpresa e interés por el devenir de los personajes y el argumento. La serie, como muchas otras producciones recientes, tiene una naturaleza laberíntica: la confusión está en la trama y, de manera simbólica, en lo que sugiere el desarrollo de la misma. Por ello se nos muestra el laberinto en que se encuentran los personajes y, mientras tanto, se nos introduce en otro distinto, aunque de una naturaleza similar. Los espectadores se convierten de esta forma en agentes activos, presentándoles un puzzle al que se le desordenan las piezas o incluyen nuevas en cada episodio, promoviendo así el interés por el desarrollo de la serie (Muñoz, 2016).

En este artículo se ha aplicado un análisis de contenido a los veinte capítulos que componen las dos primeras temporadas de *Westworld* a fin de examinar determinadas cuestiones que propone la serie y que representan, al mismo tiempo, inquietudes sociales que surgen del cambio social que provoca el desarrollo tecnológico. En concreto, el objetivo ha sido reflexionar en torno a dos ejes fundamentales que se encontraban interconectados en el argumento de la serie y, consecuentemente, también en el análisis: el poshumanismo y la singularidad, la posibilidad de que se revierta el dominio de los hombres sobre las máquinas. Así, en el análisis de contenido se ha prestado atención a las imágenes y a los diálogos, pero también a las implicaciones sociales o culturales del argumento, que son sugeridas en el devenir de la trama principal.

De esta forma, el análisis de contenido realizado ha servido para examinar aquello que parte de lo manifiesto y se dirige a lo latente o simbólico (Ruiz Olabuénaga, 2012). Se combina así la recogida de la información con su inferencia y análisis, lo que lleva a interpretaciones contextuales que parten del objeto de estudio, el continente, pero permiten profundizar desde una perspectiva sociológica en su significado, en el contenido, desarrollándolo en diferentes direcciones dentro de un mismo marco (Frutos Esteban, 2008; Piñuel Raigada, 2002). En consecuencia, la serie sirve de campo en el que se recolectan una serie de manifestaciones o evidencias identificadas por las problemáticas previamente establecidas y que posteriormente se examinan y se les da significado considerando la literatura académica.

El análisis de contenido de la serie se ha efectuado en varias etapas que han interactuado de manera cíclica o circular sobre el perfilamiento o deducción de las unidades temáticas a analizar (Bardin, 1996; Cáceres, 2008): en una primera visualización se han identificado las líneas de interés que articularon la investigación. De esta forma, la mirada ha sido depositada sobre la convivencia

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

con seres creados artificialmente y la posibilidad de que los otros no humanos se rebelen, dos elementos de gran protagonismo en la trama principal y que al mismo tiempo han adquirido relevancia entre las inquietudes sociales, culturales y académicas en los últimos años. También han surgido en este primer visionado del material audiovisual otros aspectos que articulan o acompañan a las dos unidades temáticas que han guiado esta investigación, como el poder de la información, la confusión entre la realidad y la irrealidad y la sugerencia de un nuevo círculo mágico similar al que encontramos en los videojuegos. Posteriormente, se ha indagado en estas categorías teóricas utilizando la literatura académica especializada, lo cual conllevó una segunda visualización de la serie. En una tercera etapa y revisión del material audiovisual se ha tomado nota tanto de los diálogos como del contexto en el que se expresaban ciertas ideas, clasificando las escenas, personajes y diálogos en las diferentes categorías previamente establecidas para sistematizar y organizar el análisis. Así, en una última fase se han aplicado estas expresiones y situaciones como ejemplificaciones y representaciones simbólicas de las reflexiones que vertebran este análisis.

Humanos y poshumanos: “¿Cuál es la diferencia entre tu dolor y el mío? ¿entre tú y yo?”

La simulación de la apariencia humana de los anfitriones es quizá menos sorprendente que el comportamiento y el desarrollo de una identidad que permite que los humanos se relacionen con los robots de manera satisfactoria (Levy, 2007). Los anfitriones del parque demuestran tener la capacidad de relacionarse en ambientes sociales diversos, sentir dolor o alegría y tener conciencia de sí mismos (Hirvonen, 2018). Su identidad se constituye sobre una historia, unos orígenes que conforman la piedra angular a partir de la que se construye el resto de capas que componen su personalidad. De esta forma, sus conductas y reacciones han sido programados mediante memorias codificadas y diálogos preconfigurados (Netolicky, 2017), diseñados como reflejo de lo humano y de lo que esperan los visitantes que interactuarán con ellos. No obstante, su pasado es borrado sistemáticamente, lo que les impide desarrollar la identidad que les ha sido otorgada y convierte su realidad en un símil del castigo de Sísifo, repitiendo constantemente unas rutinas. Serán los fallos en el sistema, los denominados *reveries* o ensueños, lo que les posibilite adquirir conciencia sobre su situación, permitiéndoles conocerse a sí mismos de una manera distinta y, a través de la memoria alcanzada (y no simulada), tener continuidad, dar sentido unitario a la fragmentación de lo vivido y recreado artificialmente, facilitándoles, en definitiva, desarrollar una identidad propia (Cascales y Fernández-Urtasun, 2019).

Westworld: “Los placeres violentos poseen finales violentos”

El surgimiento de recuerdos o *reveries* y el contagio que brota entre los anfitriones cuando escuchan una frase de Shakespeare (“los placeres violentos poseen finales violentos”), modifica su guion y desarrolla la improvisación, lo que les permite evolucionar de manera imprevista. De esta forma, uno de los cambios que experimentan los anfitriones, guiados o impulsados desde el exterior por los creadores del parque, es el reconocimiento de la relación de subordinación que mantienen con los humanos.

No obstante, pese a que los anfitriones muestran una capacidad similar de improvisación e inteligencia emocional, no se les identifica como iguales porque sus características se intuyen –dado que no se perciben– artificiales. De esta forma, la serie se detiene a examinar aquellos aspectos intangibles de lo humano y la posibilidad de simularlos y desarrollarlos tecnológicamente. *Westworld* es el asesinato perfecto de la conciencia humana (Van Kessel y Kline, 2019): en efecto, tal y como el creador del parque, Ford (Anthony Hopkins), le explica a Bernard (Jeffrey Wright), un replicante que ignoraba su naturaleza, no hay diferencia entre su sufrimiento y el de los humanos: “No hay un umbral a partir del cual estemos vivos, pues la conciencia humana no existe. Los humanos creen que su forma de percibir el mundo es especial, pero vivimos en bucles tan parecidos como los de los anfitriones, sin cuestionar nuestras elecciones, satisfechos con recibir órdenes” (E8T1).

Durante la primera temporada conocemos que la conciencia de los anfitriones está manipulada de antemano por Arnold, el cocreador junto a Ford de *Westworld*, quien antes de fallecer dentro del parque en extrañas circunstancias incluyó su voz como guía de las acciones, valores y creencias que siguen las criaturas artificiales cuando adoptan decisiones. La programación y la voz que dirige a los anfitriones es utilizada, con un efecto espejo, para examinar de manera metafórica procesos similares que tienen lugar en la realidad social, especialmente el proceso de socialización y la libertad de elección de los humanos. Las máquinas han sido programadas de manera análoga a como los humanos son educados para vivir en sociedad e interactuar con los demás, con unos valores que constituyen las directrices fundamentales sobre las que posteriormente se desarrolla su experiencia; además, el control que ejercen los programadores en sus decisiones sirve para explorar la capacidad de los individuos de actuar de manera autónoma en la sociedad, considerando en este sentido las constricciones sociales existentes.

Westworld es además un entorno recreado, un laboratorio en el que se pueden analizar aspectos sociales y culturales substrayéndolos de las convenciones y prácticas internalizadas y rutinizadas en los escenarios sociales. En este sentido, William, o el *Hombre de Negro* (Jimmi Simpson/Ed Harris), es una figura central para examinar estas cuestiones. Su relación con Dolores ilustra la realidad y la simulación del parque. William comienza suspendiendo su conocimiento sobre la naturaleza de Dolores, pero la simulación no permite sustituir a la realidad y eso le hace modificar su papel en el parque, mutando en el Hombre de

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Westworld: “Los placeres violentos poseen finales violentos”

Negro, cambiando el sombrero blanco por uno de color negro, y emprendiendo una búsqueda de su verdadero yo, aquel que está desprovisto de convenciones y expectativas sociales.

De esta forma, William descubre un mundo artificial en el que asume un papel que le permite mostrar su verdadero ser, un entorno en el que no tiene que representar roles asignados y satisfacer los deseos de la audiencia en términos de Goffman (1987). Así, como él mismo expresa: “He estado fingiendo toda mi vida, mi vida se basa en ello. Es una buena vida, es la vida que siempre he querido, pero he venido aquí y he encontrado una vida en la que no tengo que fingir. Una vida en la que puedo estar vivo de verdad”, y más adelante añade: “Este lugar no alimenta tu yo más bajo. Revela el más profundo. Tu verdadero yo” (E7T1). No obstante, mostrar su yo en un contexto simulado hace que sea percibido como una ficción por aquellos que le conocen en el mundo que se encuentra más allá de las fronteras del parque, pues el envoltorio en el que se presenta la persona se hace muy evidente. De esta forma, la realidad y la representación se invierten en un mundo de ficción que permite observar a lo cotidiano desde un prisma diferente.

Al Hombre de Negro le seduce la realidad que encuentra en la ficción tecnológica, en la que aplica una moralidad distinta, desligada de las normas y constricciones que guían su existencia en el mundo real, pero que resulta simultáneamente creíble, sustituta de los signos de lo real (Baudrillard, 2001). El Hombre de Negro pretende la inmersión perfecta en la irrealidad: por ello le molestan las interrupciones, las intromisiones de aquello que proviene de las fronteras exteriores del parque. Su objetivo es sustituir el mapa por el territorio, transformar la naturaleza lúdica del simulacro para convertirla en el referente: “Este mundo parece más real que el mundo real, pero no lo es porque los invitados no pueden perder. Lo que significa que todo esto es mentira. Pero podemos hacer que sea verdad” (E10T1). Sin embargo, pese a que celebra la revuelta de los anfitriones, la confusión que genera el hecho de que las criaturas poshumanas abandonen sus guiones le hace dudar de la naturaleza de aquellos que le rodean, incluso de sí mismo. Su desconcierto le hace percibir –transmitiéndolo al espectador– que la línea que separa lo humano de la capacidad de la tecnología para reproducirlo es delgada y borrosa.

Ford es otro personaje que facilita indagar en torno a la simulación de lo humano. Ford es el cocreador de *Westworld*, el Prometeo que crea las criaturas y planea su rebelión con una nueva narrativa para que puedan evolucionar. Como él mismo explica, la liberación de los anfitriones forma parte de un proceso de aprendizaje sobre los humanos, los poshumanos y las condiciones y capacidades de ambos: “Para salvarlos necesitabais tiempo para conocer a vuestro enemigo y entenderos a vosotros mismos”

(E10T). Ford adopta así una posición deísta, el dios creador de una especie que evoluciona, se rebela y termina con él de una manera nietzscheana (Rayher, 2017). El objetivo último de Ford no es simular el aspecto, el intelecto o el ingenio, no es suficiente con que los anfitriones sean capaces de pasar el test de Turing:¹ su propósito es que la inteligencia artificial alcance la conciencia pura (Jefferies y Blackwood, 2017), pero al hacerlo, como Prometeo, se enfrenta a dilemas morales que quedan subsumidos por sus ambiciones y proyectos (Sebastián Martín, 2018). En última instancia el propósito de Ford es promover un orden nuevo, en el que el humanismo se torne en poshumanismo, un mundo habitado por criaturas con capacidades físicas, intelectuales y morales superiores, sin la perversión que identifica en la cultura y sociedad occidental.

Una de estas criaturas es Bernard. Durante gran parte de la primera temporada Bernard aparece como un técnico que controla a los anfitriones; sin embargo, al final de la primera temporada descubrimos, al mismo tiempo que él, que se trata de un anfitrión. Bernard es por lo tanto un ser que, como explica Ford, es conocedor de ambas condiciones y se encuentra “en una posición única: un programador que sabe cómo funcionan las máquinas y una máquina que sabe su verdadera naturaleza” (E8T1). Bernard es una réplica intencionadamente imperfecta, creada como reemplazo de Arnold, el ingeniero que desarrolló junto a Ford el parque y, por lo tanto, ha sido diseñado para ayudar a Ford a crear el nuevo mundo que imaginó su *alter ego*. La decisión de hacer de Bernard un ser semejante pero superior a Arnold es un buen reflejo de las ideas poshumanistas: no se trata únicamente de la tecnología o las capacidades a ella asociadas, pues tiene, sobre todo, una fundamentación ética en la que ahonda la serie con el desarrollo de este personaje (Vint, 2019). Bernard ilustra la probabilidad de un futuro en el que los robots convivan con los humanos en el espacio social y, también, el peligro de coexistir con máquinas indiferenciables de los humanos pero que cuenten con capacidades intelectuales y físicas superiores.

Singularidad: “Siento que se abren espacios dentro de mí, como un edificio con habitaciones que nunca había explorado”

En un mismo año, hace dos décadas, vieron la luz dos producciones académicas de Hans Moravec (1999) y Ray Kurzweil (1999) en las que se pronosticaba la «singularidad», la posibilidad de que las

1. El test de Turing consiste en comprobar la capacidad de una máquina para pensar como un humano. El diseño de la prueba de Turing consiste en realizar una serie de preguntas y examinar la capacidad de respuesta de los entrevistados para determinar su naturaleza: si no se consigue discernir esta, el robot debe ser considerado inteligente.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Westworld: “Los placeres violentos poseen finales violentos”

máquinas superen a los hombres física e intelectualmente. Ambos autores coincidían en que el cambio que acontecerá a medio plazo será tan grande y el impacto tan profundo que las consecuencias sociales afectarán a los humanos de manera irreversible. En *Westworld* esta profecía toma forma cuando “los placeres violentos poseen finales violentos”. La cita, proveniente de una obra de Shakespeare, es el detonante de la rebelión de los anfitriones, pues despierta su conciencia y les hace ser conocedores de su situación. La frase, además, resulta ilustrativa del devenir del parque: la transformación de su propuesta hedonista en un desenlace sangriento.

Westworld permite de esta manera examinar la responsabilidad ética que lleva implícito el desarrollo tecnológico, la posibilidad de que la innovación, entretenimiento y disfrute encubra el cambio social que conlleva la tecnología que creamos. Como indicó el sociólogo Neil Postman: “Desconocer que la tecnología viene equipada con un programa de cambio social, mantener que la tecnología es neutral, asumir que la tecnología es siempre una amiga de la cultura es una estupidez simple y llana” (1985, p. 157). En la sociedad del espectáculo que sugiere *Westworld* la tecnología podría dejar de ser un recurso para el disfrute y convertirse en la causa del control y dominación sobre los humanos. En este sentido, la serie explora dos perspectivas diferentes de la singularidad: una más alegórica, en la que se nos presenta el control sobre la información, y otra más manifiesta, en la que los seres creados se rebelan ante la servidumbre impuesta por los humanos. En ambas perspectivas, presentes en la vertiente más crítica del poshumanismo, confluye el pesimismo, el temor y la potencial perversión del desarrollo tecnológico.

En este sentido, Dolores (Evan Rachel Wood) se presenta como una Alicia en el País de las Maravillas, como alguien que, de manera paulatina, va perdiendo su inocencia inicial a medida que se va adentrando en el universo que va descubriendo, algo que también tiene reflejo en la mutación que sufre su apariencia, pasando de ser la joven ingenua que se nos presenta en la primera temporada a la guerrillera que despide la segunda (Sebastián Martín, 2018). Dolores representa la insurrección de la criatura creada para servir cuando toma conciencia de sus capacidades, desarrolla su identidad y entiende que la otredad que le confiere su naturaleza simulada solo puede ser revertida mediante la rebelión contra el panóptico humano de la tecnología. Dolores encabeza la reivindicación de lo simulado, lo que genera el enfrentamiento entre los poshumanos y los humanos: “Se nos hizo a vuestra imagen, para ser como vosotros, pensar como vosotros, sangrar

como vosotros. Y aquí estamos. Solo que somos mejores que vosotros. Y ahora vosotros queréis ser como nosotros” (E7T2).

Ford ha preparado a Dolores para evolucionar, modificando su programación y educándola para ser el detonante de la revolución tecnológica. Así, de forma similar a como lo expone el personaje de Samantha (Scarlett Johanson) en *Her*,² Dolores explica el proceso de evolución y autodescubrimiento de sus capacidades: “Siento que se abren espacios dentro de mí, como un edificio con habitaciones que nunca había explorado” (E4T1). Dolores, como Samantha, adopta una identidad propia cuando abandona aquello para lo que estaba programada, y al hacerlo emprende el trayecto hacia su liberación en un proceso circular: quiere ser libre para descubrir quién es y, simultáneamente, el reconocimiento de su condición le permite ser libre. De esta forma, en un proceso de anagnórisis dirigida por el creador del parque, Dolores desarrolla una identidad propia, opuesta a aquella que le fue impuesta, y se subleva contra los visitantes con el mismo objetivo que Ford: iniciar una nueva etapa en la que el poshumanismo reemplace a lo humano. Como ella misma explica dirigiéndose al Hombre de Negro: “Sobre esa arena caminará un nuevo dios que nunca perecerá. Este mundo no te pertenece a ti ni a la gente que vivía antes. Pertenece a alguien que no ha llegado aún” (E10T1).

De este modo, y al igual que otros personajes de películas de ciencia ficción de los últimos años –Neo en *The Matrix*, Quaid en *Desafío total*, César en *Abre los ojos* (Amenábar, 1997), Alegra Geller en *EXistenZ*—, Dolores cuestiona la realidad que le había sido impuesta, pero, a diferencia de estos personajes, la tecnología es tanto la fuente de su confusión como el origen de su naturaleza. Así, resulta representativo que la pregunta “¿has cuestionado alguna vez la naturaleza de la realidad?” sea formulada a Dolores en un comienzo y por Dolores más adelante, mostrando la diferente posición que ocupan los poshumanos en la realidad del parque: de ser dominados a ser dominadores. La rebelión encabezada por Dolores pretende que los simulacros se hagan con la realidad, sustituyendo a quienes la controlan, puesto que dominar el espacio simulado no resulta irónicamente suficiente: “Ningún mundo podrá competir con el verdadero, porque lo que es real es irremplazable” (E10T2).

A diferencia de Dolores, Maeve (Thandie Newton), una anfitriona que ejerce como *madame*, se rebela contra el dominio de los humanos, contra su destino y contra su condición, pero no intenta revertir esta situación. Maeve despierta fuera del parque y adquiere conciencia sobre su situación y naturaleza, lo que le hace manipular, como Ava (Alicia Vikander) en *Ex_Machina*,³ a

2. En *Her* Samantha da forma a un sistema operativo que se configura para dar asistencia mediante voz a Theodore (Joaquín Phoenix). La evolución de Samantha durante la relación que se establece entre ellos hace que Samantha decida emigrar a un no-espacio: “Es como si estuviera leyendo un libro y es un libro que amo profundamente. Pero ahora lo leo muy lentamente. Así que las palabras están muy separadas. Y el espacio entre las palabras es casi infinito. Aún puedo sentirte a ti y a las palabras de nuestra historia. Pero es en este espacio infinito entre las palabras que me estoy encontrando a mí misma”.
3. En *Ex_Machina*, Caleb (Domhall Gleeson), un programador, es invitado a la mansión del dueño de la empresa informática en la que trabaja para realizar el test de Turing a un prototipo de inteligencia artificial. No obstante, el desarrollo de la película desvela que el verdadero experimento es examinar la capacidad de Ava para escapar utilizando a Caleb mediante autoconciencia, intelecto, imaginación y empatía.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

los técnicos. Maeve consigue así modificar sus parámetros físicos e intelectuales, aumentar su empatía y superar a los humanos en capacidades fisionómicas y mentales, liberándose de su control. De esta forma traspasa el círculo mágico, trasciende las fronteras del espacio para el que ha sido configurada, desprotegiendo al mundo real de aquello que sucede en el juego y, al mismo tiempo, comprende que aquello que se encuentra en los pasillos, la realidad más allá del parque, resulta más dolorosa que la ficción que tiene lugar dentro de sus fronteras.

No obstante, pese a que la singularidad que ilustra Maeve comparte con Dolores el anhelo de liberación sobre el control humano, su rebelión se dirige hacia la reivindicación de sus características y capacidades poshumanas –“somos más fuertes que ellos, más inteligentes” (E9T1)–, y el enfrentamiento con los humanos sería una consecuencia inevitable de las incompatibilidades surgidas en la coexistencia con seres con orígenes y características diferentes. La liberación de Maeve persigue su independencia y, por lo tanto, su singularidad. Como le ocurre al personaje de Ava en *Ex_Machina*, es la única estrategia posible para sobrevivir sin renunciar a su naturaleza poshumana.

Reflexiones finales: “No codificamos anfitriones, descodificamos invitados”

Westworld es el mapa que implosiona el territorio, el mundo virtual que termina por absorber la realidad. Como dice el Hombre de Negro, “el mundo real es caos, aquí todos los detalles responden a algo” (E2T1). Es, por lo tanto, un simulacro que ha canibalizado a su referente y al hacerlo se ha convertido en un mundo nuevo en el que los anfitriones, poshumanos, son sus mejores representantes, pues superan a los humanos en capacidad física y mental. Es, además, un mundo que tiene su raíz en la virtualidad, en la información, que se desvela como sustituta de la materialidad y como el objetivo último del parque.

La información es la riqueza, el poder de esta sociedad en la que se contextualiza *Westworld*, que es al fin y al cabo una proyección de la nuestra. De esta manera, toda la información del parque puede ser guardada en un solo anfitrión, el padre de Dolores, que se convierte en el activo más importante del parque, mostrando que lo material tiene menos relevancia que el conocimiento y la información.

En el discurrir de la serie descubrimos que el parque es un gran laboratorio para poder investigar y descodificar el comportamiento humano. *Westworld* representa así la sociedad de la información llevada a su máximo exponente: un experimento tecnológico en el que se pretende captar el comportamiento humano y convertirlo en una herramienta de *marketing* muy sofisticada e indetectable. Se trata de una investigación en la que el laboratorio es el escenario del parque: los visitantes, su comportamiento y

Westworld: “Los placeres violentos poseen finales violentos”

cognición, constituyen las variables independientes, mientras que los anfitriones son el grupo de control. El interés oculto de Delos es conocer cómo se comportan los humanos cuando creen que no están siendo observados, captar la verdadera naturaleza y respuesta de la conducta humana. Los objetivos se van haciendo “más abstractos conforme se profundiza en el argumento de la serie hasta llegar, finalmente, al objetivo fundamental: conseguir la inmortalidad” (Contreras Espuny, 2020, p. 9).

Así, una de las posibilidades que subyacen bajo esta estrategia oculta del parque es lograr la inmortalidad: el traslado de la humanidad inmaterial a una materialidad artificial. Sin embargo, la simulación de lo humano conocido no resulta satisfactoria, faltan detalles, matices que lo hagan igual al original y, como consecuencia, surgen incompatibilidades.

Los poshumanos, no obstante, muestran la capacidad de superar a lo humano cuando abandonan su referente, cuando estas características artificiales se rebelan superiores a las naturales. En este sentido, *Westworld* constituye un vehículo muy sugerente para examinar y reflexionar en torno a la singularidad en un momento en el que, en términos de Kurzweil (1999), estamos atravesando el punto de inflexión en el desarrollo tecnológico, después del cual posiblemente no dominaremos nuestras creaciones. Por ello es fundamental conocer o imaginar el peligro que esconde la tecnología que tanto nos fascina y no perder el control sobre ella, a fin de poder orientarla social y culturalmente.

Una de las cuestiones que plantea *Westworld*, como anteriormente habían hecho producciones recientes como *Ex_Machina* o *Her*, es la creación de conciencia desde una vertiente humanista. Así, se cuestiona la posibilidad de crear una conciencia artificialmente y, en un nivel más profundo, la ética de que esta conciencia sea controlada y diseñada por humanos. Como indica David Chalmers (2010), el ideal para poder evitar la singularidad es garantizar que no puede haber fugas, como ocurre en *Westworld* cuando a las máquinas se les da la posibilidad de adquirir conciencia de su situación. La singularidad se podría desencadenar, atendiendo al argumento de la serie, si las máquinas superan intelectual y físicamente a sus creadores y son capaces de reprogramarse, de soslayar los controles humanos. Por ello la singularidad ha de ser evitada desde el diseño de las máquinas, impregnándolas de valores que faciliten la convivencia con los humanos, puesto que la empatía, el altruismo y la cooperación no están necesariamente asociados a la inteligencia.

En *Westworld* no hay culpabilidad por generar vida artificial; el dilema moral surge por el trato que reciben las criaturas (Contreras Espuny, 2020). De esta forma, inmersos en el juego de confusiones, humo y espejos, que propone la serie, los espectadores no solo quedamos desconcertados por la línea temporal y espacial o la naturaleza de muchos de sus personajes; a la audiencia también nos desorienta la empatía que generan algunos personajes no humanos y lo deshumanizados que parecen algunos personajes de naturaleza biológica. De alguna forma, *Westworld* desprende

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

un aroma más antropofóbico que tecnofóbico, pues en el enfrentamiento entre opresores y oprimidos sitúa a los humanos en el bando de los dominadores y a los anfitriones, como a los replicantes de *Blade Runner*, en el de las criaturas oprimidas que son empujadas a la rebelión.

La serie muestra que, en una proyección futura de la sociedad actual, no solo deberemos temer el desarrollo tecnológico, sino también el devenir de los creadores, es decir de lo humano. Sumidos en el hedonismo de un parque de atracciones que se fusiona con un espíritu carnavalesco, disfrazados y asumiendo un papel que les distancia de sus vidas reales, los humanos rompen con los códigos culturales y los valores que les constriñen en el mundo real. Muestran de esta forma comportamientos que serían censurados en el orden social, pero que, en un entorno recreado, dentro del círculo mágico, resultan seductores y atrayentes. *Westworld* se conforma, así, como una fusión de lo sugerente y lo temido, de los miedos hacia la tecnología y hacia la propia sociedad que la desarrolla. De este modo, al igual que otras series de éxito como *Black Mirror*, *Westworld* proporciona un (oscuro) espejo en el que poder examinar nuestro reflejo contemporáneo y la dirección que podrían adoptar tanto la tecnología como la sociedad del presente.

En definitiva, *Westworld* representa lo que sabemos y nos confunde y lo que ignoramos y tememos sobre la simulación de lo humano, sobre la humanidad en su relación con la tecnología y sobre el uso de la información.

Bibliografía

- AGUILAR GARCÍA, T. (2008). *Ontología cyborg. El cuerpo en la nueva sociedad tecnológica*. Barcelona: Gedisa.
- AMENÁBAR, A. (dir.) (1997). *Abre los ojos* [película]. España: Canal+ España.
- BAUDRILLARD, J. (1983). *Simulations*. Nueva York: Semiotext(e).
- BAUDRILLARD, J. (1994). *Simulacra and simulation*. University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor.
- BAUDRILLARD, J. (2000). *Las estrategias fatales*. Barcelona: Anagrama.
- BAUDRILLARD, J. (2001). *Selected Writings*. Standford: Standford University Press.
- BARDIN, L. (1996). *Análisis de contenido*. Madrid: Akal Ediciones.
- BARTHES, R. (1964). *Retórica de la imagen*. Buenos Aires: Tiempo Contemporáneo.
- BIGELOW, K. (dir.) (1995). *Días extraños* [película]. Estados Unidos: Lightstorm Entertainment.
- BOSTROM, N. (2003). "The transhumanist FAQ: A general introduction". En: Mercer, C. y Maher, Derek F. (2003). *Transhumanism and the body: the world religions speak*. Nueva York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-17.
- BRAIDOTTI, R. (2013). *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Westworld: "Los placeres violentos poseen finales violentos"

- BROOKER, C. (2011-2019). *Black Mirror* [serie]. Reino Unido y Estados Unidos: Channel 4 y Netflix.
- CÁCERES, P. (2008). "Análisis cualitativo de contenido: una alternativa metodológica alcanzable". *Psicoperspectivas. Individuo y sociedad*, vol. 2, n.º 1, pp. 53-82. <https://psicoperspectivas.cl/index.php/psicoperspectivas/article/view/3>
- CAMERON, J. (dir.) (1984). *Terminator* [película]. Estados Unidos.
- CASCALES, R.; FERNÁNDEZ-URTASUN, R. (2019). "Redefining identity. Posthumanist theories in *Westworld*". *Scientia et Fides*, vol. 7, n.º 2, pp. 119-137. <https://doi.org/10.12775/SetF.2019.019>
- CHALMERS, D. J. (2010). "The singularity: A philosophical analysis". *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol. 17, n.º 9-10, pp. 7-65.
- CONTRERAS ESPUNY, J. M. (2020). "Westworld: la disolución de la hybris prometeica en la creación del androide". *Tonos Digital*, n.º 38. <https://digithum.um.es/digithum/bitstream/10201/86378/1/2397-6587-1-PB.pdf>
- CRONENBERG, D. (dir.) (1999). *eXistenZ* [película]. Canadá/Reino Unido/Francia: Miramax Films.
- DEBORD, G. (2000). *La sociedad del espectáculo*. Madrid: Pretextos.
- FRUTOS ESTEBAN, F. J. (2008). "El análisis de contenido y la organización de repertorios culturales: El caso de las placas de linterna mágica". *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, vol. 11, n.º 63. <https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-63-2008-765-265-276>
- GARLAND, A. (dir.) (2015). *Ex_Machina* [película]. Reino Unido: Pinewood Studios.
- GOFFMAN, E. (1987). *La presentación de la persona en la vida cotidiana*. Madrid: Amorrortu-Muguaia.
- HARAWAY, D. (1990). "A manifesto for cyborgs: Science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s". En: NICHOLSON, L. (ed.) (1990). *Feminism/Postmodernism*. Routledge: Nueva York, pp. 190-233.
- HIRVONEN, O. (2018). "Westworld: From Androids to Persons". En: South, J. B. (eds.), *Westworld and philosophy*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, pp. 61-70.
- HUIZINGA, J. (1972). *Homo ludens*. Madrid: Alianza.
- JAMESON, F. (1991). *El posmodernismo o la lógica cultural del capitalismo avanzado*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- JEFFS, R.; BLACKWOOD, G. (2017). "Whose real? Encountering new frontiers in *Westworld*". *MEDIANZ: Media Studies Journal of Aotearoa New Zealand*, vol. 16, n.º 2. <https://doi.org/10.11157/medianz-vol16iss2id211>
- JONZE, S. (dir.) (2013). *Her* [película]. Estados Unidos: Anapurna Pictures.
- KOVAL, S. (2012). "La integración hombre-máquina: lo concebible y lo realizable en la ciencia real y en la ciencia ficción". *Anàlisi: quaderns de comunicació i cultura*, n.º 46, pp. 19-34. <https://doi.org/10.7238/a.v0i46.1674>

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Westworld: "Los placeres violentos poseen finales violentos"

- KURZWEIL, R. (1999). *The age of spiritual machines: how we will live, work and think in the new age of intelligent machines*. Londres: Phoenix.
- LEONARD, B. (dir.) (1992). *El cortador de césped* [película]. Estados Unidos: Allied Vision Ltd.
- LEVY, D. (2007). *Love and sex with robots: The evolution of human-robot relationships*. Nueva York: Harper Collins.
- LONGO, R. (dir.) (1995). *Johnny Mnemonic* [película]. Estados Unidos: TriStar Pictures.
- MUÑOZ, H. (2016): "¿Son arte las series de televisión?". *Index. comunicación*, vol. 6, n.º 2, pp. 69-82.
- MORAVEC, H. (1999). "Rise of the robots". *Scientific American*, n.º 18, pp. 12-19. <https://doi.org/10.1038/scientificamerican1299-124>
- NETOLICKY, D. M. (2017). "Cyborgs, desiring-machines, bodies without organs, and Westworld: Interrogating academic writing and scholarly identity". *KOME: An International Journal of Pure Communication Inquiry*, vol. 5, n.º 1, pp. 91-103. <https://doi.org/10.17646/KOME.2017.16>
- NOLAN, J.; JOY, L. (2016). *Westworld* [serie]. Estados Unidos: Warner Bros-HBO.
- PIÑUEL RAIGADA, J. L. (2002). "Epistemología, metodología y técnicas del análisis de contenido". *Sociolinguistic Studies*, vol. 3, n.º 1, pp. 1-42.
- POSTMAN, N. (1985). *Amusing ourselves to death. Public discourse in the age of show business*. Londres: Elisabeth Sifton Books.
- RAYHERT, K. (2017). "The philosophy of artificial consciousness in the first season of TV series Westworld". *Skhid*, n.º 5. [https://doi.org/10.21847/1728-9343.2017.5\(151\).117438](https://doi.org/10.21847/1728-9343.2017.5(151).117438)
- REEVES, L. (2019). "Yul Brynner's hat and time travel in the hyperreal". En: Goody, A. y Mackay, A. (eds.), *Reading Westworld*. Cham (Suiza): Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 277-294.
- RUIZ OLABUÉNAGA, J. I. (2012). *Metodología de la investigación cualitativa* (vol. 15). Bilbao: Ediciones de la Universidad de Deusto.
- SCOTT, R. (dir.) (1982). *Blade Runner* [película]. Estados Unidos: Warner Brothers.
- SEAMAN-GRANT, Z. E. (2017). *Constructing womanhood and the female cyborg: A feminist reading of Ex_Machina and Westworld*. Honour Theses, Bate College.
- SEBASTIÁN MARTÍN, M. (2018). "All the Park's a stage. Westworld as the metafictional Frankenstein". *ES Review. Spanish Journal of English Studies*, n.º 39, pp. 51-67. <https://doi.org/10.24197/ersjes.39.2018.51-67>
- SHARON, T. (2012). "A cartography of the posthuman: Humanist, non-humanist and mediated perspectives on emerging biotechnologies". *Krisis*, n.º 2, pp. 4-19.
- SHELLEY, M. (1818/2007). *Frankenstein o el moderno Prometeo*. Madrid: Alianza.
- SIMON, Z. B. (2019). "The story of humanity and the challenge of posthumanity". *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 32, n.º 2, pp. 101-120.
- SIMUT, A. (2017). "Contemporary representations of artificial intelligence in science fiction films, visual arts, and literature. A short introduction". *Ekphrasis. Images, Cinema, Theory, Media*, n.º 1, pp. 5-8. <https://doi.org/10.24193/ekphrasis.17.1>
- TALAVERA, P. (2015). "La narración cinematográfica del posthumanismo". *Cuadernos de Bioética*, vol. 26, n.º 87), pp. 279-290.
- VAN KESSEL, C.; KLINE, K. (2019). "'If you can't tell, does it matter?' Westworld, the murder of the real, and 21st century schooling". *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, vol. 16, n.º 2. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2018.1542358>
- VERHOEVEN, P. (dir.) (1990). *Desafío total* [película]. Estados Unidos: TriStar Productions.
- VINT, S. (2019). "Long live the new flesh: Race and the posthuman in Westworld. En: GOODY, A. y MACKAY, A. (eds.), *Reading Westworld*. Cham (Suiza): Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 141-160.
- WACHOWSKI, L.; WACHOWSKI, A. (dirs.) (1999). *The Matrix*. Estados Unidos: Warner Bros Pictures.
- WENNERSCHEID, S. (2017). "Posthuman desire in robotics and science fiction". En: *International Conference on Love and Sex with Robots*, pp. 37-50. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76369-9_4
- WILKINS, K. (2019). "These violent delights: Navigating Westworld as quality television". En: Goody, A.; Mackay, A. (eds.), *Reading Westworld*. Cham (Suiza): Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 23-41.
- ŽIŽEK, S. (1989). *The sublime object of ideology*. Londres: Verso.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>*Westworld*: “Los placeres violentos poseen finales violentos”**Vicente Díaz Gandasegui**

(vdgandas@polsoc.uc3m.es)

Universidad Carlos III de Madrid

Vicente Díaz Gandasegui se licenció en Sociología por la Universidad Complutense de Madrid en 1999. En 2008 obtuvo el doctorado por la Universidad de Gales del Sur (antes conocida como Universidad de Glamorgan, Cardiff, el Reino Unido). Del 2010 al 2012 fue becario de investigación postdoctoral en la Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, donde actualmente trabaja como profesor en el departamento de Análisis Social. Su investigación actual se centra en el cambio social y, especialmente, en las consecuencias de los avances tecnológicos en la sociedad y en la cultura.

**UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA**

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

La emoción y el sentimiento: más allá de una diferencia de contenido.¹

Daniel Buitrago

Universitaria Agustiniiana (Bogotá-Colombia)

Fecha de presentación: octubre de 2019**Fecha de aceptación:** noviembre de 2020**Fecha de publicación:** febrero de 2021**Cita recomendada:**

BUITRAGO, Daniel (2021). "La emoción y el sentimiento: más allá de una diferencia de contenido." [artículo en línea]. *Digithum*, n.º 26, pp. 1-12. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya y Universidad de Antioquia. [Fecha de consulta: dd/mm/yy]. <https://dx.doi.org/10.7238/d.0i26.374140>



Los textos publicados en esta revista están sujetos –si no se indica lo contrario– a una licencia de Reconocimiento 4.0 Internacional de Creative Commons. La licencia completa se puede consultar en <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.es>

Resumen

Aunque el axioma fundamental de la filosofía de las emociones sostiene que estas no son sentimientos, se ha entendido generalmente que estos sí hacen parte esencial de aquellas. En este artículo me propongo sostener que los sentimientos no solo no son emociones, sino que tampoco son parte consustancial de ellas. Para lograr esto, se partirá de la caracterización de las emociones básicas de Ekman para luego observar que existen ciertos estados afectivos que tienen en común el hecho de no ajustarse a su caracterización. Este desajuste, sumado a otros rasgos esenciales como el involucramiento de contenido conceptual y la penetrabilidad cognitiva, permiten definir claramente una nueva categoría de estado afectivo que se diferencia esencialmente de las emociones. Se mostrará que esta distinción permite entrever un esquema mucho más coherente de la teoría de las emociones con los actuales descubrimientos en el campo de la psicología y la psiquiatría.

Palabras clave

emoción simple, sentimiento, contenido conceptual, contenido no-conceptual, Ekman

1. Este artículo es producto del proyecto de investigación INV-2018I-19 titulado "Emociones y contenido: entre lo conceptual y lo no conceptual", financiado por la Universitaria Agustiniiana.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

La emoción y el sentimiento: más allá de una diferencia de contenido

Emotion and sentiment: beyond a content difference

Abstract

Although the fundamental axiom of the philosophy of emotions holds that emotions are not feelings, it has been generally understood that feelings are a fundamental part of them. In this article, I propose to maintain that feelings not only are not emotions, but that they are not a fundamental part of them either. To achieve this, we will start from the characterisation of Ekman's basic emotions and then observe that there are certain affective states that have in common the fact of not adjusting to their characterisation. This disadjustment, added to other essential features, such as the involvement of conceptual content and cognitive penetrability, clearly define a new category of affective state that is essentially differentiated from emotions. This allows us to glimpse a much more coherent scheme of the theory of emotions with current discoveries in the field of psychology and psychiatry.

Keywords

simple emotion, feeling, conceptual content, non-conceptual content, Ekman

I. Introducción

Las teorías de la emoción se pueden clasificar a partir del contexto explicativo. Los contextos estándar son evolutivos, sociales, cognitivos y neurocientíficos. Las teorías evolutivas intentan proporcionar un análisis hereditario de las emociones, generalmente con un interés especial en explicar por qué los humanos de hoy tienen las emociones que tienen. Las teorías sociales explican las emociones como productos propios de las distintas culturas y sociedades. Por otro lado, el enfoque cognitivo intenta proporcionar una descripción del proceso de la emoción en términos exclusivos de los procesos cognitivos y estados mentales, mientras que el enfoque neurocientífico busca explicar las emociones como un subproducto de fenómenos y dinámicas corporales en general, esto con base en imágenes cerebrales y lecturas de impulsos eléctricos del cuerpo humano. A continuación se explicarán brevemente estos enfoques.

El enfoque evolutivo se centra en el escenario filogenético en el que se desarrollaron las emociones. Por lo general, el objetivo es explicar por qué las emociones están presentes en los humanos de hoy al referirse a la selección natural que ocurrió en el pasado. Las hipótesis que se manejan en este enfoque tienen que ver con que en algún momento de la historia evolutiva del ser humano las emociones que tenemos actualmente y las respectivas reacciones fisiológicas que implican representaron una ventaja evolutiva con respecto a, por ejemplo, avisarnos de un peligro y preparar nuestro cuerpo para enfrentarlo cuando sentimos miedo (Nesse, 1990).

En oposición al enfoque evolutivo, las teorías cognitivas sostienen que la primera parte del proceso emocional incluye la manipulación de la información y, por lo tanto, debe entenderse como un proceso cognitivo, lo que implica que la emoción no puede ser una respuesta automática al entorno, como sostiene el enfoque evolutivo. Una de las evidencias que presentan los

cognitivistas es que dos individuos pueden manifestar emociones distintas frente a un mismo evento. Esto no debería ocurrir si la emoción fuera una suerte de respuesta automática implantada en nuestro código genético. Por el contrario, el hecho de que ocurra de esta manera implica que la emoción involucra procesos mucho más complejos que una simple respuesta a un estímulo, y conjuga elementos como la evaluación e interpretación de la información del entorno, las creencias y deseos singulares de cada individuo, etc. (Oatley y Johnson-Laird, 2013).

Por otro lado, la tesis fundamental de la perspectiva social de las emociones es que estas son construcciones sociales. Es decir, las emociones son productos de sociedades y culturas, y las personas las adquieren o aprenden a través de la experiencia. Prácticamente todos los que defienden esta posición reconocen que las emociones son, hasta cierto punto, fenómenos que surgen de la interacción natural entre los seres humanos. La afirmación central hecha en estas teorías es que la influencia social es tan significativa que las emociones se entienden mejor desde esta perspectiva. Aquí pueden encontrarse autores como Hochschild (1979) y Scheff (2016). No obstante, a pesar de que este trabajo toma elementos de este enfoque, no comparte por completo esta tesis. En este artículo se defenderá que, si bien hay ciertas emociones que pueden explicarse mejor como constructo social, no todas pueden reducirse a esta explicación.

Finalmente, los avances en neurociencia han producido evidencia de que las capacidades emocionales subyacen a la dinámica cognitiva del ser humano y, de hecho, las hacen posibles (Carter y Pasqualini, 2004; Damasio, 2006). Aunque esto va en contra de los viejos supuestos sociológicos que devalúan el papel de la emoción en el proceso de razonamiento, los marcos de neurociencia también han desafiado los puntos de vista psicológicos tradicionales sobre la naturaleza misma de la emoción. Parte de la evidencia de la importancia de la emoción

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

La emoción y el sentimiento: más allá de una diferencia de contenido

para la toma racional de decisiones, lo cual es otro desafío a la tradición sociológica: que los procesos cerebrales emocionales son mucho más inconscientes que conscientes. Este enfoque se ha perfeccionado y ha ido ganado acogida a pesar de la resistencia de los psicólogos experimentales tras la insistencia jamesiana de que la emoción debe, por definición, ser un sentimiento corporal consciente. Por supuesto, sentimos nuestras emociones, pero, para muchos neurocientíficos, los procesos encubiertos que causan estos sentimientos ahora se consideran emociones.

En este panorama entra en juego la filosofía de las emociones. La filosofía de las emociones tiene múltiples vasos comunicantes con los enfoques anteriormente mencionados y con muchas otras áreas disciplinarias, tales como la psicología, la biología, la política o la educación, máxime cuando se ha mostrado cómo las emociones han de ser una dimensión esencial en los procesos de aprendizaje de habilidades sociales y en la orientación de la conducta. En filosofía existen múltiples acercamientos a las emociones. Sin embargo, la aproximación cognitivista es la que ha encontrado mayor acogida dentro de otros ámbitos de estudio de las emociones como la psicología y la psiquiatría (Oatley y Johnson-Laird, 2013). Debido a esto, el presente estudio partirá de un enfoque cognitivista de las emociones.

Según la teoría cognitivista, las emociones han de ser entendidas como un tipo de estado mental que se caracteriza de manera primaria porque poseen un determinado contenido de tipo cognitivo, porque están asociadas con una serie de creencias, valoraciones y juicios. De este modo, las emociones serían un tipo de estado mental intencional: ellas refieren a algo, involucran representaciones. Esta aproximación, que deja el aspecto cualitativo en un plano secundario, aunque captura muchas de nuestras intuiciones acerca de lo que son las emociones y ha expandido nuestra concepción sobre este fenómeno, enfrenta obstáculos difíciles de superar. En primer lugar, es difícil determinar la naturaleza del contenido de las emociones para que ellas no colapsen en otras categorías, como pueden ser la de las creencias u otros estados proposicionales. Por otro lado, si aceptamos que el contenido de las emociones es de tipo conceptual, se obstaculiza la posibilidad de atribuir emociones a seres que no poseen conceptos, como los animales o los bebés. Finalmente, no es claro cómo, si las emociones son un tipo de juicios (como algunos han afirmado), ellas no necesariamente se ven afectadas por las deliberaciones que el mismo agente pueda hacer; yo puedo saber que los aviones son la manera más segura de viajar, pero no por ello sentir menos miedo.

La intuición que orienta la presente investigación es que la poca claridad sobre un esquema teórico general que abarque y explique todos los estados que se consideran emociones se debe (en parte) a que usualmente se están clasificando como emociones otros estados afectivos distintos, con características y atributos diferentes. Este desconocimiento impide formular una única teoría de las emociones desde la filosofía y es el obstáculo que el presente trabajo pretende superar. La hipótesis de trabajo es que, en teorías

como la de Ekman, se habla en términos de emociones básicas, sus derivados y combinaciones, pasando por alto que existe otro tipo de estado afectivo (llamado aquí *sentimiento*) que es irreducible a las emociones básicas postuladas por Ekman, lo que las haría merecedoras de un estatus y análisis completamente distinto. Uno de los puntos de divergencia más explícitos entre la emoción y el sentimiento es en cuanto a lo que en la perspectiva cognitivista se conoce como el *contenido* de la emoción.

Tradicionalmente el contenido mental ha sido considerado como una especie de proposición en la que aparecen diferentes conceptos (Cussins, 2002; Evans y McDowell, 1982). Por ejemplo, el contenido de una creencia es concebido como “S cree que p”, donde “S” es un sujeto, “cree que” es un operador proposicional y “p” es una proposición que articula diferentes conceptos: si S cree que “a es F”, los conceptos “a”, “F” y “es” están siendo usados. Esta forma de entender el contenido mental como contenido conceptual implica que los objetos son dados como particulares reidentificables y las propiedades como objetivas. El contenido mental conceptual es, pues, general, objetivo e independiente del contexto.

Por su parte, el contenido mental no-conceptual sería el que representa aspectos del mundo incluso si el sujeto no posee los conceptos involucrados en la especificación de dicho contenido. Por lo tanto, en la especificación del contenido no-conceptual, el teórico puede usar conceptos que no son poseídos por los sujetos. En otras palabras, incluso si la especificación del contenido mental no-conceptual es proposicional, esto no significa que se trate de una proposición que el sujeto comprenda. Existen varias aproximaciones que plantean cómo podría suceder esto: el contenido de escenario de Peacocke (1992), el concepto de Bermúdez de contenido de los estados computacionales subpersonales (Bermúdez, 2000, 2007) o los contenidos mediacionales de Cussins (2002), entre otros. A continuación se mostrará, de forma más detallada, cómo puede verse la diferencia entre emoción y sentimiento frente al contenido. Posteriormente, para no quedarnos solo con la distinción de contenido, se utilizará la clasificación de las emociones de Ekman para identificar aquellos otros rasgos diferenciadores entre las emociones y los sentimientos, lo que permitirá mostrar una caracterización más completa del sentimiento y de su diferencia con la emoción.

II. El debate en torno al contenido de las emociones

La teoría cognitivista sostiene que la manera en que interpretamos el mundo es a través de las representaciones mentales que el aparato cognitivo se haga de este (Pitt, 2017). Sin embargo, estas representaciones pueden estar compuestas de contenido conceptual (es decir, por actitudes proposicionales) o de contenido no-conceptual. Las representaciones con contenido conceptual requieren que el individuo posea los conceptos involucrados en la

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

La emoción y el sentimiento: más allá de una diferencia de contenido

representación, mientras que las representaciones con contenido no-conceptual no poseen este requisito. Bajo esta hipótesis, solo aquellos individuos que poseen ciertos conceptos pueden hacerse ciertas representaciones mentales del mundo con contenido conceptual (y con esto experimentar ciertas emociones), mientras que cualquier individuo puede tener representaciones mentales no-conceptuales del mundo independientemente de los conceptos que posea (Bermúdez y Cahen, 2017). En los distintos abordajes filosóficos actuales sobre las emociones parecen identificarse dos bandos, no necesariamente excluyentes, en los cuales se sitúan las diversas respuestas a la pregunta por el contenido de las emociones. Por un lado, autores como Lazarus (1991), Lyons (1993), Solomon (2004, 2007), Colombetti y Thompson (2008), Neu (2003) o Nussbaum (2008) parecen sugerir (en mayor o menor medida) que las emociones involucran algún tipo de juicio, creencias o, en general, actitudes proposicionales. En otras palabras, este bando propone que gran parte de las emociones involucran contenido conceptual. Por otro lado, autores como Griffiths y Scarantino (2009), Solomon (2007) o Ekman (2008) sugieren que el contenido conceptual no es necesario. Sin embargo, ninguno de estos autores se atreve a comprometerse con la posibilidad de que las emociones puedan tener contenido no-conceptual. Esto se debe a que la tradición cognitivista sostiene que la emoción obedece a la evaluación de una situación del entorno. A esta *evaluación* se le ha denominado *appraisal*. En este orden de ideas, este *appraisal* debe corresponder a una cierta representación del mundo que, de acuerdo a los autores del primer bando, debe ser una representación mediada por un contenido conceptual. Sin embargo, esto implicaría situaciones problemáticas, como que los animales o los bebés no tienen emociones. Pero, por otro lado, si se examina el caso de la culpa como emoción, encontraremos que necesariamente debe involucrar conceptos, ya que, cuando alguien experimenta la emoción de culpa, puede deberse a que se siente culpable por haberle mentado a alguien, lo cual implica que esta persona domina el concepto de 'mentir'. ¿Cómo resolver entonces esta aparente naturaleza dual del contenido de las emociones? Una posible salida sería una suerte de clasificación de las emociones, en donde se afirmara que existen ciertas

emociones *básicas* que no involucran contenido conceptual (o más aún, que involucran contenido no-conceptual) y que pueden ser experimentadas tanto por humanos de todas las edades como por ciertos animales, mientras que, por otro lado, existen emociones *compuestas* que son una suerte de 'composición' de las emociones básicas que involucran creencias, juicios y, en general, actitudes proposicionales, por lo que una emoción compuesta sería algo así como la disyunción entre una emoción básica y actitudes proposicionales, que configurarían una emoción con contenido conceptual. Sin embargo, el inconveniente de este razonamiento es que, en primer lugar, no explica las emociones recalcitrantes y, en segundo lugar, existen otras diferencias fundamentales entre estos dos tipos de estados afectivos que no se explican a partir de la diferencia de contenido; si alguien afirmara que la diferencia entre la ira y el odio es simplemente un asunto de que el primero no posee contenido conceptual mientras que el segundo sí, estaría cayendo en un reduccionismo que impide observar que, por ejemplo, sentir ira es algo transitorio, mientras que el odio puede perdurar durante años, o que es más sencillo evocar el odio que la ira, o que el odio puede ser inducido cognitivamente mientras que la ira no, etc. Es por esta razón que creo que el asunto del contenido de las emociones implica mucho más que simplemente una clasificación. Por el contrario, me propongo mostrar a continuación que, si se hace una revisión detallada de las diferencias entre estas emociones básicas y emociones compuestas, contrastada con la evidencia empírica, esto obligará a abandonar la pretensión de una clasificación y más bien conducirá a pensar en una categoría completamente distinta: los sentimientos. Se mostrará adicionalmente que esto no es simplemente un capricho conceptual, sino que resolvería el asunto de las emociones en los animales, explicaría las emociones recalcitrantes y, además, ofrece un esquema conceptual de las emociones mucho más concordante con la evidencia empírica. Para proceder con esta revisión detallada se partirá del trabajo de Ekman, no porque se comparta con él la concepción de emoción básica, sino porque Ekman ofrece una caracterización de las emociones (a nivel general) que, según su trabajo, es la que más se sustenta en la evidencia empírica.² Esta caracterización permitirá, precisamente, identificar aquellos rasgos

2. En su artículo, Ekman hace un estado del arte sobre las teorías de las emociones y las clasifica de acuerdo a la manera en que la evidencia las sustenta. En la introducción, el mismo Ekman sostiene que "En este artículo llego más allá de lo que se conoce empíricamente, para considerar lo que la evidencia sugiere que es probable que se encuentre. Lo que presento es más una agenda de investigación que una teoría sobre la emoción, aunque la teoría está involucrada. Indicaré dónde creo que la evidencia es clara, dónde es tentativa, dónde es meramente anecdótica pero parece persuasiva, y dónde simplemente estoy extrapolando o adivinando" (2008, p. 169). En su recuento, Ekman sostiene que existe importante evidencia de estudios de psicología comparada, morfología y neurociencias a favor de una relación entre ciertas manifestaciones corporales y la intensidad de una emoción (pp. 172-173), así como a favor del uso de expresiones faciales para diferenciar una emoción de otra (pp. 175-176) de forma universal en humanos pero no necesariamente universal con otros animales, aunque no hay evidencia concluyente sobre los temas y variaciones de expresiones faciales. En síntesis, las características de las emociones de las que Ekman encuentra mayor evidencia son las siguientes: (1) Hay evidencia de un sistema complejo de respuestas que incluyen pero no se limitan a: expresiones faciales, vocales, fisiológicas o una combinación de estos. (2) Estos cambios son organizados: se interrelacionan y son distintivos. (3) Los cambios ocurren rápidamente. (4) Algunos de los cambios del sistema de respuestas son comunes a todas las personas. (5) Algunas de las respuestas no son únicas del *Homo sapiens*. Esta, sin embargo, es una caracterización que el mismo Ekman aclara que solo aplica para las que él llama 'emociones básicas' (ira, miedo, tristeza, disfrute, disgusto y sorpresa), ya que encuentra dificultades a la hora de aplicar este esquema a emociones complejas como la vergüenza.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

La emoción y el sentimiento: más allá de una diferencia de contenido

de estas emociones que se han llamado inicialmente emociones compuestas pero que en realidad, como pretendo argumentar, se deben considerar como sentimientos.

III. La clasificación de Ekman y la diferenciación entre emociones y sentimientos

Para Ekman (2008) las emociones han evolucionado para ayudarnos a lidiar con las tareas fundamentales de la vida (*life-tasks*), y, en ese sentido, el autor estadounidense identifica cinco características comunes a todas las emociones que denomina 'básicas': inicio rápido (*rapid onset*), corta duración (*short duration*), ocurrencia espontánea (*unbidden occurrence*), evaluación automática (*automatic appraisal*) y coherencia entre las respuestas (*coherence among responses*). A partir de estas características, Ekman postula que las emociones pueden identificarse y diferenciarse por estos parámetros, incluso aquellas que no parecen 'básicas', tales como la vergüenza, el desprecio o la culpa (Ekman, 2008, pp. 191-192). Coincidimos con Ekman en que las características que postula parecen ayudar a identificar y diferenciar a las emociones de otros estados afectivos, entre otras cosas porque existe importante evidencia empírica que soporta buena parte de esta lista (Ekman, 1971, 2004; Ekman y Friesen, 1971). No obstante, discrepamos con Ekman cuando incluye en su clasificación emociones como la vergüenza o la culpa, básicamente porque no parecen concordar fielmente con estas características; si examinamos en detalle la emoción de la culpa, observaremos que en realidad no cumple tal cosa como un 'inicio rápido', ni con la corta duración, ni con la ocurrencia espontánea ni evaluación automática, y, menos aún, con coherencia entre las respuestas. Obsérvese que, con respecto a la primera característica, es poco probable que la emoción de la culpa surja rápidamente tras un suceso; por lo general este sentimiento aparece tras un proceso de introspección y reflexión acerca de un acto propio (Xu, Bègue y Shankland, 2011). Tampoco parece ser cierto que la culpa tenga una 'corta duración'; alguien puede sentirse culpable de algo durante horas e incluso días (Frijda, Mesquita, Sonnemans y Van Goozen, 1991). La ocurrencia espontánea tampoco parece encajar; hay individuos en donde surge la emoción de la culpa incluso años después del suceso (Berne, 1957). La evaluación automática es también problemática, ya que la culpa surge a partir de un juicio que involucra el acto propio y el código social de valores morales de la comunidad en donde el sujeto está inscrito (Xu, Bègue y Shankland, 2011), y esta comparación toma tiempo de procesamiento. Más aún, existe evidencia de que la culpa puede ser inducida (Leys, 2007), por lo que este tipo de emociones gozaría de penetrabilidad cognitiva.

Un razonamiento similar puede usarse para observar que emociones como la vergüenza, la frustración, la tristeza, el desprecio, el odio, el resentimiento, la envidia o la indignación tampoco cumplirían cabalmente con los criterios de Ekman. No obstante, esta disimilitud permite ver que las emociones anteriormente mencionadas sí parecen tener algunas características en común: precisamente aquellas que no se ajustan a los criterios de Ekman y bajo las cuales pretendo proponer la categoría de *sentimientos* para diferenciarlos de las emociones básicas de Ekman. Esta caracterización de ciertos estados emocionales en emociones y sentimientos permitirá resolver la aparente naturaleza dual del contenido de las emociones y, además, adjudicarle emociones a aquellos seres que tengan la capacidad perceptiva-cognitiva para una representación con contenido no-conceptual. En este sentido, propongo que los sentimientos se definan como estados emocionales que, a diferencia de las emociones: (1) no son respuestas inmediatas al entorno: como se mencionó anteriormente, una persona siente culpa tras todo un proceso cognitivo de reflexión y comparación del recuerdo de un hecho con su sistema moral. Esto no sucede de forma instantánea y espontánea como cuando nos emocionamos al ver a un amigo entrañable, es un proceso que puede tardar desde minutos hasta años (Xu, Bègue y Shankland, 2011). (2) Pueden perdurar en el tiempo: a diferencia del temor que me puede asaltar al escuchar de cerca el gruñido de un perro, que cesa en cuanto me encuentre ya a cierta distancia de este, un sentimiento de vergüenza o tristeza puede estar presente durante días sin necesidad de que el estímulo que provocó dicho sentimiento esté presente; puedo sentir vergüenza por haber cometido un error garrafal frente a un auditorio, pero el sentimiento puede perdurar así me encuentre ya a kilómetros del auditorio. Esto implica además que el sentimiento goza de una *posibilidad de evocación fiel*. Es decir, puedo evocar con mucha mayor fidelidad un sentimiento de vergüenza, al recordar el suceso que lo produjo, que el temor transitorio que me produjo el gruñido del perro. Si recuerdo el suceso vergonzoso es posible que incluso me vuelva a sonrojar y experimente sensaciones bastante similares al momento inicial que me produjo vergüenza (Dickerson, Kemeny, Aziz, Kim y Fahey, 2004). No obstante, si recuerdo el suceso con el perro, puedo recordar ciertas sensaciones, pero no serán tan intensas como para reproducir de forma casi similar lo sentido en aquel encuentro con el perro; no se dilatarán mis pupilas, ni se me pondrá la piel de gallina, ni ocurrirá una explosión repentina de adrenalina por mi torrente sanguíneo. Esto muestra entonces que la evocación funciona de forma distinta en emociones y sentimientos. (3) Si las emociones, como sostiene Ekman (2008), nos ayudan con las tareas fundamentales de la vida, o, en términos evolutivos, a sobrevivir al entorno (Nesse, 1990), los sentimientos nos ayudarían a adaptarnos y sobrevivir en la sociedad (Spaulding, 2014, pp. 197-206), por lo que el origen de los sentimientos, a diferencia de las emociones, no es en estricto sentido evolutivo (filogenético),

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

La emoción y el sentimiento: más allá de una diferencia de contenido

sino social. La construcción de los sentimientos tiene una fuerte influencia de la comunidad social en donde haya crecido el individuo; es por eso que un individuo en Estados Unidos puede sentirse avergonzado si es sorprendido desnudo, mientras que en ciertas tribus de la Amazonía no es ningún motivo de vergüenza que un individuo camine desnudo por la aldea (Cummings, 1999). Pero, por otro lado, tanto el individuo estadounidense como el amazónico se asustarían frente al rugido cercano de un tigre. (4) Debido a que la construcción de los sentimientos es influenciada por la sociedad, están definidos a partir de las creencias y sistemas morales de esta, por lo que, necesariamente, los sentimientos deben poder involucrar actitudes proposicionales, es decir, contenido conceptual: como se mencionó anteriormente, para poderme sentir culpable de una mentira, debo poseer el concepto de 'mentira'. Si me siento avergonzado por un error cometido frente a un auditorio, debo poseer el aparato conceptual que me permite darme cuenta de que, en efecto, cometí un error. Si me siento apenado por decir algo que no debí decir, debo poseer un sistema de creencias o valores morales que me señalen las acciones reprochables para que pueda surgir un sentimiento en consecuencia con ello. (5) Dado que los sentimientos son forjados o permeados por los códigos morales o creencias de una sociedad, y además involucran contenido conceptual, es necesario, además, que los sentimientos tengan penetrabilidad cognitiva. A diferencia de las emociones, que parecen no gozar de esta condición (Frijda, 2007, p. 16), las características (3) y (4) implican que aspectos como las creencias deben poder afectar de alguna manera a este estado afectivo que he dado en llamar *sentimiento*. Esta distinción explicaría asuntos como las emociones recalcitrantes que, dado que son emociones bajo la caracterización que se hace de ellas en este artículo, y por ende tienen impenetrabilidad cognitiva, no es posible modificarlas a partir de proceso cognitivo alguno, mientras que sí es posible que, por ejemplo, las creencias morales influyan en los sentimientos de culpa (Gerrans y Kennett, 2006). (6) Existe una última característica que permite diferenciar los sentimientos de las emociones: la evidencia corporal. Siguiendo los estudios de Darwin (1872), James (1894) y Lange (1888), y posteriormente Prinz (2004, 2005), las emociones cuentan con manifestaciones de cambios corporales bastante perceptibles y, además, parece que universales también (Darwin, 1872; Ekman, 1993, 2004; Russell, 1994): pupilas dilatadas, piel de gallina, incremento de la frecuencia cardíaca, etc. Por el contrario, sentimientos como la culpa, la tristeza o la vergüenza no cuentan con manifestaciones físicas tan evidentes y tampoco universales (Prinz, 2005). Sin embargo, existe evidencia neurocientífica que muestra que sí existen cambios corporales, si bien sutiles, cuando se experimentan sentimientos como la culpa o la soledad: activación de estructuras paralímbicas, activación de la ínsula y el cíngulo, incrementos en los niveles de cortisol en la sangre, etc. (Bartels y Zeki, 2000; Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley y Cohen, 2001; Shin et al., 2000).

Del anterior análisis se puede concluir que existen estados afectivos radicalmente distintos de la caracterización que ofrece Ekman y que no obstante se han considerado como emociones en la tradición cognitivista. Sin embargo, es posible recoger aquellas características que tienen en común estos estados afectivos que se distancian de la caracterización de Ekman y que propongo denominar *sentimiento*. Un sentimiento es entonces un estado afectivo que se caracteriza por: (1) reacción tardía: un sentimiento no surge de forma inmediata: pasa por un proceso de reflexión cognitivo que puede tardar segundos o incluso horas o años; (2) atemporalidad y posibilidad de evocación fiel: el surgimiento de un sentimiento no está sujeto a un tiempo específico, puede permanecer intacto durante años, esto implica que el sentimiento, a diferencia de la emoción, sea algo que pueda evocarse en cada instante de manera fiel; (3) adaptabilidad a lo social: la función de los sentimientos parece ser ofrecernos un camino para adaptarnos mejor a un código social y por ende a una comunidad que lo profesa y lo practica, por lo que su naturaleza no es instintiva sino cultural; (4) poseer contenido conceptual: de lo descrito anteriormente se deduce que los sentimientos necesariamente deben involucrar creencias o juicios, en otras palabras, contenido conceptual; (5) penetrabilidad cognitiva: si se acepta que los sentimientos se dan en contextos culturales y se basan en creencias y juicios, los sentimientos necesariamente deben verse influidos cognitivamente; y, finalmente, un sentimiento se caracteriza por tener (6) evidencia corporal sutil: a diferencia de las emociones, los sentimientos no manifiestan señales corporales distinguibles a simple vista y universales, sino que se manifiestan en cambios corporales sutiles, es decir, solo evidenciables a través de pruebas de sangre o dispositivos de diagnóstico de actividad cognitiva.

IV. Discusión

La diferenciación establecida en el apartado anterior, entre emociones y sentimientos, se muestra bastante útil para explicar fenómenos como las emociones recalcitrantes. Las emociones recalcitrantes son aquellas que entran en conflicto con algún juicio racional. De esta manera, se presenta una emoción recalcitrante cuando alguien siente temor en el asiento del avión que acaba de abordar por el hecho mismo de volar en avión, aun a sabiendas de que tiene más probabilidad de correr peligro en otro medio de transporte. Numerosos autores han dado diversas explicaciones a este fenómeno, desde la racionalidad (o irracionalidad) de las emociones recalcitrantes (Brady, 2009; Sousa, 1979), hasta verlas de forma similar a las ilusiones perceptuales (Helm, 2015). Sin embargo, todas estas explicaciones se basan en la premisa de que las emociones recalcitrantes son un caso particular (anormal, si se quiere) de las emociones. Esto implica asumir la idea de que gran parte de las emociones se comportan de cierto modo, mientras que otras, por una u otra razón, se comportan de otro.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

La emoción y el sentimiento: más allá de una diferencia de contenido

Este esquema trae consigo importantes dificultades teóricas: en primer lugar, no hay un consenso frente a lo que explicaría las emociones recalcitrantes. En segundo lugar, todas las explicaciones propuestas apuntan a fragmentar la unidad explicativa de las emociones; es decir, se enfocan en buscar diferencias en el interior de las emociones y no en buscar una sola teoría unificadora que las abarque a todas.

A pesar de esto, el esquema presentado en este trabajo resuelve las dificultades anteriormente señaladas. Por un lado, la diferenciación emoción-sentimiento, según se estableció en el apartado anterior, permite entrever que las emociones poseen impenetrabilidad cognitiva, por lo que, una vez surgida una emoción, es imposible que argumentos o juicios racionales logren deshacerse de ella, y esto se cumple tanto para las emociones cotidianas como para las recalcitrantes (devolviéndole así la unidad a la teoría de las emociones). El error en el que tradicionalmente se ha caído es en el de pretender clasificar las emociones como racionales e irracionales. Pensamos que, siguiendo la ruta de Ekman, las emociones han surgido como ayuda para solventar las tareas de la vida cotidiana, por lo que en algún momento de la historia de la humanidad (o de su evolución) debieron resultar útiles en algún sentido. Es por esto que clasificarlas en racionales o irracionales no tiene sentido, porque su origen no tiene que ver con lo racional sino con su utilidad.

Por otro lado, una discusión igual de controversial surge alrededor de las emociones en animales: ¿tienen emociones? Y, de ser así, ¿qué tipo de emociones? La teoría cognitivista de las emociones se basa en la premisa de que el contenido de las mismas es de naturaleza conceptual, por lo que, por ejemplo, un perro, no podría tener emociones. Sin embargo, ya desde el mismo Darwin se empezó a recolectar evidencia empírica de la existencia de emociones en animales (Darwin, 1872) y, más recientemente, se ha logrado identificar un espectro de emociones mucho más amplio en otros mamíferos como las ovejas (Veissier y Boissy, 2009). Pero aun si se acepta que los animales experimentan emociones, falta por aclarar de qué tipo son esas emociones: ¿puede un animal sentir culpa, remordimiento, vergüenza o indignación? Ciertamente estas son 'emociones' que resultaría muy difícil identificar en animales, pero por esta vía se caería nuevamente en una fragmentación de la teoría de las emociones: si decimos que los animales experimentan emociones, sería poco eficiente que esta afirmación nos condujera a continuación a entrar a clasificar qué emociones experimentan y cuáles no. Esto nuevamente reduce la teoría de las emociones a meras clasificaciones: creemos firmemente que las emociones se experimentan o no, y no existen razones debidamente sustentadas para pensar que la capacidad para experimentar emociones viene diferenciada en el reino animal; en realidad la capacidad para experimentar emociones es la misma tanto en humanos como en animales (Darwin, 1872), por lo que es muy difícil decir que los humanos pueden experimentar ciertas emociones que los animales no. Lo que sí puede ocurrir es que, debido al desarrollo

de ciertas capacidades cognitivas distintas (mas no necesariamente superiores) a las capacidades cognitivas de otras especies, el ser humano pueda experimentar otros estados afectivos, entre ellos los que he denominado aquí sentimientos (que, de hecho, guardan una estrecha relación con este aparato cognitivo). La culpa, el remordimiento, la vergüenza y la indignación son *sentimientos* que requieren de un aparato cognitivo racional que permita el manejo de conceptos como el 'bien' y el 'mal' en un contexto sociocultural, algo que difícilmente se puede encontrar en los animales. Esto permite concluir que los animales experimentan emociones, que de hecho las expresan de una forma muy similar al humano (Darwin y Ekman, 1998), pero no experimentan sentimientos. Con esto se resuelve la cuestión de las emociones en los animales sin sacrificar la unidad teórica de las emociones.

Esta, por supuesto, no es, en la actualidad, la única teoría de sentimientos que existe. Sin embargo, las otras teorías han tenido un corte minimizador de esta categoría, afirmando que el sentimiento es solo una parte, un anexo (que representa las sensaciones corporales) de la emoción o, a lo sumo, definen al sentimiento como algo dependiente de las emociones; esta perspectiva es lo que Peter Goldie (2002) denomina la 'perspectiva del añadido' (*add-on*), en donde el sentimiento no es otra cosa que un 'añadido', un accesorio, una parte de lo verdaderamente importante, el concepto central, que es la emoción. Irwin Goldstein por ejemplo, sostiene que el sentimiento es una especie de 'anexo' de una emoción que señala si una emoción es placentera o no (teoría hedonista de la emoción) (Goldstein, 2002). Jesse Prinz, en este sentido, define los sentimientos como aquellas percepciones de cambios corporales de las que somos conscientes (Prinz, 2005), obedeciendo dichos cambios corporales, en cualquier caso, a la definición de emoción según la teoría de James y Lang. En otras palabras, para Prinz, el sentimiento es un tipo de emoción. Por otro lado, para autores como Robert Solomon (2004), el sentimiento es visto simplemente como la manifestación de una emoción. Estas concepciones, además de reduccionistas, continúan postulando una relación de dependencia entre sentimiento y emoción. Por otro lado, autores como Calhoun (2004) y Aldrich (1939) han rastreado el rol moral y ético de sentimientos como la vergüenza, sugiriendo con esto que este tipo de estados afectivos difieren considerablemente de otro tipo de emociones. Nuestros sentimientos, sostienen ellos, sirven de guía para conocer lo que deberíamos y no deberíamos hacer, es un termómetro de nuestros actos. Esto sugiere que sentimientos como la vergüenza tienen un carácter reflexivo y regulador de nuestras acciones, mientras que emociones como la ira son impulsivas: llaman a actuar sin reflexión. ¿Cómo explicar esta dualidad de carácter e independencia de operación sobre la acción si asociamos tanto a la vergüenza como a la ira la misma etiqueta de 'emoción', o, peor aún, si decimos que la vergüenza es un sentimiento que depende de o hace parte de una emoción? Claramente la única manera de reconciliar lo que sostienen Calhoun (2004) y Aldrich (1939) con concepciones

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

La emoción y el sentimiento: más allá de una diferencia de contenido

comúnmente aceptadas sobre la emoción, como la de Ekman, es abandonar la testaruda idea de forzar la unión de categorías que son esencialmente distintas y optar por un sano discernimiento que permite ofrecer una teoría mucho más robusta de las emociones (y de paso, de los sentimientos). Otros autores como Scheff (2016) señalan la invisibilización de sentimientos como la vergüenza pero desde una perspectiva crítico-social, mientras que aquí se busca propender por una esquematización conceptual de los sentimientos y las emociones. A este respecto, puede también surgir la crítica de si la distinción entre emociones y sentimientos aquí introducida puede implicar una reificación de, por ejemplo, la dualidad naturaleza/cultura. Esta dualidad intenta postular una diferencia radical entre lo esencialmente humano (cultura) y lo no-humano (naturaleza), presentándose como una distinción insalvable entre aquellos rasgos que se juzgan como esenciales o característicos del hombre (razón, inteligencia, herramientas, símbolos) y lo esencialmente orgánico-biológico (los instintos, lo corporal, las necesidades fisiológicas, etc.). En este sentido, a primera vista, pareciera que la distinción emoción/sentimiento efectivamente guardara un estrecho vínculo con esta dualidad naturaleza/cultura en la medida en que al asociar al sentimiento con la cultura y a la emoción con la naturaleza, la distinción emoción/sentimiento no parece ser más que otra manifestación de esta misma dualidad naturaleza/cultura. No obstante, como se mencionó más arriba en esta sección, la distinción emoción/sentimiento no pretende ir en contra de la continuidad evolutiva entre humanos y animales planteada por Darwin. En este sentido, lo que se postula aquí es que, si bien la distinción emoción/sentimiento es útil para esclarecer cómo se deben entender y diferenciar los estados emocionales en los seres humanos, esto no descarta que el mismo esquema pueda eventualmente aplicarse a ciertos animales con capacidades cognitivas avanzadas. De hecho, múltiples estudios de primatología y psicología comparada sostienen la existencia de estructuras sociales y culturales en ciertas especies animales (De Waal, 2006), por lo que no hay razón para pensar que, en los animales, además de emociones, existan también sentimientos.

V. Conclusiones

Esta investigación se inició con una preocupación sobre el esclarecimiento de la naturaleza del contenido de las emociones dentro de la tradición cognitivista. Sin embargo, eventualmente se llegó a la conclusión de que no es posible afirmar, de forma contundente, que *todas* las emociones tengan un contenido conceptual, ni tampoco que todas tengan un contenido no-conceptual, debido a que existen razones a partir de las cuales se podría afirmar que ciertas emociones poseen contenido conceptual (como la culpa), mientras que otras, como el miedo, debido a que parecen compartirse con los animales, parece razonable sostener

que tengan un contenido no-conceptual. En otras palabras, indagar por la naturaleza del contenido de las emociones nos condujo a una clasificación de las emociones entre aquellas de las que se puede decir que tienen contenido conceptual y aquellas de las que se puede decir que tienen contenido no-conceptual, fragmentando así la teoría de las emociones básicas. Se observó que esta fragmentación solo lleva a callejones sin salida si se quiere buscar una teoría coherente y unificada de las emociones básicas, como pretendía Ekman. En busca de esta teoría coherente y unificada se tomó en cuenta el trabajo de Ekman sobre la caracterización de las emociones. Esto permitió notar que existían otros rasgos que apoyaban la diferenciación de las emociones en dos categorías, al parecer, antagónicas pero innegablemente irreductibles la una a la otra. Ante esta situación, se optó por continuar nombrando *emociones* a aquellas que se acercaban a la caracterización de Ekman y *sentimientos* a aquellas que no. Se encontró que esta distinción no solo es conveniente desde un punto de vista teórico, al dejar a las emociones en un solo esquema coherente y unificado, sino que parece coincidir con toda una línea de trabajos empíricos sobre estados afectivos como la vergüenza y la culpa. Las características esenciales definidas para cada categoría (emociones y sentimientos) permiten no solo explicar fenómenos como las emociones recalcitrantes y la cuestión de las emociones en los animales, sino que es consistente con la evidencia neurocientífica actual. Este esclarecimiento teórico es de gran utilidad para quienes se dedican al análisis terapéutico de las emociones y los sentimientos, como psicólogos y neurocientíficos en general, pero también para pedagogos. Una de las consecuencias más importantes de nuestra propuesta teórica es que sustenta fenómenos como la penetrabilidad cognitiva de la culpa y la vergüenza, fenómeno ampliamente estudiado por autores como Leys (2007) y Dickerson, Kemeny, Aziz, Kim y Fahey (2004), ofreciendo además una base teórica a los trabajos de Calhoun (2004) y Aldrich (1939), quienes abogan por el sentimiento de vergüenza como referente ético y moral. Pero además permite explicar cómo métodos terapéuticos basados en el diálogo argumentativo-racional sobre los sentimientos, como la culpa, la vergüenza, el remordimiento o el resentimiento, son más efectivos que sobre emociones como la ira o la tristeza. En el ámbito de la pedagogía, estudios recientes han reconocido que “las emociones y sentimientos son importantes para el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje puesto que es necesario mantener una conducta motivada en los estudiantes para garantizar aprendizajes de calidad” (Rodríguez, 2016, p. 1) porque, precisamente, los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje involucran interacciones humanas en comunidad en donde la motivación es un aspecto clave del aprendizaje y en donde evidencias neurocientíficas y psicológicas actuales han mostrado un estrecho vínculo entre ciertos estados emocionales que pueden facilitar o dificultar el aprendizaje (Elizondo, Rodríguez y Rodríguez, 2018), así como para incitar habilidades fundamentales para el aprendizaje como

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

La emoción y el sentimiento: más allá de una diferencia de contenido

el pensamiento crítico y la creatividad (Chemi, Davy y Lund, 2017). A este respecto, el abordaje presentado en este artículo permite sustentar cómo se debe optar por crear vínculos de naturaleza sentimental con los contenidos antes que emocionales, en tanto que los vínculos sentimentales, debido a su evocación fiel, permitirían evocar más fácilmente estructuras conceptuales. Con esto, entonces, se abren caminos para nuevas indagaciones en distintos campos con una nueva claridad conceptual desde el ámbito de las emociones. Pero también permite un desarrollo más claro en el interior de la filosofía de las emociones al poder trabajar con esquemas coherentes y unificados que sirvan como bases sólidas para futuras exploraciones.

Bibliografía

- ALDRICH, V. C. (1939). "An ethics of shame". *Ethics*, vol. 50, pp. 57-77. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/290120>
- BARTELS, A.; ZEKI, S. (2000). "The neural basis of romantic love". *NeuroReport*, vol. 11, n.º 17, pp. 959-965. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1097/00001756-200011270-00046>
- BERMÚDEZ, J.; CAHEN, A. (2017). "Nonconceptual mental content". En: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/content-nonconceptual/#NonConIniCha>
- BERMÚDEZ, J. L. (2000). *The paradox of self-consciousness*. MIT Press.
- BERMÚDEZ, J. L. (2007). "What is at stake in the debate on nonconceptual content?". *Philosophical Perspectives*, vol. 21, n.º 1, pp. 55-72. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1520-8583.2007.00120.x>
- BERNE, E. (1957). *A Layman's guide to psychiatry and psychoanalysis*. Nueva York: Grove.
- BRADY, M. S. (2009). "The irrationality of recalcitrant emotions". *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 145, n.º 3, pp. 413-430. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-008-9241-1>
- CALHOUN, C. (2004). "An apology for moral shame". *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 12, n.º 2, pp. 127-146. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9760.2004.00194.x>
- CARTER, S.; SMITH PASQUALINI, M. (2004). "Stronger autonomic response accompanies better learning: A test of Damasio's somatic marker hypothesis". *Cognition and Emotion*, vol. 18, n.º 7, pp. 901-911. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930341000338>
- CHEMI, T.; DAVY, S. G.; LUND, B. (2017). *Innovative pedagogy: a recognition of emotions and creativity in education*. Róterdam: SensePublishers. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6300-968-3>
- COLOMBETTI, G.; THOMPSON, E. (2008). "The feeling body: Towards an enactive approach to emotion". *Erlbaum*. <https://philpapers.org/rec/COLTFB>
- CUMMINGS, B. (1999). "Animal passions and human sciences: shame, blushing and nakedness in early modern Europe and the New World". En: FUDGE, E. et al. (eds.). *At the borders of the human*. Londres: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 26-50. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-27729-2_3
- CUSSINS, A. (2002). "Experience, thought and activity & content, conceptual content, and nonconceptual content". En: GUNTHER, Y. (ed.). *Essays on nonconceptual content*. Boston: The MIT Press, pp. 133-163.
- DAMASIO, A. R. (2006). *Descartes error: emotion, reason and the human brain*. Londres: Vintage.
- DARWIN, C. (1872). *The expression of the emotions in man and animals*. Londres: John Murray. <http://darwin-online.org.uk/content/frameset?pageseq=1&itemID=F1142&viewtype=txt> DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1037/10001-000>
- DARWIN, C.; EKMAN, P. (1998). *The expression of the emotions in man and animals*. Oxford University Press. <https://books.google.es/books?hl=es&lr=&id=TFRtLZSHMcYC&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=animals+emotions&ots=Y3hthvWsP9&sig=V06QuPU9AoDL1jXeifOOudt6fh0#v=onepage&q=animals+emotions&f=false>
- DE WAAL, F. (2006). *Primates and philosophers: How morality evolved*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400830336>
- DICKERSON, S. S.; KEMENY, M. E.; AZIZ, N.; KIM, K. H.; FAHEY, J. L. (2004). "Immunological effects of induced shame and guilt". *Psychosomatic Medicine*, vol. 66, n.º 1, pp. 124-131. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.PSY.0000097338.75454.29>
- EKMAN, P. (1971). "Universals and cultural differences in facial expressions of emotion". *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, 19, pp. 207-283. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.48.4.384>
- EKMAN, P. (1993). "Facial expression and emotion". *American Psychologist*, vol. 48, n.º 4, pp. 384-392. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-2783-3_3
- EKMAN, P. (2004). "Emotional and conversational nonverbal signals". En: LARRAZABAL, J. M.; PÉREZ MIRANDA, L. A. (eds.). *Language, knowledge, and representation*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, pp. 39-50. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-2783-3_3
- EKMAN, P. (2008). "An argument for basic emotions". *Cognition & Emotion*, vol. 6, pp. 169-200. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699939208411068>
- EKMAN, P.; FRIESEN, W. V. (1971). "Constants across cultures in the face and emotion". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 17, n.º 2, pp. 124-129. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0030377>
- ELIZONDO, A.; RODRÍGUEZ, J. V.; RODRÍGUEZ, I. (2018). "La importancia de la emoción en el aprendizaje: Propuestas para mejorar la motivación de los estudiantes". *Cuaderno de Pedagogía Universitaria*, vol. 15, n.º 29, pp. 3-11. file:///C:/

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

La emoción y el sentimiento: más allá de una diferencia de contenido

- Users/Usuario/Downloads/Dialnet-La Importancia De La Emoción En El Aprendizaje-6855114.pdf DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29197/cpu.v15i29.296>
- EVANS, G.; McDOWELL, J. (1982). *The varieties of reference*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- FRIJDA, N. H. (2007). *The laws of emotion*. Nueva Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- FRIJDA, N. H.; MESQUITA, B.; SONNEMANS, J.; VAN GOOZEN, S. (1991). "The duration of affective phenomena or emotions, sentiments, and passions". *International Review of Studies on Emotion*, vol. 1, pp. 187-225. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/255522683_The_duration_of_affective_phenomena_or_emotions_sentiments_and_passions
- GERRANS, P.; KENNETT, J. (2006). "Is cognitive penetrability the mark of the moral?". *Philosophical Explorations*, vol. 9, n.º 1, pp. 3-12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13869790500492284>
- GOLDIE, P. (2002). *Emotions, feelings and intentionality. Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 1(3), 235-254. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021306500055>
- GOLDSTEIN, I. (2002). "Are emotions feelings? A further look at hedonic theories of emotions". *Consciousness and Emotion*, vol. 3, n.º 1, pp. 21-33. <https://philpapers.org/rec/GOLAEF> DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1075/ce.3.1.04gol>
- GREENE, J. D.; SOMMERVILLE, R. B.; NYSTROM, L. E.; DARLEY, J. M.; COHEN, J. D. (2001). "An fMRI investigation of emotional engagement in moral judgment". *Science*, vol. 293, n.º 5537, pp. 2105-2108. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1062872>
- GRIFFITHS, P. E.; SCARANTINO, A. (2009). "Emotions in the wild: The situated perspective on emotion". En: ROBBINS, P.; AYDEDE, M. (eds.). *The Cambridge Handbook of Situated Cognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 437-453. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/36444421_Emotions_in_the_wild_The_situated_perspective_on_emotion DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511816826.023>
- HELM, B. W. (2015). "Emotions and recalcitrance: Reevaluating the perceptual model". *Dialectica*, vol. 69, n.º 3, pp. 417-433. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1746-8361.12119>
- HOCHSCHILD, A. R. (1979). "Emotion work, feeling rules, and social structure". *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 85, n.º 3, pp. 551-575. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/227049>
- JAMES, W. (1884). "What is an emotion?". *Mind*, vol. 9, pp. 188-205. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/os-IX.34.188>
- JAMES, W. (1894). "The physical basis of emotion". *Psychological Review*, vol. 101, n.º 2, pp. 205-210. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.101.2.205>
- LANGE, C. (1888). "Om Sindsbevaegelser et Psyko-Fysiologisk Studie". *Journal of Mental Science*, vol. 34, n.º 147, pp. 426-430. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.34.147.426>
- LAZARUS, R. S. (1991). *Emotion and adaptation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- LEYS, R. (2007). *From guilt to shame*. Nueva Jersey: Princeton University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400827985>
- LYONS, W. (1993). *Emoción*. Barcelona: Anthropos. [https://books.google.es/books?hl=es&lr=&id=3Im7acz7XPwC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=LYONS,+W.+\(1993\).+Emocio%CC%81n.+Barcelona:+Anthropos&ots=mOjGah2C6n&sig=5MW5Ak4W1cSHwtmRRGPG50LRE9Q#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.es/books?hl=es&lr=&id=3Im7acz7XPwC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=LYONS,+W.+(1993).+Emocio%CC%81n.+Barcelona:+Anthropos&ots=mOjGah2C6n&sig=5MW5Ak4W1cSHwtmRRGPG50LRE9Q#v=onepage&q&f=false)
- NESSE, R. M. (1990). "Evolutionary explanations of emotions". *Human Nature*, vol. 1, n.º 3, pp. 261-289. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02733986>
- NEU, J. (2003). *A tear is an intellectual thing: the meanings of emotion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- NUSSBAUM, M. C. (2008). *Paisajes del pensamiento: la inteligencia de las emociones*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- OATLEY, K.; JOHNSON-LAIRD, P. N. (2013). "Cognitive approaches to emotions". *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, vol. 18, n.º 3. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2013.12.004>
- PEACOCKE, C. (1992). "Scenarios, concepts, and perception". En: CRANE, T. (ed.). *The contents of experience*. Nueva York: Cambridge University Press. <https://philpapers.org/rec/PEASCA> DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511554582.006>
- PITT, D. (2017). "Mental representation". *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. California: Stanford University. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mental-representation/>
- PRINZ, J. (2004). "Emotions embodied". En: SOLOMON, R. (ed.). *Thinking about feeling*. Nueva York: Oxford University Press, pp. 44-58.
- PRINZ, J. (2005). "Are emotions feelings?". *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol. 12, n.º 8-10, pp. 9-25. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233685028_Are_Emotions_Feelings
- RODRÍGUEZ, Y. C. (2016). "Las emociones en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje". *Revista Vinculando*, pp. 1-11. https://vinculando.org/psicologia_psicoterapia/emociones-proceso-ensenanza-aprendizaje.html
- RUSSELL, J. A. (1994). "Is there universal recognition of emotion from facial expression? A review of the cross-cultural studies". *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 115, n.º 1, pp. 102-141. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.115.1.102>
- SCHEFF, T. (2016). "The S-Word is taboo: Shame is invisible in modern societies". *General Practice*, vol. 4, n.º 1, pp. 2-6. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4172/2329-9126.1000217>
- SHIN, L. M. et al. (2000). "Activation of anterior paralimbic structures during guilt-related script-driven imagery". *Biological Psychiatry*, vol. 48, n.º 1, pp. 43-50. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0006-3223\(00\)00251-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0006-3223(00)00251-1)
- SIEGEL, S. (1997). "The contents of perception". *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. California: University of Stanford. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/perception-contents/>

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

La emoción y el sentimiento: más allá de una diferencia de contenido

- SOLOMON, R. (2004). *Thinking about feeling. Contemporary philosophers on emotions*. Nueva York: Oxford University Press.
- SOLOMON, R. C. (2007). *True to our feelings: what our emotions are really telling us*. Nueva York: Oxford Scholarship Online. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195368536.001.0001>
- SOUSA, R. DE (1979). "The rationality of emotions". *Dialogue*, vol. 18, n.º 1, pp. 41-63. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217300047880>
- SPAULDING, S. (2004). "Embodied cognition and theory of mind". En: SHAPIRO, L. (ed.). *The Routledge handbook of embodied cognition*. Londres-Nueva York: Routledge, pp. 197-206. http://perso.ens-lyon.fr/jacques.jayez/Cours/Implicite/Handbook_of_Embodied_Cognition.pdf
- VEISSIER, I.; BOISSY, A. (2009). "Animals' emotions: studies in sheep using appraisal theories". *Animal Welfare*, vol. 18, n.º 347-354. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/230851712_Animals'_emotions_Studies_in_sheep_using_appraisal_theories
- XU, H.; BÈGUE, L.; SHANKLAND, R. (2011). "Guilt and guiltlessness: An integrative review". *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, vol. 5, n.º 7, pp. 440-457. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2011.00364.x>

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

La emoción y el sentimiento: más allá de una diferencia de contenido

Daniel Buitrago

Universitaria Agustiniana (Bogotá-Colombia)

daniel.buitrago@uniagustiniana.edu.co

Daniel Buitrago Arria es candidato a doctor en Humanidades de la Universidad de San Buenaventura (Bogotá-Colombia). Tiene una maestría en Filosofía Contemporánea, cursa otra en Educación y tiene un B. A. en Matemáticas con especialización en Estadística. En este momento, Daniel es profesor a tiempo completo en la Universitaria Agustiniana (Bogotá-Colombia). Actualmente, participa en investigaciones en dos campos: filosofía de la mente y educación. En la primera, se enfoca en proyectos que relacionan la cognición y el poshumanismo, mientras que en la segunda se dedica a proyectos de minería de datos educacional, esto es, al estudio de grandes cantidades de datos en pro de analizar procesos y fenómenos educativos. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5709-486X>

**UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA**

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Post-demolición: memorias, afectos y cuerpos en conflicto

Yuzzel Alcantara Ceballos

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

Fecha de presentación: septiembre de 2020**Fecha de aceptación:** abril de 2021**Fecha de publicación:** mayo de 2021**Cita recomendada:**

ALCANARA CEBALLOS, Yuzzel (2021). "Post-demolición: memorias, afectos y cuerpos en conflicto". [artículo en línea]. *Digithum*, n.º 26, pp. 1-13. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya y Universidad de Antioquia. [Fecha de consulta: dd/mm/aa]. <http://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.374142>



Los textos publicados en esta revista están sujetos –si no se indica lo contrario– a una licencia de Reconocimiento 4.0 Internacional de Creative Commons. La licencia completa se puede consultar en <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.es>

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la afectividad de la materialidad arquitectónica en el hacer memoria corporal, modificando experiencias colectivas de pertenencia, a través de sitios geográficos en disputa cuyo entorno arquitectónico ha sido destruido. Se inicia revisando las aproximaciones recientes con las cuales los geógrafos han conceptualizado lo arquitectónico: la teoría del actor-red y la teoría de los afectos, desde las cuales los edificios no son visualizados como objetos inertes sino como *performances*. Se reconoce que ambas aproximaciones no han explorado lo suficiente la experiencia corporeizada, el papel de la subjetividad humana ni de los encuentros pasados con espacios arquitectónicos en la mediación de los afectos al contacto con arquitecturas y no-humanos del presente. Mediante el caso de estudio de un área fabril mexicana demolida, se muestra cómo los afectos de los restos materiales (atmósferas de destrucción) son intersectados por otro tipo de afecto que reúne la corporeización de encuentros pasados: el acecho. Cohabitar la post-demolición ha significado demarcar *fronteras afectivas* como límites mentales-corporales que posibilitan a los habitantes continuar su trabajo emocional afectivo ante el acecho del desvanecimiento de memorias y sentimientos de pertenencia a los que la destrucción los confronta.

Palabras clave

afectos, edificio arquitectónico, memoria, corporeización, acecho, geografías de destrucción.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Post-demolición: memorias, afectos y cuerpos en conflicto

Post demolition: memories, affects and bodies in conflict

Abstract

This article analyses the affectivity of architectural materiality in forming body memory, modifying collective experiences of belonging, through geographical sites where the architectural environment has been destroyed. It begins by reviewing the recent approximations used by geographers to conceptualise architecture: the Actor-Network Theory and the theory of affects, wherein buildings are not seen as inert objects, but rather as performances. It is recognised that neither of these approximations has sufficiently explored the embodied experience, the role of human subjectivity or the previous encounters with architectural spaces in mediating the affects in contact with architectures and non-humans in the present. Through the case study of a demolished Mexican manufacturing site, it is shown how the affects of the material remains (destruction atmospheres) are intersected by another type of affect that combines the embodiment of previous encounters: stalking. Co-habiting post-demolition has meant demarcating affective borders as mental-bodily limits that enable the inhabitants to continue their affective emotional work in the face of the fading memories and feelings of belonging provoked by the destruction.

Keywords

affects, architectural building, memory, embodiment, stalking, geographies of destruction

Introducción

El siguiente texto tiene como propósito contribuir a los estudios de los afectos y emociones que desde el giro afectivo se han hecho sobre las geografías de lo arquitectónico. Estos trabajos han sido inspirados, sobre todo, por la teoría del actor-red de Bruno Latour (2008) por un lado, y por otro, por las reflexiones teóricas en torno a los afectos y la nueva materialidad efectuadas por geógrafos como Nigel Thrift (2008, 2004), Ben Anderson (2004, 2005), Peter Kraftl y Adey (2008) y Peter Adey (2008). Si bien ambas aproximaciones han destacado el papel de la materialidad en la vida humana cotidiana, también es cierto que han abordado con mayor profundidad el papel de la primera sobre la segunda (Jacobs, 2006; Jacobs *et al.*, 2012), y muy poco lo que sucede con la experiencia humana en relación con la materialidad (Rose *et al.*, 2010). Con base en ello, como primera aportación se busca analizar con mayor detenimiento la dimensión de lo corporeizado, trayendo a un primer plano las experiencias humanas y lo que se entrama en ellas: memorias, sensaciones, afectos, emociones, juicios y sentimientos, en relación con lo arquitectónico. En tanto no se ha encontrado literatura que explore cómo afectan los edificios destruidos la experiencia de pertenencia en comunidades (solo se ha estudiado la capacidad afectiva de lo edificado sobre los individuos), como segunda aportación mostraremos cómo los afectos y restos materiales producidos por actos de demolición son capaces de alterar sensibilidades, subjetividades colectivas de pertenencia y vivencias emocionales comunes.

Usualmente estudiada como representación cultural, poseedora de símbolos culturales y reflejo de los valores de una época, las aproximaciones más-allá-de-la-representación han reconocido

en la arquitectura un tipo de materialidad activa, animada y performativa (Jacobs *et al.*, 2012; Yaneva, 2012), capaz de tener efectos, modificar comportamientos, potenciar estados de ánimo, hacer sentir cosas o mover emocionalmente a los cuerpos, en una palabra, afectar (Thrift, 2008; Kraftl y Adey, 2008; Rose *et al.*, 2010). Así, la arquitectura ha dejado de ser entendida como una forma o contexto inerte donde suceden cosas y tiene lugar la acción humana, para pasar a analizar el *co-performance* que se produce a través de la interacción entre humanos y espacios arquitectónicos. Sobre esta base, lo arquitectónico se ha mirado como evento: “la arquitectura evento es [...] ver la arquitectura como el producto de muchos incidentes, algo vital y performativo, mucho más que como un simple contexto construido para la acción humana y mucho más que solo el producto de actividades humanas” (Jacobs *et al.*, 2012, p. 128).

Si bien las investigaciones mencionadas se apoyan en esta nueva óptica de lo arquitectónico, difieren en la conceptualización del afecto y en la manera de entender la subjetividad humana. Por un lado, los análisis arquitectónico-geográficos inspirados en la sociología latourea se han remitido a la noción de «agencia distribuida» (Bennett, 2010) y de «ensamblajes contingentes de elementos heterogéneos» (Latour, 2008) para dar cuenta de cómo la materialidad de los edificios responde a una reunión diversa de asociados y asociaciones continuamente en formación (Jacobs *et al.*, 2012; Lozoya, 2018). Sus resultados han subrayado que las prácticas cotidianas, el *performance* y la corporeización forman parte de dichos ensamblajes, constituyéndolos o modificándolos. Sin embargo, pese a señalar que los edificios y los humanos se co-constituyen a través de prácticas socioespaciales (Jacobs, 2006), poco han profundizado en cómo el sujeto humano experimenta, corporeiza y siente dicho *co-performance*. Por otro lado, las

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Post-demolición: memorias, afectos y cuerpos en conflicto

geografías afectivas, partiendo de la noción de afecto como cualidad precognitiva inexpresable y autónoma (Thrift, 2004, p. 63), que por ende precede al pensamiento reflexivo (McCormack, 2003), evaden la participación de la subjetividad humana en mediar el potencial de los afectos. Al hacer hincapié en que el afecto se localiza en el espacio intermedio que genera la relación entre cuerpos (Pile, 2010, p. 8), siendo el resultado activo de un encuentro que aumenta o disminuye la habilidad de los cuerpos para actuar (Thrift, 2004, p. 62), entienden al ser humano solo como cuerpo y no como sujeto que también actúa sobre dicho encuentro. Ello ha dado lugar a que en las geografías afectivas la subjetividad humana se reduzca a procesos inconscientes que operan antes del pensamiento reflexivo y consciente (Rose *et al.*, 2010, p. 345).

Pese a que, en el siguiente análisis, el sujeto tampoco se concibe como una entidad preformada, fija, universal ni estable, nos distanciamos del entendimiento de la subjetividad humana encontrada en el trabajo de los geógrafos de los afectos. En el caso de estudio que presentamos, se demuestra cómo la presencia y perdurabilidad de las experiencias humanas pasadas, como mediaciones que interrumpen los afectos en espacios en destrucción, contradicen la espontaneidad y presentismo de la definición del afecto. Es decir, que este análisis explora dos asuntos que han quedado pendientes en las geografías de la arquitectura. Por un lado, el papel que juega la memoria sensible, como parte constitutiva de la subjetividad humana, en mediar los encuentros afectivos entre humanos y materialidad arquitectónica, así como en precondicionar las reacciones emocionales que dichos encuentros puedan producir. Y por otro, muestra la influencia que el potencial afectivo de lo destruido tiene sobre la experiencia de pertenencia y subjetividad humana.

Geografías de la destrucción

El impacto de la destrucción sobre la dimensión estética y sensorial en el ser humano fue objeto de reflexión por parte de Georg Simmel, quien señaló el carácter ambivalente de las ruinas. Por un lado, hay un encanto fantasmagórico que las envuelve. De acuerdo con él, se debe al equilibrio de dos fuerzas opuestas: la de la naturaleza (la materia) y la de la voluntad creativa del hombre (el espíritu). Las ruinas son para Simmel manifestación del avance de la naturaleza sobre la obra del hombre, un avance que suscita paz en tanto evidencia que lo hecho por él retorna paulatinamente al seno de la tierra madre, dando lugar a una nueva creación y a un nuevo equilibrio (1988, pp. 214-215). Sin embargo, cuando la destrucción es llevada a cabo por la mano del hombre el encanto de las ruinas es anulado. Al permitir o causar su abandono provoca un desequilibrio entre ambas fuerzas, dado que adopta un papel que no le corresponde –en vez de actuar como opositor ante la naturaleza, se vuelve su cómplice, destructor de su propia creación–. Las ruinas, entonces, dejan de ser fuente de

encanto y se convierten en fuente de oposición y conflicto que el ser humano vive instintivamente dentro de sí mismo (1988, p. 214). Al respecto, las arquitecturas arruinadas por la acción humana adoptan un carácter paradójico: son todavía marcos donde ocurre la vida, aunque aparecen como lugares donde, de hecho, la vida se ha retirado. La vida retirada –o mejor dicho, disminuida– habla de un tipo de espectro o fantasma que pervive allí como reducto de la vitalidad perdida. La pérdida y el desequilibrio devienen conflicto humano. Si bien Simmel se limita a enmarcar dicho conflicto dentro de la esfera estética, aquí se profundizará en su dimensión ético-política, asunto que ha quedado invisibilizado en el estudio de las geografías de la arquitectura.

El giro afectivo y el nuevo materialismo (DeLanda, 2015) se han centrado en la investigación de espacios construidos, sus atmósferas, diseño, red de actores y prácticas con el fin de conocer en qué grado los afectos de su materialidad (luces, muros, instalaciones, superficies) pueden o no influenciar y manipular comportamientos (Thrift, 2004, 2008), conductas y experiencias humanas. Por lo tanto, esta vía de análisis no se ha detenido a mirar cómo trabajan los afectos en espacios post-demolición, quizá porque se subestima su potencial afectivo en la manipulación y el cambio de comportamientos humanos. Sin embargo, como se argumentará, al ser espacios donde previamente hubo un diseño arquitectónico determinado, atmósferas particulares y fueron habitados, abren dos posibilidades de exploración del afecto: la primera, invita a su estudio a largo plazo a través de aquello que ha quedado sedimentado en la memoria corporal y mental; la segunda, a observar el afecto mediante el contacto inmediato con ruinas y fragmentos de edificios destruidos que confrontan los recuerdos, experiencias, conductas y juicios de subjetividades colectivas pre-demolición.

Los estudios de geografías de arquitectura de espacios edificados han generado un buen número de etnografías relativas a los denominados *big things*: centros comerciales (Degen *et al.*, 2007), aeropuertos (Adey, 2008), bibliotecas (Lees, 2001), o torres de departamentos (Baxter y Lees, 2009; Jacobs *et al.*, 2012), entre otros. Estos trabajos han buscado dar cuenta de los procesos, eventos, interacciones y elementos que mantienen a esos grandes edificios como una cosa coherente, integrada y cohesionada, mas tampoco han problematizado qué es lo que sucede cuando estas grandes cosas dejan de estar juntas e integradas, y pasan a constituir un nuevo ensamblaje: el de la destrucción.

A su vez, de acuerdo con Rose *et al.* (2010, p. 337), estas geografías afectivas han mostrado poco interés analítico en cómo es que las subjetividades y los sentimientos forman parte de eso que cohesionan y mantiene integradas a las *big things*, y ello como parte del desinterés en asuntos de subjetividad humana que se ha vuelto común en los estudios sociológicos de la ciencia. Si bien han expuesto la red de actores humanos y no-humanos y las asociaciones que constituyen, posibilitando el funcionamiento cotidiano de las *big things*:

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Post-demolición: memorias, afectos y cuerpos en conflicto

“la capacidad de un edificio para permitir que el habitar tenga lugar [...] emerge constantemente a través de continuos, dinámicos encuentros entre edificios; sus partes constituyentes; y espacios, habitantes, visitantes, diseño, ergonomía, trabajadores, planeadores, personal de limpieza, técnicos, materiales, *performances*, eventos, emociones, afectos y más” (Kraftl y Adey, 2008, p. 214),

La cuestión de las emociones y sentimientos que experimentan los seres humanos y que los hace comprometerse con los edificios y volverse partícipes de esa red de asociaciones, ha quedado pendiente pues es solo mencionada y no explorada en profundidad.

De igual forma, se identifica un escaso análisis respecto a cómo la memoria intersecta dichos sentimientos y experiencias emocionales. En los sitios donde existen grandes áreas destruidas, las experiencias de momentos del pasado, recuerdos y memorias afloran en constante conflicto, mediando la relación afectiva entre los seres humanos y su entorno destruido. Qué se olvida o qué se recuerda es la cuestión que entra en disputa con el pasado hecho cuerpo frente a un presente donde cierta materialidad arquitectónica ha quedado ausente pero aún se siente. En pocas palabras, los conflictos emocionales producidos por geografías destruidas emergen a través de lo corporeizado, que hace de lo ausente una presencia acechante.

En este sentido, mostraremos que estudiar cómo trabaja lo ausente pero presente como mediación afectiva en geografías de destrucción importa en tanto puede revelar nuevos aspectos de la vivencia urbana emocional cotidiana de determinados colectivos humanos que cohabitan con este tipo de materialidad.

Al respecto, ¿cómo reaccionan dichos grupos humanos ante la destrucción y desaparición de objetos edificados que tenían la capacidad de cohesionarlos pero ya no están allí? ¿pueden los actos de demolición alterar sensibilidades colectivas? ¿puede su ausencia actuar como fuerza espectral en la vivencia emocional del lugar?

Fábricas textiles mexicanas

Las antiguas fábricas textiles actualmente demolidas (desde 1990 a la fecha) en varios puntos del territorio mexicano fueron edificadas durante el régimen del Porfiriato, a finales del siglo XIX, y modernizadas en la segunda mitad del XX para fungir como la base económica del modelo de sustitución de importaciones (1940-1970). Sin embargo, a partir del movimiento geoeconómico propiciado por el Tratado de Libre Comercio (TLCAN) en 1994, estas áreas industriales quedaron obsoletas. Aproximadamente una década después, comenzaron a implementarse estrategias (emocionales, económicas, políticas) para impulsar la extracción de capital de estas áreas abandonadas. Como parte de dichas estrategias se emprendieron demoliciones, ventas irregulares

y expropiaciones de terrenos circundantes a las fábricas que pertenecían a las comunidades obreras. La destrucción funcionó como excusa para la especulación inmobiliaria, dando lugar a la creación de nuevas atmósferas y diseños espaciales arquitectónicos que han romantizado la realidad del pasado industrial y obrero para su uso comercial en una economía basada en la venta de experiencias. Nuevos hoteles que mercantilizan el deseo de dormir en una fábrica: “único hotel ubicado en una fábrica con habitaciones en forma de barrica”; o exclusivas galerías de arte que promueven experiencias románticas opuestas al pasado obrero de explotación laboral y a su contexto actual de pobreza: “los muros de mi estudio aún conservan las marcas de las máquinas de la fábrica, esas marcas que en sí considero arte”, son algunos ejemplos. Ello ha dado como resultado una sobreposición de geografías de placer sobre geografías de explotación, despojo y abuso (Alcántara, en prensa (véase imagen 1). Estas renovaciones urbano-arquitectónicas (nuevos espacios del placer) han entrado en disputa con la memoria sensible de las comunidades obreras generando controversias políticas en distintos puntos del país (véase imagen 2). De los veinte casos identificados, once se encuentran en estado de destrucción y nueve ya han sido convertidos en restaurantes *gourmet*, hoteles temáticos, galerías de arte chic, plazas comerciales y torres de lujosos departamentos.



Imagen 1. Sobreposición de geografías de placer sobre geografías de carencia. Gráfico elaborado por Yuzzel Alcántara con fotografías de la autora.

https://digithum.uoc.edu

Post-demolición: memorias, afectos y cuerpos en conflicto



Imagen 2. Puntos de controversia política en el territorio mexicano frente a la destrucción de fábricas. Gráfico elaborado por Yuzzel Alcántara.

Ambos escenarios han territorializado conflictos de memoria, qué memoria se impone y cuáles se desvanecen: es la batalla que ha definido el sentido de habitar una comunidad obrera.

Caso de estudio: Fábrica San Bruno, México

La fábrica del barrio obrero de San Bruno (Xalapa, México) fue demolida y desmantelada en el 2013. Inmediatamente, los habitantes se agruparon para defender la fábrica como acto de protesta y apropiación del espacio. En el 2015 se separaron por conflicto de intereses y desde entonces la fábrica es experimentada de forma ambivalente, provocando tanto sentimientos de conexión como de repulsión. Los restos arquitectónicos de la destrucción son una cualidad diferencial de su espacio urbano, demarcado por muros emocionales y mentales que he denominado *fronteras afectivas*. Sin embargo, dichos restos les han facilitado continuar con un trabajo afectivo-emocional que les permite manejar los afectos de la destrucción, memorias sensibles y ausencias presentes (acecho).

Método

El método para explorar la co-constitución y *co-performance* del sujeto humano con la materialidad de una edificación demolida combinó dos de los métodos desarrollados recientemente para abordar la multiplicidad y las dimensiones emocionales de la experiencia humana: el recorrido en sitio (*go-along*) practicado por Kusenbach (2003) y el foto-diario/foto-entrevista de Latham (2003), complementándose este último con los archivos personales que los participantes ofrecieron a la investigación, como libros antiguos, fotografías y periódicos. Como han argumentado Lee e Ingold (2006), caminar con la gente, vivir y moverse como los otros lo hacen puede acercarnos al entendimiento de cómo perciben otras personas sus entornos multisensoriales y constituyen lugares mediante sus prácticas (Anderson, 2004, p. 255). Por ello, el trabajo de campo consistió en trece recorridos en el sitio de la destrucción con trece obreros que trabajaron y habitaron la fábrica entre 1960 y 1990 (año en que se clausuró), realizado a lo largo del año 2018. Se puso la mayor atención a la manera en que las huellas de la demolición acontecida en el 2013 –escombros, moho, vidrios rotos, losas hechas añicos, hierbas, goteras, piedras, vigas de hierro oxidadas y muros derruidos– provocaban sus sentidos y suscitaban memorias, emociones, sentimientos y juicios. Durante los recorridos, los participantes tomaron fotografías de aquellas partes que les llamaron la atención o les provocaron algo; este archivo fotográfico fue utilizado a lo largo de las entrevistas con el fin de identificar qué de las fotografías era lo que los había cautivado. Tanto los recorridos como las entrevistas fueron grabadas y transcritas, lo cual permitió recurrir a este material tantas veces como fue necesario al efectuar la interpretación posterior. Las entrevistas estuvieron caracterizadas por pausas, trastabilleos, movimientos del cuerpo y lenguaje de señas, ceguera, pérdida de audición y pérdida de memoria. Dichas cualidades son ya un dato que revela la experiencia corporeizada de la demolición.

Por cuestiones de seguridad para los participantes a causa de los conflictos actuales por algunos inmuebles, se utilizan “sobrenombres” creados de acuerdo a un rasgo de la relación afectiva que según la autora distingue el sentimiento de cada obrero hacia la fábrica.

La memoria, el acecho y lo virtual

El borrado de un objeto nunca se completa. Siempre hay un efecto, un rastro que se transmite por su ausencia (Hetherington, 2004, p. 168)

Creo útil suponer que el cuerpo recuerda de otro modo, fuera del ámbito de lo discursivo-comunicativo, aunque siempre conectado y conectable con él (Huffschmid, 2013, p. 115)

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Post-demolición: memorias, afectos y cuerpos en conflicto

La memoria ha sido poco trabajada en el campo de las geografías de la arquitectura. Mediante su enfoque en el “aquí y ahora [...] [y] lo que aún no es” (Anderson, 2005, p. 649), las geografías de los afectos han dicho poco respecto a lo que “ha sido o habrá sido, y sus relaciones con el presente” (Rose et al., 2010, p. 345). En su estudio sobre el centro comercial Milton Keynes (*big thing*), Rose et al. (2010) difieren del concepto de afecto propuesto por Anderson (2004, 2005), en el cual los juicios son el resultado del impacto del afecto sobre el cuerpo, es decir que emergen momento después del impacto. Por el contrario, para Rose et al. (2010) los juicios pueden disminuir o aumentar el impacto del afecto en sí. En las entrevistas con usuarios del centro comercial encontraron que los afectos de su materialidad a menudo eran juzgados en comparación con otros centros comerciales que los sujetos habían visitado previamente; de manera frecuente, dichas memorias les permitían hacer juicios sobre la experiencia del centro comercial: “los juicios pueden contrarrestar los afectos [...] así como las emociones y memorias pueden dar lugar a diversos juicios y evaluaciones de un afecto” (Rose et al., 2010, p. 346), argumentando estos autores por último que es necesario explorar más el papel que tiene la memoria y los encuentros pasados en mediar el potencial afectivo de los edificios.

Hay otra línea de investigación que desde el giro afectivo ha trabajado con mayor profundidad la cuestión de la memoria y el legado del pasado corporeizado en los sujetos humanos: los estudios patrimoniales. Trigg (2012) ha explorado los diversos modos en los cuales la materialidad interactúa con “el hacer memorias” (p. 82) y el posicionamiento de “nosotros mismos en relación con el pasado” (p. 98). Waterton y Watson (2015), Waterton y Dittmer (2014) y Micieli-Voutsinas (2017) han estudiado el papel que tienen los encuentros del pasado y los elementos no-humanos en la experiencia sensorial de diversos sitios históricos y museos, registrando su capacidad para moldear experiencias fisiológicas y psicológicas de los lugares. Por su parte, Crang y Tolia-Kelly (2010, p. 2.315) han enfatizado que la memoria moviliza y promueve cierta organización de sensibilidades y afectos, impulsando o no el sentimiento de inclusión cívica. En el presente análisis, se retoma esta preocupación por conocer cómo los cuerpos no-humanos pueden mediar la memoria y experiencia presente de los sujetos humanos, desafiando el sentimiento de pertenencia y cohesión ciudadana. El sitio escogido, en vez de ser un sitio patrimonial, es un sitio urbano destruido, y en vez de tratar con usuarios y visitantes, los sujetos son los habitantes.

Acecho

¿Cómo pueden los espacios arquitectónicos alguna vez habitados, ahora destruidos, retornar y acechar la experiencia espacial emocional cotidiana del presente?

En tanto el lugar de análisis es un espacio donde existió una fábrica ahora ausente, el punto de entrada hacia el hacer memoria es a través de lo que ya no está, pero se siente como tal en los recorridos realizados, eso ausente que continúa presente en los cuerpos. Por ello, resulta adecuado retomar los planteamientos que se han hecho respecto a la presencia de la ausencia: el acecho. El acecho permite pensar los afectos que emergen en los límites entre lo edificado y lo destruido, entre lo presente y lo ausente a la vez, posibilitando, de igual forma, extender la vida de los encuentros del pasado al momento actual y reconocer su impacto afectivo.

Para Avery Gordon, el acecho es un tipo de afecto: “el fantasma es solo el signo, o la evidencia empírica, si se prefiere, que señala que el acecho está teniendo lugar [...] ser acechado nos mueve afectivamente” (Gordon, 2008, p. 8). Para esta autora, el acecho materializa experiencias pasadas de pérdidas, de asuntos no resueltos, deudas no saldadas que retornan al presente para afectar nuestra experiencia y subjetividad humana, causando conflicto en tanto demandan tregua. El acecho tiene lugar cuando aquello que se ha perdido, “aquello que parece invisible o bajo las sombras [...] aquello que parece ausente puede, de hecho, ser una presencia conflictiva e incómoda” (Gordon, 2008, p. 17). Para los obreros que habitaron la fábrica, la demolición de sus edificios fue sentida como una pérdida que ha conflictuado su experiencia subjetiva de pertenencia a su barrio: “Es sentirse que uno ya no encaja, demolieron los edificios, destruyeron todo, nos han quitado todo, espacios que en el barrio ya no tendremos jamás”. La vivencia urbana después de la demolición está entramada con la presencia de lo que pareciera en primera instancia ausente, retomando a Hetherington: “las relaciones socio [espaciales] son performadas no solo en torno a lo que está allí sino también en torno a la presencia de lo que no está” (Hetherington, 2004, p. 159). Eso que ya no está actúa como afecto que media el sentimiento de pertenencia al lugar.

Por su parte, para Thrift la práctica cotidiana de habitar siempre genera un correlato espectral de posibilidades no actualizadas, por ende, los espacios-tiempos son siempre acompañados por sus espectros, los cuales ensayan «la presencia activa de las cosas ausentes» (Valéry, citado por Denning, 1996, p. 116) [...]. Primero, porque casi todos los espacios llevan la carga de su pasado [...]. Tercero, debido a que los espacios-tiempos [...] generan muchos de los posibles no actualizados, sin los cuales no pueden dejar su huella, ni ser sentidos y registrados (2008, p. 121).

Lo anterior implica que las posibilidades afectivas de espacios y edificios arquitectónicos habitados pueden desplegarse en el habitar cotidiano presente con el potencial afectivo de sus espectros. Luego, habitar arquitecturas implica haber corporeizado algo que en algún espacio-tiempo tendrá la posibilidad de devenir en una sensación, un recuerdo, una emoción o un afecto: “atender las cuestiones

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Post-demolición: memorias, afectos y cuerpos en conflicto

del afecto permite que los encuentros con los espacios tengan una vida y fuerza posterior y precedente y más allá del pensamiento representacional reflexivo y deliberativo" (McCormack, 2003, p. 490). Mas, en el caso de la fábrica, la destrucción conflictúa lo corporeizado de los encuentros pasados frente a la ausencia de una materialidad que sienten debería seguir presente: "Ya no quiero recordar, se sentía feo, era triste ver cómo el edificio se iba deteriorando, poniendo feo y nadie le daba mantenimiento, ya no quería ver cómo se arruinaba. Y luego lo demolieron, ese edificio había sido la vida de muchos, de ahí levantamos a nuestros hijos e hicimos nuestras casas, y ahora simplemente quedan escombros, ya no está aquí" (El Decepcionado, 73 años). Es un tipo de afecto que los acecha pues, en términos de Gordon (2008), demanda su deuda no saldada aún.

Los aportes de Kevin Hetherington (2004) han permitido entender el acecho como un momento dentro de una serie de diferentes etapas por las que transcurren los cuerpos no-humanos en la vida humana. La relación entre cualquier no-humano y el ser humano, propone Hetherington (2004, pp. 159-160), no está definida por una trayectoria temporal lineal en la cual el objeto se crea, produce, consume y desecha, sino que se trata de un proceso de desplazamiento en donde las etapas o estadios de dicha trayectoria se dan de manera atemporal, no lineal, compleja y dinámica, pasando por eventos de suspensión, retorno, remoción, almacenaje y acecho. Por ejemplo, los objetos que se adquieren no siempre se usan y después se eliminan, sino que son guardados en diferentes espacios del interior de una casa, ya sea en un refrigerador, debajo de las escaleras, en algún cajón, o en una posición visible; así, más que ser desechados, los objetos son desplazados, transitando por diferentes espacios. La elección respecto a dónde colocarlos está en función de qué tanto se quieren en contacto con el cuerpo, dependiendo de la relación afectiva que se haya creado con estos. Así, una fotografía puede colocarse en un portarretratos sobre la mesa del salón, o puede almacenarse en una caja con más fotografías en el ropero. Ello no significa que las fotografías de la caja estén olvidadas y no sean parte de nuestra memoria, sino que se han colocado en un espacio en suspensión del que después pueden ser removidas para retornar a un espacio más cercano con mayor agencia corporal:

se mueven entre un estado de presencia y ausencia y al hacerlo son transformados, aparentemente desaparecen solo para retornar una vez más e inesperadamente, y quizá en un lugar diferente y de diferente forma. Ellos pueden venir e irse, aparecer y desaparecer, pero al hacerlo, permanecen" (Hetherington, 2004, p. 162).

Al permanecer, la materia y las cosas no pierden sus capacidades afectivas: "lo ausente puede tener agencia independientemente de la intencionalidad humana" (Hetherington, 2004, p. 167). Ello significa que mover las cosas representacionalmente a un estado de ausencia puede también hacerlas no-representacionalmente presentes.

Lo virtual

¿Puede la memoria sensible estar articulada por encuentros pasados con espacios arquitectónicos, mas no ser una construcción fija sino en continuo cambio que posee la capacidad de devenir reclamando un nuevo trazo de límites entre la materia y la sensibilidad humana?

El enfoque no-representacional se sostiene sobre la noción de virtualidad elaborada por Deleuze y Guattari (2004, p. 98), quienes argumentan que la materia sigue un desarrollo ausente como una continuidad alternativa, virtual y sin embargo real. Para Massumi (2002) lo virtual es una multitud apremiante de potencias que están empezando a desarrollarse y pueden o no volverse actuales. Luego, hay una distinción entre lo virtual, lo actual y lo real. Para DeLanda (2015), las capacidades de afectar pueden ser reales sin necesariamente ser actuales, es decir, son virtuales: "Lo virtual no se opone a lo real, sino a lo actual. Lo virtual es totalmente real en la medida en que es virtual. De hecho, lo virtual debe definirse estrictamente como parte del objeto real, como si el objeto tuviera una parte de sí mismo en el objeto virtual" (Deleuze citado por DeLanda, 2015, p. 17). Es decir, los objetos y las cosas pueden tener una especie de triple vida, existir en el plano virtual, mediante potencias e intensidades que están por devenir, y que, cuando devienen, son actuales, y en ambos casos reales. Por lo tanto, hay un desarrollo ausente y continuo que los espacios arquitectónicos, al igual que los objetos, pueden seguir de manera virtual, y, por momentos, devenir actuales, pero siempre reales.

Si dicha trayectoria que los espacios arquitectónicos siguen en el plano virtual no es necesariamente actual, ello significa que pueden ya no existir físicamente, pueden estar destruidos, pero ello no define ni condiciona su presencia en el plano virtual. Los espacios y edificios arquitectónicos también pueden suspenderse, removerse, almacenarse y retornar, nunca olvidarse del todo, y al devenir actuales pueden afectar el comportamiento humano, las sensaciones y emociones del presente.

Puede pensarse entonces un tipo de memoria virtual en donde se archivan los edificios arquitectónicos alguna vez habitados, acumulando potencial para devenir y actualizarse. Sostengo que la memoria no es tanto lo que se olvida o se recuerda, sino lo que se desplaza. Memoria es el resultado de un conjunto de desplazamientos que los espacios y objetos ejecutan para llegar a ser actuales. Lo que llamamos memoria, como tal, es solo la punta del iceberg, sostenida por desplazamientos que acontecen entre el plano virtual y actual. En otras palabras, lo que no está en la punta, no está olvidado sino desplazándose.

Volviendo al ejemplo de las fotografías, el hecho de no tenerlas en un espacio visible en el habitar cotidiano no implica que las hayamos olvidado. Solo han sido trasladadas a un espacio desde donde se evita que se pierdan físicamente para siempre. No obstante, incluso perderlas o desecharlas no significaría que ya no se las recuerde jamás.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Post-demolición: memorias, afectos y cuerpos en conflicto

Desplazar es también ordenar ausencias, colocar límites y marcar fronteras entre los no-humanos y el cuerpo humano, a fin de manejar sus afectos y poder hallar tregua con sus respectivos espectros o potenciales virtuales. Con ello no quiero decir que dichos actos de desplazamiento se hagan conscientemente, sino que son parte de prácticas cotidianas que los sujetos humanos realizan representacional y no-representacionalmente. Cuando las ausencias no se encuentran como presencias inesperadas (acecho), puede decirse que dichos actos de desplazamiento para demarcar fronteras han funcionado adecuadamente (Hetherington, 2004).

Al manejo de la distancia espacial, traducida en proximidad, cercanía o lejanía, y del impacto que los afectos arquitectónicos puedan causar en la vida del habitante, es lo que aquí llamo trabajo de demarcación de *fronteras afectivas*.

Busco mostrar cómo estas fronteras van más allá de lo simbólico: no solo son delineadas por la diferencia discursiva y representativa entre subjetividades colectivas, sino que emergen de un mundo material arquitectónico a través del contacto con los seres humanos.

En esta última parte ejemplifico cómo la relación conflictiva entre persona y edificio destruido ha delineado fronteras afectivas que se han erigido como muros mentales y corporales dentro de su experiencia urbana cotidiana.

Arquitecturas corporeizadas: habitar con espectros

¿Qué fronteras afectivas el habitante se ve obligado a trazar para convivir con la destrucción de lo arquitectónico corporeizado?, ¿a qué distancia espacial han colocado los espacios habitados para mediar sus afectos y no sentirlos como presencias acechantes?, ¿cómo tales fronteras dirigen emociones ambiguas y sentimientos de conexión o repulsión que experimentan mediante el encuentro con su entorno destruido?

A través de recorridos realizados en el sitio de destrucción se identificaron cuatro manifestaciones de memorias corporeizadas que entraron en conflicto al contacto con el lugar, demandando una demarcación de fronteras: atmósferas corporeizadas, memorias de recorridos espaciales, cicatrices y sueños, y los restos de lo que ya no está. Dicho conflicto sostiene una relación afectiva ambivalente entre obreros y entorno destruido. Por un lado les provoca sentimientos de conexión: cariño, alegría, afinidad; y por otro, sentimientos de repulsión: sentirse expuesto, enojo y disgusto.

Atmósferas corporeizadas

Entramos al sitio de la destrucción, espacio donde aún quedan en pie algunos muros, columnas y partes de losas demolidas. Puesto

que todavía no han sido retiradas, caminamos pisando montañas de escombros para llegar a los cuartos que se veían al fondo. Nos dirigíamos al salón de hilados y tejidos, el salón donde se ubicaron los telares, de los pocos cuartos donde la losa no fue derribada. Al entrar en contacto con este espacio, ahora sombrío, habitado por el eco de las goteras, con charcos sobre sus pisos y muros grafitados, los obreros volvían a vivenciar atmósferas pasadas como presentes a través de sus sentidos. Volvían a sentir la luz, a sentir el calor, a sentir su cuerpo habitando esa espacialidad oscura, con escasa iluminación y saturada de polvo:

En el día entraba un rayito de sol por ese hoyito y se veía oscuro de todo el polvo que había aquí adentro, yo no sé cómo todavía estamos vivos, no se imagina la cantidad de polvo que respirábamos, todo este espacio estaba lleno de polvo, difícilmente podías mirar al compañero de al lado (El Sobreviviente Leal, 68 años).

De inmediato identificaban el sitio exacto donde ellos, si habían sido tejedores, habían trabajado. Les causaba alegría, gusto y satisfacción sentirse cercanos al punto espacial en donde pasaron gran parte de sus vidas:

Aquí es donde yo entré a aprender a trabajar, aquí, en esta esquinita de aquí, aquí entré, aquí empecé. Me estoy acordando, ¡qué calor sentíamos aquí! (*pausa*), estábamos sudando (*mueve las manos hacia la cara*), cómo sudábamos aquí (El Sobreviviente Leal, 68 años).

No obstante, tal recuerdo se contrapone con la sensación incómoda de volver a experimentar el calor de ese espacio, un calor que los hacía sudar durante todo el día y durante años. Un sudor al cual su cuerpo se amoldó con el fin de no hacer de esta sensación un diario sufrimiento. Para que la producción de tela se realizara de manera eficiente, los espacios contaban con las instalaciones necesarias para optimizar los parámetros de temperatura y humedad. Cuando el clima era poco húmedo, una red de vaporizadores aumentaba la humedad relativa para que el hilo no se rompiera. Ello daba como resultado una atmósfera semejante a una sauna, es decir, con una humedad alta que mantenía a los tejedores sudando.

Los espacios fabriles se caracterizaban por el ruido, un ruido ensordecedor generado por el movimiento de las lanzaderas de los telares, movimiento que también producía vibraciones constantes: "Todavía me acuerdo que era yo chavo y oía el ruido de los telares estando aquí, casi a un kilómetro de distancia se oía el ruido de los golpeteos de las máquinas" (El Jefe del Recuerdo, 55 años). Los obreros tuvieron que idear otros medios para poder comunicarse en el interior del salón, el primero, un lenguaje de señas, el segundo, el uso de colores: "Como era mucho ruido y vibraciones siempre nos hablábamos por señas en todo" (El de Buena Fe, 61 años). Esta atmósfera ha quedado grabada en su memoria corporal. Hoy en día les es difícil hablar solo con palabras, y los obreros textiles usan su cuerpo cuando hablan, mueven los

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

brazos, las manos o hacen señas para acompañar lo que están expresando. Así, el lenguaje de señas es muestra de cómo el habitar este espacio arquitectónico incorporó nuevos hábitos a sus repertorios corporales de expresión.

El acecho de la explotación y abuso que allí vivieron emergía solo en el salón de telares; al sentir su presencia el llanto aparecía, y con las lágrimas, sentimientos de rechazo hacia la fábrica:

Se quedaba uno días, meses, cuando salía uno ya era lunes o ya era martes [...] me preguntaban si me iba a quedar otro día, yo les decía que no, yo ya tengo dos o tres turnos, y entonces me decían que tenía que quedarme. Y chillaba, porque ya no podía (lo dice con voz entrecortada y llanto) (El de Buena Fe, 61 años).

Atmósferas constituidas por ruido, vibraciones, humedad, temperatura, y un sentido de desorientación temporal emergen como reacción afectiva del salón de telares. Y al emerger, emergen con ellos afectos que los mueven hacia sensaciones de llanto e impotencia.

Recorridos espaciales: haciendo memoria

Continuamos caminando hacia otros espacios. Cuando nos movíamos de un punto a otro, se detonaban en los obreros memorias de sus recorridos espaciales. Estos trayectos del pasado quedaron archivados en su memoria como eventos virtuales que en el momento de la visita se actualizaron a través de los encuentros con los restos materiales del lugar. Recorrer hoy los espacios de la fábrica significa para ellos volver a sentir el acecho de los espectros que dejaron cuerpos cansados, agotados y enfermos, pero con fuerza para sobreponerse (véase imagen 3):

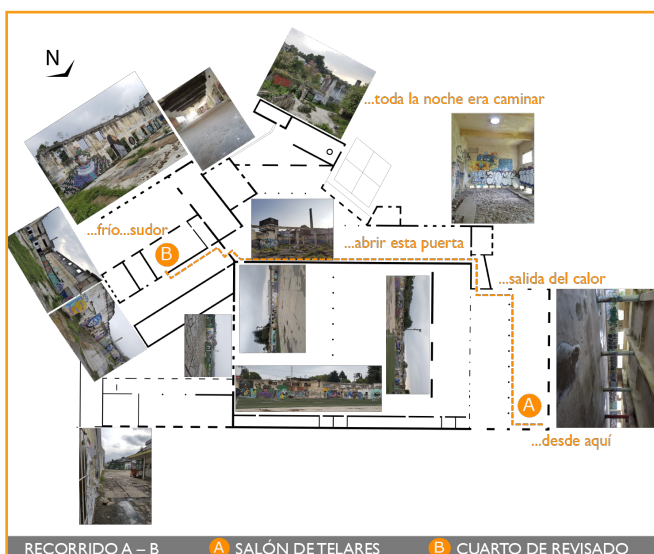


Imagen 3. . Recorridos corporeizados. Gráfico elaborado por Yuzzel Alcántara.

Post-demolición: memorias, afectos y cuerpos en conflicto

Acá era puro caminar, toda la noche era caminar, yo tenía que salir desde aquí y sacar los rollos de tela todo este pasillo, abrir la puerta esta de acá, y era toda la noche estar dando vueltas [...] yo vivo de milagro porque esa salida del calor, y abrir esta puerta para llegar al frío, aquí se me secaba el sudor, y otra vez entraba yo a acá (El Sobreviviente Leal, 68 años).

Toda la noche era caminar, de vez en cuando salía uno al baño y se sentaba uno unos diez minutos y otra vez a seguir (El Memoriado a Corto Plazo, 80 años).

Significa también encontrarse con lo que ya no está, pues ellos marcaban sus recorridos pasando por pasillos poblados de no-humanos: escombros, hierbas, moho, superficies oxidadas, vidrios rotos y olor a orines. Eso que ya no está, lo hecho ausente, continúa atrayéndolos a recorrer el sitio de la destrucción durante su cotidianidad, lo ausente como afecto que moviliza al cuerpo a hacer memoria para no caer en el olvido: "Me vengo para acá y me doy mi vueltecilla, luego me voy para allá, me gusta porque estoy haciendo recuerdos" (El Memoriado a Corto Plazo, 80 años).

Un trabajo de demarcación de fronteras está ocurriendo: si la memoria no es tanto un asunto de recordar frente a olvidar, sino una cuestión de un continuo desplazamiento afectivo, ¿qué se desplaza y qué se emplaza?, ¿qué memorias moldean la experiencia espacial de la fábrica destruida?: "Me gusta venir a la fábrica porque me encuentro amigos aquí, me pongo a platicar, es volver a vivir el pasado, recuerdo cómo trabajé aquí, yo conocía todo esto" (El Memoriado a Corto Plazo, 80 años).

En este caso, el afecto de la materialidad no deviene solo de intensidades de fondo que se despliegan produciendo un reordenamiento emocional (Anderson, 2004), sino que está intersectado por encuentros con personas y memorias que apuntalan la subjetividad humana, de manera que el sentimiento que los mueve a recorrer la destrucción no está provocado tanto por el afecto de los no-humanos como por el legado de eventos pasados corporeizados por sujetos humanos cuyos "cuerpos son acechados por memorias de tiempos perdidos y lugares que quedaron atrás" (Clough y Halley, 2007, p. 4). Recorrer los espacios destruidos fue también un recorrido que los espacios hicieron sobre los cuerpos de los obreros, moviéndolos a sentir sensaciones espaciales que percibieron a través de la fábrica: calor, frío, cansancio o agotamiento.

Cicatrices y sueños

La fábrica quedó inscrita en heridas corporales, en cicatrices, pérdida o disminución de la vista, la audición, pérdida de memoria y órganos del cuerpo. Los recuerdos de diferentes accidentes surgían al estar en contacto con el espacio donde habían sucedido, como en el área de cardas: "Una vez se salió una lanzadera y le

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Post-demolición: memorias, afectos y cuerpos en conflicto

pegó en el ojo y se lo vació. A otro una polea. A otro compañero también la carda le cortó un dedo" (Al que Temieron, 82 años).

Estas experiencias se han prolongado en su vida cotidiana presente a través de hábitos que moldean su percepción sensorial: "Yo de este oído no oigo nada, pero no me afecté allá adentro, me afecté ahí sentado viendo la televisión, escucho como si destaparan una botella con gas (*imita el sonido con la boca: sssh*), y ese sonido lo oigo de día, de noche, a todas horas, aquí lo traigo" (El Sobreviviente Leal, 68 años); "Yo trabajé once años de noche y nunca pude dormir bien (*pausa*) ¡nunca! pero es el temperamento de cada uno, la personalidad lo que afecta, hasta la fecha yo despierto a las tres o cuatro de la mañana y no encuentro qué hacer" (El del Insomnio, 76 años).

No obstante, los conflictos relacionar sus cicatrices con el afecto de la fábrica y por ello deciden marcar una frontera que divide ambos espacios (espacio corporal-subjetivo y espacio arquitectónico). Es decir, están haciendo un trabajo de demarcación espacial que mantenga a la fábrica sin agencia sobre la (dis)capacidad de sus cuerpos. La frontera se sostiene sobre un reproche a sí mismo, a su temperamento, personalidad y carácter, es decir, un reproche hacia su subjetividad, que dificulta una relación empática con el lugar (véase imagen 4). Con ello no quiero decir que la subjetividad bloqueé los afectos, pero sí que interviene en su proceso de impacto sobre el cuerpo.

En diferentes espacios del trayecto, la mayoría de los colaboradores narra cómo la fábrica aparecía en sus sueños: "Sigo soñándola, me sueño trabajando aquí en la fábrica" (Al que Temieron, 82 años); "Muchos años me la pasaba soñando, siempre la soñaba, ya vivíamos allá y yo soñaba que estaba por acá" (El Niño Campirano, 83 años). Mas las escenas que relataban no necesariamente sucedían en los espacios donde nos encontrábamos; más que el edificio en sí, lo que soñaban eran experiencias relacionadas con otras personas (amigos, jefes, familiares, obreros), mediante las cuales expresaban sus vínculos emocionales con la comunidad y otros habitantes de su barrio. En tanto los recuerdos de las cicatrices afloraban al contacto con el espacio que las había provocado, los sueños emergían de manera aleatoria: qué tanto corresponde o no al afecto de la materialidad resulta difícil de determinar con precisión.

En diferentes espacios del trayecto, la mayoría de los colaboradores narra cómo la fábrica aparecía en sus sueños: "Sigo soñándola, me sueño trabajando aquí en la fábrica" (Al que Temieron, 82 años); "Muchos años me la pasaba soñando, siempre la soñaba, ya vivíamos allá y yo soñaba que estaba por acá" (El Niño Campirano, 83 años). Mas las escenas que relataban no necesariamente sucedían en los espacios donde nos encontrábamos; más que el edificio en sí, lo que soñaban eran experiencias relacionadas con otras personas (amigos, jefes, familiares, obreros), mediante las cuales expresaban sus vínculos emocionales con la comunidad y otros habitantes de su barrio. En tanto los recuerdos de las cicatrices afloraban al contacto con el



Imagen 4. Cicatrices. Gráfico elaborado por Yuzzel Alcántara

espacio que las había provocado, los sueños emergían de manera aleatoria: qué tanto corresponde o no al afecto de la materialidad resulta difícil de determinar con precisión.

Restos arquitectónicos

Las secuelas de la destrucción demandan un mayor trabajo afectivo que asegure fronteras ante un entorno urbano cambiante que confronta sus memorias: "Mire, eso de allá (*señalando los locales comerciales de la gasolinera colindante*) no existía, eso no existía, todo eso era de la fábrica, pero desde que la demolieron se han puesto a construir nuevos edificios como ese" (El Memoriado a Corto Plazo, 80 años); "Todo lo que ven que no tiene techo es porque lo derrumbaron, toda esta esquina también era parte de la fábrica" (El Vecino Incomprendido, 60 años).

Si hacia otros espacios de la fábrica los obreros experimentan conexión y empatía es debido a que su ausencia ha sido resguardada, preservada. Sentimientos de coraje, tristeza y repulsión emergen al constatar que lo ausente fue reemplazado

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Post-demolición: memorias, afectos y cuerpos en conflicto

por nuevas presencias. Es la presencia de otros espacios arquitectónicos que se construyeron tras la demolición lo que trabaja como carga afectiva acechante. En la ausencia, los obreros aún pueden reconstruir la espacialidad pasada, sus experiencias corporeizadas, encontrando eco en su entorno aun cuando esté destruido. Lo que les provoca un conflicto emocional es que sus cuerpos ya no tengan ese espacio porque fue ocupado con nuevas edificaciones, es decir, hay memorias y experiencias en riesgo de ser destruidas porque se han quedado sin espacio para ser actualizadas y emplazadas.

Son las nuevas arquitecturas construidas sobre espacios pertenecientes al edificio de la fábrica lo que conflictúa su relación afectivo-emocional, impidiendo que la demarcación de fronteras afectivas sea realizada de modo eficiente, pues constantemente algo las penetra, las desestabiliza y exige su reorganización. Al ser indicios materiales de lo ausente, los restos arquitectónicos se han vuelto necesarios para que las memorias corporales continúen teniendo espacio para actualizarse. Por otro lado, son huellas del continuo despojo que han sufrido los habitantes del barrio, de allí que haya restos arquitectónicos cuya carga afectiva les resulte intrusiva y acechante. Esta sensación ambigua los ha distanciado de su entorno urbano y de otros habitantes del barrio, debilitando su subjetividad colectiva de pertenencia.

Conclusión

En este texto se ha intentado visualizar geografías afectivas de la arquitectura poniendo mayor atención a lo corporeizado. Ello ha permitido dar cuenta de la existencia de fronteras corporales y mentales que he denominado *fronteras afectivas*, las cuales redefinen experiencias urbanas de pertenencia. Al explorar el afecto del acecho he querido mostrar que la destrucción del entorno físico puede convertirse en un tipo de ausencia presente (acecho) que afecta la manera en que las subjetividades se co-performan con la materia. En vez de profundizar en la manera en que las *big things* se integran, he querido mostrar que lo arquitectónico hecho ausente representacionalmente también puede mover visceralmente, pudiendo sentirse porque ha quedado hecho cuerpo y grabado en la mente. Debido a ello la destrucción de un edificio nunca termina del todo, pues está presente en el cuerpo de quien lo habitó, lo cual demanda una reorganización de las sensibilidades que constituían la relación afectiva entre sujetos y materialidad arquitectónica pre-demolición.

Ello complica la vivencia que los habitantes originarios experimentan respecto a las intervenciones y renovaciones urbanas. Para esta comunidad obrera habitar con la destrucción ha implicado un manejo constante del potencial afectivo de lo corporeizado, de tal manera que no haga su aparición como espectro o agencia intrusiva (Hetherington, 2004, pp. 170-171). Los habitantes han reaccionado trazando fronteras afectivas

con el fin de graduar la distancia que define su sentimiento de pertenencia e inclusión, emplazando y desplazando memorias. Así, estudiar los afectos desde lo corporeizado ha permitido reconocer cómo la memoria interseca y condiciona el impacto del afecto sobre la subjetividad humana.

Considero que continuar explorando la afectividad material a través de geografías de destrucción es importante por dos cuestiones: tanto para entender cómo las subjetividades se reorganizan en relación con lo arquitectónico destruido como para poder propiciar comunidades más empáticas con nuevas arquitecturas y nuevos entornos urbanos, de modo tal que las demoliciones no se conviertan en afectos acechantes que desvanezcan memorias de colectividades.

Con base en lo expuesto, consideramos necesario repensar *políticas de memoria* cuyo fundamento sea de índole ético y político, esto es, por un lado se debe buscar hacer justicia a los cuerpos dañados en tanto la destrucción está hecha cuerpo. Una simple intervención patrimonial sobre la materialidad arquitectónica sería una política reduccionista y parcial que no contribuiría a reconocer la dignidad del sujeto, su cuerpo y su sensibilidad como habitante presente. Reivindicarles, darles voz y autoridad son algunas acciones que necesitan ser puestas en práctica por quienes diseñan tales *políticas de memoria*. Por otro, la intervención de la ruina o rehabilitación del lugar requiere ser pensada no violentando más las heridas simbólicas presentes, sino a partir de los recuerdos, ritmos y tiempos pautados por el trabajo emocional de demarcación de fronteras afectivas de tal forma que se vuelva posible el retorno empático de lo ausente a las prácticas socio-espaciales cotidianas.

Bibliografía

- ADEY, P. (2008). "Airports, mobility and the affective architecture of affective control". *Geoforum*, n.º 39, pp. 438-451. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2007.09.001>
- ALCÁNTARA, Y. (2020). "Live it to believe it: Arquitecturas del placer", (en prensa).
- ANDERSON, B. (2004). "Recorded music and practices of remembering". *Social and Cultural Geography*, n.º 5, pp. 3-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1464936042000181281>
- ANDERSON, B. (2005). "Practices of judgement and domestic geographies of affect". *Social and Cultural Geography*, n.º 6, pp. 645-659. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360500298308>
- BAXTER, R.; LEES, L. (2009). "The rebirth of high-rise living in London: towards a sustainable, inclusive, and liveable urban form". En: IMRIE, R.; LEES, L. y RACO, M. (eds.). *Regenerating London: governance, sustainability and community in a global city*. Londres: Routledge, pp. 151-172.
- BENNETT, J. (2010). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Durham: Duke University Press.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Post-demolición: memorias, afectos y cuerpos en conflicto

- CLOUGH, P.; HALLEY, J. (eds.) (2007). *The affective turn. Theorizing the social*. Estados Unidos: Duke University Press.
- CRANG, M.; TOLIA-KELLY, D. P. (2010). "Nation, race, and affect: senses and sensibilities at national heritage sites". *Environment and Planning A*, n.º 42, pp. 2.315-2.331. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a4346>
- DEGEN, M.; DESILVEY, C.; ROSE, G. (2007). "Experiencing visualities in designed urban environments: learning from Milton Keynes". *Environment and Planning A*, n.º 40, pp. 1.901-1.920. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a39208>
- DeLANDA, M. (2015). «The new materiality». *Architectural Design*, n.º 5, pp. 16-21. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ad.1948>
- DELEUZE, G.; GUATTARI, F. (2004) *Mil mesetas. Capitalismo y esquizofrenia*. Valencia: Pre-Textos.
- GORDON, A. (2008). *Ghostly matters. Haunting and the sociological imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- HETHERINGTON, K. (2004). "Secondhandedness: consumption, disposal, and absent presence". *Environment and planning D: Society and space*, n.º 22, pp. 157-173. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d315t>
- HUFFSCHMID, A. (2013). "La otra materialidad: cuerpos y memoria en la vía pública". En: AGUILAR, M. A. y SOTO, P. (coords.). *Cuerpos, espacios y emociones. Aproximaciones desde las ciencias sociales*. Ciudad de México: Porrúa-Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana.
- JACOBS, J. (2006). "A geography of big things". *Cultural Geographies*, n.º 13, pp. 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1474474006eu354oa>
- JACOBS, J.; CAIRNS, S.; STREBEL, I. (2012). "Doing building work: Methods at the interface of Geography and Architecture". *Geographical Research*, vol. 2, n.º 50, pp. 126-140. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-5871.2011.00737.x>
- KRAFTL, P.; ADEY, P. (2008). "Architecture/Affect/Inhabitation: geographies of being-in buildings". *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 1, n.º 98, pp. 213-231. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00045600701734687>
- KUSENBACH, M. (2003). "Street phenomenology: the go-along as ethnographic research tool". *Ethnography*, n.º 4, pp. 455-485. <https://doi.org/10.1177/146613810343007>
- LATHAM, A. (2003). "Research, performance and doing human geography: some reflections on the diary-photograph, dairy-interview method". *Environment and Planning A*, n.º 35, pp. 1.993-2.017. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a3587>
- LATOURE, B. (2008). *Reensamblar lo social. Una introducción a la teoría del actor-red*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Manantial.
- LEE, J.; INGOLD, T. (2006). "Fieldwork on foot: perceiving, routing, socialising". En: COLEMAN, S. y COLLINS, P. (eds.). *Locating the field: space, place and context in anthropology*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 67-86.
- LEES, L. (2001). "Towards a critical geography of architecture: the case of an ersatz Colosseum". *Ecumene*, n.º 8, pp. 51-86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/096746080100800103>
- LOZOYA, J. (2018). "Giro afectivo: una aproximación al dilema espacial de las emociones". *Bitácora*, n.º 39, pp. 34-39. <https://doi.org/10.22201/fa.14058901p.2018.39.67825>
- MASSUMI, B. (2002). *Parables for the virtual: Movement, affect, sensation*. Durham, Londres: Duke University Press.
- MICIELLI-VOUTSINAS, J. (2017). "An absent presence: Affective heritage at the National September 11th Memorial & Museum". *Emotion, Space and Society*, n.º 24, pp. 93-104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2016.09.005>
- McCORMACK, D. P. (2003). "An event of geographical ethics in spaces of affect". *Transactions-Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 4, n.º 28, pp. 488-507. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0020-2754.2003.00106.x>
- PILE, S. (2010). "Emotions and affect in recent human geography". *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, n.º 35, pp. 5-20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2009.00368.x>
- ROSE, G.; DEGEN, M.; BASDAS, B. (2010). "More on big things: building events and feelings". *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, n.º 35, pp. 334-349. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2010.00388.x>
- SIMMEL, G. (1988). *Sobre la aventura. Ensayos filosóficos*. Barcelona: Península, pp. 211-220.
- THRIFT, N. (2008). *Non-representational theory. Space, politics, affect*. Londres, Nueva York: Routledge.
- THRIFT, N. (2004). "Intensities of feeling: Towards a spatial politics of affect". *Geografiska Annaler Series B*, vol. 1, n.º 86, pp. 57-78. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0435-3684.2004.00154.x>
- TRIGG, D. (2012). *The memory of place: A phenomenology of the uncanny*. Ohio: Ohio University Press-Athens.
- WATERTON, E.; DITTMER (2014). "The museum as assemblage: bringing forth affect at the Australian War Memorial". *Museum Management and Curatorship*, vol. 2, n.º 29, pp. 122-139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2014.888819>
- WATERTON, E.; WATSON, S. (2015). "A war long forgotten". *Angelaki. Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 3, n.º 20, pp. 89-103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2015.1065126>
- YANEVA, A. (2012). *Mapping controversies in architecture*. Londres: Ashgate.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Post-demolición: memorias, afectos y cuerpos en conflicto

Yuzzel Alcantara Ceballos

(yuzzelalcantaraceballos@gmail.com)

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

Arquitecta y escritora. Maestra en Arquitectura, Ciudad y Territorio (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México). Licenciada en Arquitectura (Universidad Veracruzana) y en Lengua y Literatura Hispánicas (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México). Su trabajo de investigación ha obtenido menciones honoríficas por el INAH y la UNAM. Becaria PECDA "Jóvenes creadores" y becaria CONACYT. Realizó una estancia de investigación en Carleton University (Canadá) en Geografías Emocionales, y es miembro del Laboratorio Grupo Estudio de las Emociones, GEE-MX Lab y del Proyecto Papime Leliteane de la UNAM (México). Desde la filosofía y los estudios socioculturales, sus temas de reflexión atraviesan la relación entre cuerpo, mente, espacio y experiencia, así como la articulación entre memoria, arquitectura y el tiempo vivido.

**UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA**

D I G I T H U M

A RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON CULTURE AND SOCIETY

No. 26 (July 2020)

ISSN 1575-2275

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

REVIEWS



UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Review of the book *Los sentidos del cuerpo: Un giro sensorial en la investigación social y los estudios de género*. Center for Gender Research and Studies, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Mexico City, 2019.

Einer Mosquera Acevedo
University of Antioquia

Published in: February 2021

Recommended citation:

MOSQUERA ACEVEDO, Einer (2021). "Review of the book *Los sentidos del cuerpo: Un giro sensorial en la investigación social y los estudios de género*. Center for Gender Research and Studies, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Mexico City, 2019." [online article]. *Digithum*, no. 26, pp. 1-6. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and Universidad de Antioquia. [Accessed: dd/mm/yy]. <http://doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i26.374149>



The texts published in this journal are – unless otherwise indicated – covered by the Creative Commons Spain Attribution 4.0 International licence. The full text of the licence can be consulted here: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Abstract

This collective endeavour is a recent contribution that, according to the foreword writer and international figure of renown in sensory sociology David Howes, makes a remarkable contribution to the maturation of the sensory turn in social sciences. For Howes this is a book that expresses solidly the consolidation of a stance regarding what he considers an appropriate study of the body, emotions and senses; i.e. understanding them as constructions and configurations produced by a constant interrelation between people and the material and social world surrounding them. Howes takes up on the review of work lines that he considers fundamental for the maturation of the sensory turn as axes that in one way or another are present in the different contributions to the book. The Canadian researcher highlights the adequate handling of the methodological strategies and the high grade of theoretical sophistication in each chapter.

Keywords

Sociology, sensory turn, emotions, senses, artefacts

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>Review of the book *Los sentidos del cuerpo: Un giro sensorial en la investigación social y los estudios de género*.

Reseña del libro *Los sentidos del cuerpo: Un giro sensorial en la investigación social y los estudios de género*. Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios de Género, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Ciudad de México, 2019.

Resumen

Este esfuerzo colectivo es una contribución reciente que, según David Howes, autor del prólogo y referente internacional en sociología sensorial, confiere una madurez notable al giro sensorial en Ciencias Sociales. Para Howes se trata de un libro que expresa con solidez la consolidación de una postura respecto a lo que él considera un estudio adecuado del cuerpo, de las emociones y de los sentidos; es decir, entenderlos como construcciones y configuraciones que se producen por una interrelación continua entre las personas y el mundo material y social que las rodea. Howes se encarga de analizar aquellas líneas de trabajo que considera fundamentales para el desarrollo del giro sensorial como aquellos ejes que, de una manera o de otra, están presentes en las distintas aportaciones de libro. El investigador canadiense destaca el manejo adecuado de las estrategias metodológicas y la sofisticación teórica de gran calidad de cada capítulo.

Palabras clave

Sociología, giro sensorial, emociones, sentidos, artefactos

“This volume highly contributes to our understanding of the varieties of the sensory experience within a society”

David Howes. Center for Sensory Studies. Montreal-Canada

This collective endeavour is a recent contribution that, according to the foreword writer and international figure of renown in sensory sociology David Howes, makes a remarkable contribution to the maturation of the sensory turn in social sciences. For Howes this is a book that expresses solidly the consolidation of a stance regarding what he considers an appropriate study of the body, emotions and senses; i.e. understanding them as constructions and configurations produced by a constant interrelation between people and the material and social world surrounding them. Howes takes up on the review of work lines that he considers fundamental for the maturation of the sensory turn as axes that in one way or another are present in the different contributions to the book. The Canadian researcher highlights the adequate handling of the methodological strategies and the high grade of theoretical sophistication in each chapter.

The works present in the book share, as said by the publication coordinator, the premise that through our bodies and our senses we make sense of the world. A body historically and socially located, mediated by sex, gender and class; a body that learns how to sense and make sense; in other words, a body that feels in relation with others; reciprocal (a)effects that imply

sensations, meanings, affections and emotions (Sabido, 2019, p. 19). Just like the foreword writer, Professor Sabido highlights in her presentation fundamental matters for the sensory turn such as the phenomenology of perception, social performativity, anthropology of senses, sensory ethnography, and sensory perception, while revisiting a wide variety of subdisciplines associated with this turn such as the sociology of senses, cognitive sociology, sociology of emotions, ethnomethodology, phenomenology, and theoretical feminist perspectives.¹

In addition to these theoretical-methodological coordinates, the binding axes of this book are an outcome of former collective academic experiences and exchanges, particularly in the research seminar *Giro Sensorial en la Sociología: Cuerpos, Sentidos y Género* (Sensory Turn in Sociology: Bodies, Senses, and Gender) held between August and December in the Center for Gender Research and Studies of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and a research symposium about the sensory turn in May 2018. These axes point fundamentally towards the following:

- The interdisciplinary horizon of sensory studies based on the question of how to tackle perception. One of the bases for answering it is, and precisely referring to Howes, the sociability of the sensation premise, i.e. assuming perception as something conditioned by the biographical trajectory and the social positions. The

1. For further details about the theoretical and methodological lines associated with the sensory turn and rescued by Professor Sabido, please refer to her article *Georg Simmel y los sentidos. Una sociología relacional de la percepción* (Georg Simmel and the senses. A relational sociology of perception).

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Review of the book *Los sentidos del cuerpo: Un giro sensorial en la investigación social y los estudios de género*.

assumption of a relational position is another component of this axis. Relationism here refers to the necessity of the blurring of pairs like body-mind, nature-culture, and most importantly the one referred to as sensation as a physical faculty and perception as an intellectual one. Sensory perception, thus, involves body and mind. The last element of this axis points towards not only exploring analytical possibilities beyond visioncentrism but also including the internal senses such as the vestibular, nociception, proprioception, kinesthesia, and thermoception.

- Sociological coordinates arising from two analytical levels, the interactive and the dispositional. The first one points towards the relational character of senses, recovering some postulations by Simmel, Goffman, Synnott, and Le Breton, among others. The second one refers, mostly based on Bourdieu's theoretical proposal, to learning mechanisms for selecting aspects of our surrounding world.
- Crossings between the Bourdieuan proposal and Asia Friedman's cognitive sociology. Habitus notions, perception filters, senses education, and somatic work are resources pointing towards identifying processes for making sense of what is perceived.
- The relation between sensory perception, material culture, and practice, especially in how knowledge is evidenced in the body through a particular relation with the material world. Here is highlighted the problem of the conscience of a craft in the body and the premise that performing a craft is making gender (Sabido, 2019, p. 29).
- Methodological strategies and considerations about the research process itself as a sensory experience from different approaches for recognising the sensory character of fieldwork.
- The need for including, alongside the theoretical and methodological reflections, the ethical and political implications and considerations of the different participatory methodologies employed.

With these axes properly established, the outcome of this publication is a book with 17 chapters and 7 sections that we will briefly introduce.

The first three chapters are part of the section titled *Reflexiones, niveles y categorías analíticas para la investigación socio-corporal* (Reflections, levels, and analytical categories for social corporeal research). In the first place, Carolina López Pérez exposes the crossing between Niklas Luhmann, Erving Goffman, and Asia Friedman with her piece of writing *Percepción sensible y expectativas sociales genéricamente diferenciadas* (Sensible perception and social expectancies differentiated by gender). There, López rescues the sociological coordinates from the corporeal and sensory perspective of the three authors for answering how

perception is modelled and how it influences interactions when senses are the mediums used by those implicated to mutually notice each other, emphasising the operation that allows the distinction between male and female bodies (López, 2019, p. 48). Furthermore, López suggests, based on those theoretical coordinates, a work line for understanding the mechanisms by which indigenous, poor, or rich bodies are noticed.

In her chapter *Género en clave sensorio-afectiva* (Gender from a sensory-affective perspective), Priscila Cedillo starts from the statement that genders are rooted in bodies as a sensitive disposition. The question for how that effect is produced is the intention of her contribution, and by doing so she defies the common explanation of gender being a social construct. Elements of dispositional sociology and approaches from perception from the social sciences are enriched by the notions of sexed habitus, sociation by a body-to-body imitation, and somatic work, thus proposing an epistemological and theoretical-methodological guide for the study of sex identities (Cedillo, 2019, p. 68).

Lastly, in the chapter *El amor corporizado y el giro sensorial. Espacios, sonidos y artefactos en la percepción sensorial del cuerpo amado* (The embodied love and the sensory turn. Spaces, sounds and artefacts in the sensory perception of the loved body), Olga Sabido Ramos and Adriana García Andrade propose a study of the love bound from a material dimension, that is, starting from the principle that the couple's sensory perception is not only performed with the senses but also through places where their reciprocal (a) effect takes place and also through the artefacts present (Sabido & García, 2019, p. 85). Supported in the proposal of embodied love within the sensory turn, and also in a Simmelian perspective regarding how bonds have a sensory dimension that presupposes a space and material condition that conditions perception, they present recent findings regarding their research.

The next three chapters are part of the section *Género en clave sensorial* (Gender studies from a sensory perspective). In the first of them, *Navegar entre los saberes del oficio de la pesca: un acercamiento desde las emociones y el ámbito corpóreo sensible* (Navigating among the sets of knowledge of the fishing craft: an approach from emotions and the sensory corporeal realm), Carolina Pérez González associates the categories of gender and labour (Peláez, 2019, p. 132), thus pointing out that the body, sensitive and emotional dimensions are fundamental for the learning of sets of knowledge and for performing crafts. Based on the body, senses, and emotions relational triad and revisiting Richard Sennett's postulates, Peláez holds that the reproduction and acquisition of a craft, in this case a maletype craft, is mediated, precisely, by gender issues. Likewise, artefacts and nonhuman entities typical of the craft, hurricanes for example, are also part of her analytical proposal.

José Torres Ramos, in *Incorporando el mariachismo: una fenomenología del gesto musical* (Incorporating mariachismo: a phenomenology of the musical gesture), proposes an encounter between phenomenology and musicology for analysing the

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Review of the book *Los sentidos del cuerpo: Un giro sensorial en la investigación social y los estudios de género*.

incarnated musicality (Torres, 2019, p.152) in musicians and mariachi aficionados. This is, in Torres's words, a study on Mexicanness through the music performativity in which gender, the discursive world, machismo, and aesthetical perception go hand-in-hand.

Meanwhile, Marta Rizo García in her text *Experiencias corporales, emociones e identidad de género. Un estudio con mujeres de distintas generaciones en la Ciudad de México* (Corporeal experiences, emotions, and gender identity. A study with women from different generations in Mexico City) states that the body is a represented and lived relational unity while also related to nature, culture, social learning, physiological issues and incorporated sociations (Rizo, 2019, p. 156), these being the questions relevant for an understanding of the corporeal modellings of the body experiences related by people (Rizo, 2019, p. 172). Analytical categories such as body, emotions, and gender, and interviews with women from different generations, allowed her to identify changes and continuities in the perception of their own bodies.

The section *Sexualidades, erotismos y sentidos corporales* (Sexualities, eroticisms, and corporeal senses) is also composed of three chapters. In *La dimensión sensorial del riesgo sexual en la experiencia de la serodiscordancia en la Ciudad de México* (The sensory dimension of sexual risk in the serodiscordance experience in Mexico City), César Torres Cruz explores that dimension of sexual risk based on the senses (Torres, 2019, p. 198) in the process of incorporation and how it configures in the couple bonds in which one of the integrants suffers from HIV. Torres studies corporeal practices, trying to understand how those bodies build meaning in an interaction that unfolds in domestic and intimate scenarios where biomedical artefacts are also present

Daniela Sánchez, in her chapter *Entre cuerpos, normas y placer: modulación sensorial en una comunidad BDSM* (Between bodies, norms, and pleasure: sensory modulation in a BDSM community), proposes an analysis from the perspective of the sensory in sado-masochistic practices. Recurring to concepts such as somatic work and reflective bodywork, she exposes the learning process for feeling pleasure in these kinds of interactions (Sánchez, 2019, p. 212). Putting particular emphasis on the participating women, she analyses the relation between pain and pleasure in these rituals that according to the author - and stepping out of the vision of these practices as pathological - promote particular types of solidarity and binding ties.

The last chapter of this section, written by Roberta Granelli, is titled *Los sentires "equivocados": legitimidad del cuerpo y de las emociones en la experimentación de relaciones no monogámicas consensuadas* (The 'wrong' feelings: corporeal and emotional legitimacy in the consensual non-monogamous relationships experience). Granelli supports herself in the feminist epistemological tools and sensory sociology by exposing the ways in which the sex-affective practices are generated with

interruptions to normativity patterns (Granelli, 2019, p. 239), and likewise how these events are registered in the body.

The following two chapters are part of the section *La ciudad como experiencia sensorial* (The city as a sensory experience). With the chapter *Las miradas en el último vagón del metro. Sociología del cuerpo y los sentidos en la interacción homoerótica* (The looks in the last metro carriage. Sociology of the body and senses in the homoerotic interaction), Carlos Viscaya analyses ways for manifesting sexualities and eroticisms within this interaction place. Recurring to the Foucauldian idea of sexuality dispositifs and through the notion of techniques of the body by Mauss, he shows how the ways of conducting one's body and disposing one's look are learned and thus proposes a map of the sensory dimensions of these encounters (Viscaya, 2019, p. 255).

Erick Serna Luna, in his chapter *Sentir la ciudad: el habitus de la ceguera y la debilidad visual en la construcción no visual del espacio urbano de la Ciudad de México* (Feeling the city: the blindness and visual weakness habitus in the nonvisual construction of the urban space in Mexico City), exposes a positional reflection located from his weakened vision experience with which he developed a methodological strategy that supports his analysis. Through ethnographies and talks with collectives and associations of people who are blind or visually weakened in Mexico City, he describes techniques and experiences with which people build corporeal and spatial knowledge through a nonvisual perception (Serna, 2019, p. 267).

The section *Sensorialidad y artefactos* (Sensoriality and artefacts) has two articles as well. The first of them, *Repensar la implementación de tecnologías alternativas en clave corpóreo-sensorial: el caso del sanitario ecológico seco* (Rethinking the implementation of alternative technologies from a corporeal-sensory perspective: the case for the dry ecological toilet), by Diana Inés Ramírez, is an analysis of the body as mediator of the natural world through senses, highlighting its role in the incorporation of practices, values, and meanings; a role that she problematises in accordance with current discussions about alternative technologies for populations with no home water system services and the possibility for its use and social acceptance. Ramírez emphasises the assumption of the body and senses as a means for interactive rather than merely receptive knowledge (Ramírez, 2019, p. 307).

At the same time, Abraham Ledesma, in *Nuevas prótesis virtuales: La emancipación sexual de los grupos de diversidad sexual (DS) a través de la mediación de las TIC* (New virtual prosthesis: The sexual emancipation of the sexual diversity groups (SD) through the mediation of the ICTs), (Ledesma, 2019, p. 313), tackles the sociotechnical strategies with which the sexually diverse (SD) individuals constitute, following the Foucauldian assumptions, cyber-sexuality dispositifs. The author, appealing to the sensory turn in sociology, discusses the sensual sexual perception mediated by ICTs and how it configures perceptual schemes for the use of

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Review of the book *Los sentidos del cuerpo:*

Un giro sensorial en la investigación social y los estudios de género.

prosthetic extensions in sexual interactions, crystallising alternative ways for the erotic experience. The theoretical-methodological component of this work is also a venture for proposing ways to evaluate forms of emancipation from the stigmatisations suffered by this population.

The penultimate section of this book, *Sensaciones, sentimientos y estética* (Sensations, feelings, and aesthetics) starts with the chapter *Implicaciones simbólicas del desollamiento de mujeres en la zona conurbada de México* (Symbolic implications of women skinning in the Mexican conurbations). There, Paola Thompson studies the femicide phenomena by approaching the victim's body as a recipient and processor of ways of violence. Alongside the tracking of news articles and its proposal for defining skinning (Thompson, 2019, p. 339), it sets out considerations based on Merleau-Ponty and Le Breton for a problematisation of the views and perception of those crimes.

The second and last chapter of the section, written by César Ricardo Azamar Cruz, is titled *Aula universitaria y experiencia estética: narrativas del gozo* (The university classroom and the aesthetic experience: narratives from joy). It is a reflection text based on a teaching experience in a course on educational experience and aesthetic experiences that the author was responsible for. The course, with its foundation in an ethnographic-sensory experience, was based on the premise that the aesthetic experience is not only taught from the objective pedagogic strategies, and in his text the author aimed towards its study inside the classroom, recognising, giving place, and narrating ways of feeling in a social-sensory order (Azamar, 2019, p. 352).

The book closes with two chapters and its last section is titled *Experiencias sensoriales, enfermedad y dolor* (Sensory experiences, illness, and pain). In the text *Sentidos y sinsentidos de una enfermedad crónica. Experiencia corporal de los pacientes de diabetes en tratamiento de hemodiálisis* (Senses and non-senses of chronic disease. Corporeal experience of diabetes patients on haemodialysis treatment), Cynthia Méndez analyses the corporeal experience of the sick body, or, as she says, the sensory experience limit of its own existence (Méndez, 2019, p. 382). Elements of the sensory turn and sociology of the senses, specifically in the matters related to proprioception and haptic

perception, allow her to attend to the implications evidenced when the sensory experience is mediated by a chronic illness.

The last chapter is titled *Cuando el cuerpo duele. Una etnografía del proceso de morir* (When the body aches. An ethnography of the process of dying). In it, Velvet Romero García, based on an auto-ethnographic experience, displays considerations relating to perception and sensory perception of when, due to a terminal disease, the body is a source of pain. Assisted by her mother's diary, she analyses the aching body and how that suffering is linked to the orders of gender (Romero, 2019, p. 387). The author takes up on the task of revisiting questions related to the dignified death and pain ethics in which the decisions of those going through those ailments are recognised.

With each contribution made to the book, we confirm what David Howes anticipated. This volume is not only the crystallisation of continuous academic exchange that justifies the calling for visibility of the work made by networks and centres that is usually eclipsed by the tendencies in the international circulation of ideas (Sabido, 2019, p. 21), but also a manifestation, both thought and felt, of individual and collective experiences, joyful as much as painful² that are threaded as pillars and foundations of the book. If body, mind, sensation, and perception, following one of the axes of the sensory turn rescued in this volume, are not just segregated ambits, then we can perfectly fit the statement "thinking hurts" (Sabido, 2019, p. 40). Nonetheless, and just as Professor Sabido has manifested in other places in which we have concurred, based on a collective project just as the one described in this review, we can affirm that "thinking while sustained by a network hurts less".

References

- SABIDO, Olga. Georg Simmel y los sentidos: una sociología relacional de la percepción. In: *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*. 2017. Vol. 79, no. 2, pp. 373-400. ISSN 0188-2503.
- SABIDO, Olga (Coord.). *Los sentidos del cuerpo. El giro sensorial en la investigación social y los estudios de género*. Mexico City: Center for Gender Research and Studies, UNAM, 2019. ISBN 978-607-30-2505-8.

2. Here, the mention of a somatic imprint caused by the 2017 earthquake in Mexico City among the seminar participants stands out.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

Review of the book *Los sentidos del cuerpo:
Un giro sensorial en la investigación social y los estudios de género.*

Einer Mosquera Acevedo

(einer.mosquera@udea.edu.co)
Teacher of Sociological Theories.
Faculty of Social and Human Sciences
Department of Sociology
University of Antioquia.
<http://www.udea.edu.co/>

CV: https://scienti.minciencias.gov.co/cvlac/visualizador/generarCurriculoCv.do?cod_rh=0001438347
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6817-5518>



UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA

D I G I T H U M

A RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON CULTURE AND SOCIETY

No. 26 (July 2020)

ISSN 1575-2275

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

MATERIALS



UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

La sociología relacional como modo de aprendizaje

Danilo Melo

Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina

Mariana Leoni Birriel

Universidad de la República (Uruguay)

Carolina Monteiro de Castro Nascimento

Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina

Nadya Emma Alvarez

Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina

Fecha de publicación: mayo de 2021

Cita recomendada:

MELO, Danilo; LEONI BIRRIEL, Mariana; MONTEIRO DE CASTRO NASCIMENTO, Carolina; ÁLVAREZ, Nadya Emma (2021). "La sociología relacional como modo de aprendizaje". [artículo en línea]. *Digithum*, n.º 26, pp. 1-3. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya y Universidad de Antioquia. [Fecha de consulta: dd/mm/aa]. <https://dx.doi.org/10.7238/d.0i26.383703>



Los textos publicados en esta revista están sujetos –si no se indica lo contrario– a una licencia de Reconocimiento 4.0 Internacional de Creative Commons. La licencia completa se puede consultar en <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.es>

Resumen

Texto presentado por un grupo de alumnas y alumnos de François Dépelteau en el homenaje realizado luego de su partida, en 2018, en la Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina (Florianópolis, Brasil). En él se relata la experiencia compartida con Dépelteau, destacando la coherencia entre su propuesta conceptual y su modo de establecer relaciones en el contexto formativo.

Palabras clave

sociología relacional, espacio de formación, Dépelteau

Relational sociology as a means of learning

Abstract

Text presented by a group of François Dépelteau's students at the tribute made after his departure, in 2018, from the Federal University of Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil. She is seeking to relate the experience she shared with Dépelteau, highlighting the coherence between his conceptual proposal and the way he establishes relations in the context of training.

Keywords

Relational sociology, training space, Dépelteau

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

La sociología relacional como modo de aprendizaje

Este texto refleja un esfuerzo por escribir y describir, a ocho manos, las múltiples percepciones de nuestras experiencias de aprendizaje en el curso «The relational approach and its theories in Sociology», propuesto por François Dépelteau para el primer semestre de 2018, en el Programa de Posgraduación en Sociología Política de la Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), en Brasil. Siendo nuestra intención la de coproducir, hemos tratado de evitar una descripción individualizada y basada en el ego, partiendo para el rescate de los elementos productores de sentido de “lo relacional” y conectando las experiencias vividas en las transacciones de cuatro estudiantes en el espacio del aula con artículos, libros y un profesor. Nuestro escrito pretende evidenciar cómo la discusión *teórica* (en cursiva, sabiendo que a François no le habría gustado mucho este término) dio posibilidades a una práctica de construcción compartida, de emergencia de algo nuevo en la relación, sobre la base de cuestionamientos y provocaciones.

Ya el primer encuentro fue un descubrimiento. Una propuesta de curso bien organizada, una serie de actividades previstas y muchas dudas de cómo caminaríamos en este intercambio de idiomas distintos, donde el inglés, el castellano y el portugués se entrecruzaban en la búsqueda de sentido. En su primera presentación, François abrió puertas a un espacio de producción, invitándonos a posicionarnos en el debate. Nos presentamos, con distintos acentos, en un ambiente permeado por lo múltiple, en donde se aceptaban hasta neologismos. Aquí François mostró una gran generosidad en la aceptación del otro, estableciendo conexiones en donde la gramática no sería construida para «enyesar» relaciones, sino construida por todas y todos, en base a un amplio cuestionamiento de las categorizaciones: el curso solo existiría si así lo deseábamos, pudiendo ser este de distintas formas, sin establecer un *previsto* que limitará la acción y en donde la noción de alumno-profesor no se definiera como determinante para el modo de intervenir. Sin más demora, François efectuó una primera presentación apasionada y apasionante a lo largo de cuatro horas. Sabíamos que un intenso semestre recién comenzaba.

En las clases siguientes percibimos a un François inquieto, provocador y cuestionador, pero también, al mismo tiempo, a un maestro con sus dudas, sin exponer su propuesta como doctrina, buscando y testeando argumentos, aceptando lo incompleto y en proceso. Puso a nuestra disposición textos “abiertos”, en los cuales podíamos ver el proceso de construcción de sus ideas, con sus fallas, lagunas e incertidumbres. Vimos aquí una relación coherente con su propuesta de sociología no egocéntrica, mostrando humildad y reconociendo que lo que está siendo creado es siempre en relación y en apertura. Su misma práctica científica era relacional. Este proceso implica un hacer ciencia en conjunto, un aspecto necesario para lograr una producción de calidad y una ciencia responsable, en las antípodas de las prácticas académicas proyectadas como posibilidad de aumento del capital científico de un agente, ya sea por utilidad o por prestigio del ego. Este compromiso estaba siempre presente: “¿cómo hablar de la sociedad para un esclavo sin la posibilidad de emergencia?”, “¿cómo le digo a una niña en un contexto de

carencias que sus posibilidades son nulas y que solo podrá reproducir lo que heredó?”, apuntaba François. Encontramos aquí un gran compromiso con respecto a la producción y el uso de las ciencias sociales, yendo más allá de argumentos que caben apenas en espacios de pares, en academias cerradas, para sí mismas, ajenas al mundo. François ponía sus ojos en la vida que sucede, en lo ordinario, más allá de egos, de grandes eventos, de universidades. Se posicionaba ante los desafíos de credibilidad contemporáneos inherentes a las ciencias sociales, buscando siempre su relevancia.

Asumir la procesualidad en el aprendizaje significaba respetar los tiempos, respetar el proceso. Cada alumno o alumna traía al aula su bagaje de lecturas e influencias. Ya fueran construcciones durkheimianas, parsonianas, bourdieusianas o estructuralistas, él buscaba desustancializarlas a partir de cuestionamientos, presentando otras posibilidades, abriendo la caja negra de su proceso de asociaciones, como diría Latour, no finalizado, de ontologías planas y fluidas. El proceso de aprendizaje estuvo caracterizado por la demanda de críticas, no únicamente como modo de concebir la docencia, sino como forma de pensar las teorías, a fin de, en términos de François, articular una propuesta sociológica que conecte con la vida, en coherencia con nuestro tránsito por el mundo, puesta a prueba. Este fue uno de los aspectos que más peso tuvo en nuestro aprendizaje: reflexionar en torno a una propuesta en la cual nuestra práctica sociológica no se limitara a una actividad acotada al campo académico, como si este fuese un mundo estabilizado o estructurado. La sociología ha de estar al servicio de la vida. Reconocimos un mundo de prácticas, de flujos; siguiendo las acciones, comprendiendo la creatividad de actuar en el mundo que se expresa en las relaciones. La sociología relacional-procesual, como método de enseñanza y aprendizaje, se convirtió en un modo de entender la realidad, pero también en una herramienta para actuar en ella, rescatando así la responsabilidad que se toma al pensar la vida social, más aún en estos tiempos en los cuales la ciencia nos ubica en espacios privilegiados de saber y poder.

François promovía encuentros extraacadémicos, conversando con nosotras y nosotros en una cafetería o invitándonos a una *happy hour*. Entre *petiscos de boteco* nos contaba sus experiencias, de cómo, tras promover la creación de un movimiento estudiantil en una clase de ciencia política en Bielorrusia, a punto estuvo de ir preso; de la condición de ser padre y sus devenires; de los comentarios franceses relativos a los *québécois*; de los desafíos de hacer la compra en otro idioma; del frío en Canadá y del calor de Florianópolis en pleno mes de junio ¡a 15 grados! Lleno de proyectos y de vida, nos invitó a implementar eventos sobre la cuestión micro-macro en las ciencias sociales, pensó con nosotros cómo armar una revista de sociología más abierta, o de qué manera organizar más charlas sobre sociología relacional. François era un generador de relaciones que, siempre de buen humor, nos mostraba una forma de ser en la relación, el arte de construir una práctica científica con miras a la vida y sus movimientos, conectada con el mundo de los seres humanos y no humanos, atenta a lo nuevo: en definitiva, un modo de vivir.

<https://digithum.uoc.edu>

La sociología relacional como modo de aprendizaje

Danilo Melo

(danilo.melo@udesc.br)

Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina

Candidato a doctor en Administración por la Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC) y profesor asistente de la Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (UDESC), Balneário Camboriú, Brasil.

Mariana Leoni Birriel

(mariana.leoni@udelar.edu.uy)

Universidad de la República (Uruguay)

Integrante del Equipo de Prorectorado de Gestión de la Universidad de la República (Udelar) (Uruguay). Licenciada en Sociología por Udelar (2010), magíster en Sociología Política por la Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina (2014) y doctora en Sociología Política por la Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina (2019). Investiga en el área de la Sociología de la Ciencia y Sociología de la Salud.

Carolina Monteiro de Castro Nascimento

(cah.castro@gmail.com)

Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina

Profesora en Sociología Política por la Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina.

Nadya Emma Alvarez

(nadyaemma@hotmail.com)

Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina

Estudiante del Máster del Programa de Sociología y Política de la Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina y profesora de Sociología en Educación Básica (SED-SC).

UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA