

Philippe Fritsch

“A DIALECTICAL ALTERNATIVE TO WARS OF CLASSIFICATION”

Among the obstacles to the international circulation of scientific and cultural products, there are some (and not the least) which are bound up with the wars of classification which specifically structure their reception. Writers and their works are seen through force fields which are both strange and foreign to them. They run the risk of being mobilised or rejected in battles which are not theirs, and as a result their specific contribution may be ignored. In this respect the “misunderstandings” which characterised the reception of Weber’s work in France are exemplary. Without drawing up an exhaustive list of the improper ways in which Weber’s work in the social sciences was alternately rejected or

kidnapped for ulterior motives, there is nevertheless a certain epistemological interest in recalling the period when Merleau Ponty’s readers were able to discover Weber through “ Les Aventures de la dialectique”(1955). It was the first text by Weber to have been published in France and so quite naturally it was lit up in such a way as to exaggerate certain aspects and obscure others. As a result, these pages did not escape the danger of being implicated in game plans and rivalries that had nothing to do with them, and which enrolled Weber simultaneously in current phenomenological thought and the “philosophy of the subject” which were not concerns of his.

While pointing out the stimulating character of Merleau-Ponty’s text, Pierre Bourdieu also revealed its limits. As he said himself, he read Weber differently, rescuing him both from “ Parsons and Aron, and Schütz and the

phenomenology of the social world, etc.”

Contrary to the use of the “classics” with the aim of legitimisation and valorisation (either opposition or allegiance to them) and in particular their way of enunciating problems , and their points of view (what they may or may not reveal), there is another tactic which is to confront a theory to new objects of research. This constitutes both an alternative to becoming embroiled in sterile theoretical discussions and a condition for the international circulation of ideas untrammelled by artificial oppositions and vain controversies.