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On the Uses of Phenomenology in Sociological Research: A Typology, some Criticisms and a Plea

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Abstract

This paper aims to discern, clarify, criticise, and advocate some uses of phenomenology in sociological research. Phenomenology is increasingly evoked or implicitly employed in sociological endeavours. Little attention, however, is paid to what is entailed in taking a phenomenological approach, and whether it is employed to advance empirical or theoretical knowledge. I build an analytic typology of different empirical and theoretical uses of phenomenology, criticise a range of these uses, and argue that other uses bear significant potential for the advancement of theoretical and empirical knowledge. The paper's main contribution lies in comparing and contrasting the many invocations of phenomenology in contemporary social scientific research to discern their benefits and shortcomings.

KEYWORDS

empirical research, lived experience, phenomenological methods, phenomenology, sociological theory, sociology, theoretical research

1 | INTRODUCTION

The phenomenological movement is a complex project spanning over a century and entangling multiple disciplines since its programmatic statement in the writings of Edmund Husserl. It includes thinkers as diverse, influential and with contested legacies as Max Scheler, Edith Stein, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Levinas, Aron Gurtwisch, Alfred Schutz, etc. Much has been written about the branches and differences within the movement, which provide fascinating material for a history of phenomenology as a series of 'heresies' (Ricoeur, 1974) that transform and modify the scope, aims and philosophical orientation of the movement (for introductions to phenomenology that take this historical and exegetical route, see Moran, 2002; Spiegelberg, 1982).

Another way to think about the phenomenological movement takes on the difficult task of defining its core in terms of overarching procedures, concerns or common themes that unite its disparate proponents (Zahavi, 2008, 2018). The core impulse of phenomenology consists of a rejection against any form of *explanatory* reductionism in an attempt to recover experiential aspects of a phenomenon through an adequate description of its fundamental structures. The central attempt is to bring back any phenomenon (such as thinking, perceiving, imagining, acting, or even anxiety) to the (broadly understood) lifeworld; that is, to its constitution in intersubjectivity, its horizonality and intentionality, its embeddedness in a lived space and time, its embodied aspects, and so on.

Phenomenology is hence better seen, practiced, and recognised 'as a manner or as a style' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: lxxi). As style, it is recognisable by specific leitmotifs and a general sensibility, which are already evident in Husserl (who otherwise attempts to present it as a *method*) (see also Gros, 2023). This shared sensibility is an orientation to everyday experience when asking a different range of scholarly questions. A phenomenological approach aims at returning 'to the things themselves' in their mode of givenness or manifestation in *lived* experience, in order to retrieve aspects or dimensions (such as embodiment or intersubjectivity) that would otherwise go unnoticed. However, the aims of this return to experience are not always clear; similar questions arise over whether or how this style of thinking is productive to advance theoretical programmes or enhance empirical research.[1]

The study of 'things themselves', in their manifestation or modes of givenness in experience, requires to 'bracket off' any attempt to explain them in terms of psychological, economic, historical, natural, sociological or physical causal dynamics. The phenomenological 'bracketing' consists of suspending the naturalistic attitude in order to give a fuller account of the richness of experience, its intentional and horizonal aspects, embodied and embedded dimensions, and its constitution in an intersubjective lifeworld. Hence, phenomenology emerges as a fundamental analysis of the intentional structures and lifeworlds that constitute structures of relevance and significance, which allow entities to be experienced under some aspects with specific sense, meaning and orientation.

However, phenomenology is no longer a protest exclusively against explanatory naturalism or mechanistic explanations. Rather, phenomenology must be seen as a turning away from any form of thinking about a particular phenomenon that takes its point of departure in crystallised beliefs and theoretical constructs, which in turn risk perpetuating preconceptions and prejudgements embedded in our scientific or scholarly discipline. Too often, we risk falsely anticipating explanatory factors and mechanisms, or hammering down crucial experiential aspects into conceptual objects or theorems. The phenomenological bracketing is hence substantially different from – if not opposed to – the so-called epistemological break. Positivism,

naturalism and other forms of scientism or (critical) rationalism contend that common sense is blind or oblivious to the objective mechanisms, tendencies or processes that determine the phenomena we observe as an event within a causal system. In sum, what we see here is an epistemological break from *doxa*, the lifeworld, and lived experience, from the first-person perspective, in order to arrive at – in Thomas Nagel's and Bernard Williams' respective phrasing – 'the view from nowhere' and an 'absolute conception of reality'.

Phenomenology, in stark contrast, brackets out the third-person, objectivising and explanatory attitude together with its theoretical and metaphysical prejudices, in order to return to a richer and more faithful description of phenomena as experienced. This process involves recovering things in their perspectival character, in their different modes of manifestation and givenness from and to first-person perspectives. The return to the first person does not relapse into subjectivism; rather, it is an attempt to understand the different ways in which the world can encounter and co-constitute us as subjects. The phenomenological concept of experience hence encompasses entities encountered not only as natural, but also aesthetic, moral, usable and social, objects. For instance, things can be given not only as an object to perception, but also a tool to be used, as enigmas to be interpreted, as emblems or totems binding us to others, as symbols, icons or indexes directing us to another thing, or as an invitation to fly into our imagination. More radically, the mode of givenness and manifestation of the very same thing is modified as a result of changes, shifts or transformations in our relationship with the field of experience, opening us, among other things, to different provinces of meaning anchored in intersubjective practices. This return to things in their dynamic givenness or manifestation avoids the premature straitjacketing of crucial aspects, themes, dimensions or structures that are constitutive of our ways of experiencing things. The phenomenological style of thinking has the sensibility towards this dimension at its core.

Phenomenology typically starts with an intuitive grasp of phenomena as experienced, followed by an analytic examination of their dimensions and aspects and a reconstructive description of the fundamental structures and dynamics configuring determinate experiences (Spiegelberg, 1982, pp. 682, 683, 690–693; see also Gallagher & Zahavi, 2020, pp. 21–30). These operations constitute the staple of phenomenology, in all its variants, and their goal is to 'remove foreign bodies [introduced by our theoretical constructs] and refurbish the genuine phenomena without pulling them from their roots' (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 681, my gloss).

The phenomenological leitmotifs emerge from this sensibility towards *lived* experience. Our way of accessing the world, our ways of encountering and being touched by reality, imply that things are pregnant with meaning; that is, that they emerge from the co-encounter of the world with a (inter)subjective perspective capable of opening, and being open to, reality. This (inter)subjectivity is, at the same time, located somewhere and has its own temporal trajectory and rhythms; it is embedded and embodied through and within different temporal horizons. The phenomenological leitmotifs (embodiment, horizonality, intersubjectivity, orientation to meaning, intentionality, etc.) connect different dimensions constitutive of meaningful and shared human existence, such as the problem of perception, intersubjectivity, embodiment and temporality; intersubjectivity, otherness and selfhood; or perception, motricity, skills, and embodiment.

Yet, phenomenology does not remain at the level of a style in strict sense. A style typically has no other use apart from its self-contained actualisation. Phenomenology, on the other hand, is a style of thinking that, in principle, attempts to provide better foundations for philosophy and science, for theoretical and conceptual formation and for empirical research. At this juncture, however, we start noticing the different uses of phenomenology. What comes after the phenomenological description draws the dividing, yet fluid, lines between the various uses of phenomenology in different fields of social scientific research. After his 'transcendental turn',

the late Husserl insisted that the 'phenomenological reduction' and *epoché* must follow the prior reconstructive operations in order to bring aspects and dynamics of experience back to their constitution in transcendental subjectivity. It would be difficult to argue that prominent phenomenologists after Husserl (such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty or Ricoeur (Spiegelberg, 1973, 1982, pp. 708–712, see also Dreyfus, 1991, pp. 46–59, 65)) have accepted the *reduction* or *epoché* either for philosophical purposes or to practise or apply phenomenology outside philosophy (see Spiegelberg, 1973, 1974, Bossert, 1974; Zahavi, 2019, 2020, 2021, respectively). This rejection makes phenomenology less of a philosophical *method* (in strict sense) and more of a *style* of thinking capable of being employed beyond philosophy in relation to different theoretical problematics, empirical questions and disciplinary concerns.[2] For instance, instead of tracing intersubjectivity back into transcendental structures, the question is open as to how intersubjectivity is achieved locally and practically in and across different situations.

Hence, the usage of the phenomenological style of thinking remains indeterminate and available to be taken into different directions. This article explores four uses in sociology: (1) design of empirical research, (2) cross-validation of empirical results, (3) theory-building, and (4) concept-correction. The first two uses are related to advancing substantive empirical knowledge, while the latter two refer to progress in theoretical knowledge.

I want to argue that, within all these usages lies the danger of misuse. A misuse of phenomenology oscillates between two poles: either phenomenology *overtakes* the operation for which it is employed, and hence distracts the attention from the specificity of the field of study or discipline, or phenomenology is *overtaken by* the field of study or discipline, and therefore its potential for advancing knowledge and innovation is diminished. To benefit from phenomenology, I argue, balance is needed to allow it to perform its work in order to advance and organise empirical knowledge, or to build, ground, validate and correct conceptual or theoretical frameworks. In other words, my plea is that a discipline that encounters the phenomenological *style* of thinking cannot remain the same but must remain itself.

In what follows, I attempt to systematise phenomenological *usages* in sociology and social-scientific research. Such a systematisation of phenomenology according to usage has unique advantages over more historical or conceptual exegetical reviews of phenomenology within sociology. Firstly, it makes explicit the different purposes for which the phenomenological style of thinking can be employed. Secondly, it sheds light on how to employ it in different phases and types of inquiry. Thirdly, it assesses the turn to phenomenology in the light of its results in advancing empirical or theoretical knowledge. Finally, it encourages the sociological imagination to extend phenomenological usages in a more systematic and reflective manner. While the paper contributes substantively to the clarification of uses of phenomenology in sociological research, the analytic typology provides blueprints for related endeavours. On the one hand, it can used as a model to analyse uses of other philosophical approaches (such as hermeneutics, pragmatism, or ordinary language philosophy) in sociology. On the other, it can be used as a model to assess the uses of phenomenology in other disciplines (such as anthropology, history, cultural studies, or geography).

2 | PHENOMENOLOGY AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: BETWEEN SATURATION AND INSPIRATION

The phenomenological style of thinking can be directed at the design of empirical research with a qualitative orientation. Given its explicit focus on *lived* experience, phenomenology is

intuitively useful for a sort of empirical research oriented towards analysing and reconstructing subjectivities and lifeworlds. However, this usage goes in at least two directions. On the one hand, phenomenology has been taken as a *saturating* tool for qualitative inquiry. This use of phenomenology consists in saturating the inquiry process in its totality. Accordingly, researchers try to find in phenomenology the methods and principles to determine research design, data collection and interpretation, *and* the validation of results. Advocates of this position – either in psychology (Giorgi, 1997, 2012, 2021) or health studies (van Manen, 2014, 2016, 2017) – insist that some sort of phenomenological reduction must be performed to saturate the inquiry. This saturating use has not gone undisputed (for an elaborate criticism of this practice, see Zahavi, 2019, 2020, 2021). Critics point out that the Husserlian *reduction* is a philosophical operation that remains indifferent to more specific concerns or problematics of the area of study or discipline. The saturating use simultaneously demands *too* much from phenomenology and attends *too* little to the specific issues and disciplinary techniques and concerns of the field in which it is deployed. And yet, studies that claim a phenomenological orientation typically appeal to it as a way of validating their procedures and make appeals to very specific philosophical techniques, such as *eidetic* variations, phenomenological bracketing or the *epoché* in their data collection, analysis, or different stages of the qualitative procedure.

On the other, phenomenology provides either architectural frameworks or specific insights that open room to innovation and synergy within the discipline. In these cases, phenomenology is taken more as a style of thinking that can be used to solve specific issues with methodological repercussions. Phenomenology, in this sense, is meant to provide *inspiration* to develop – in dialogue with specific disciplinary concerns and procedures – novel methodological tools, research design and programmes. In this case, phenomenology is taken as a style of thinking to open research programmes or advance methodological debates within a specific discipline.

Typically, this usage in the social sciences centres around the postulate of 'adequacy to meaning' (as intended by actors) as a general principle orienting empirical research, which can make use of the more specific techniques of, say, ethnographic methods, pragmatic reconstruction of life-worlds or hermeneutics for data interpretation (Eberle, 2014a, 2014b; for another set of general phenomenological postulates that still do not saturate the whole research design, see Flick and Eberle, 2002). Crucial to this use is that phenomenology *interacts* in synergy with – rather than takes over – the more specific techniques and approaches of the discipline in question.

Seen in more detail, this synergetic interaction takes at least two forms. On the one hand, phenomenology provides architectonic principles for opening a research programme within a discipline. It provides a style of seeing things that opens a whole domain of empirical observation alongside epistemological foundations and general guidelines. On the other, phenomenological insights interact in synergy with problematics specific to a research technique within the discipline, refining the understanding of different phases of its research design, such as data collection and analysis.

Key examples of the two forms of phenomenological inspiration in qualitative research are found in Garfinkel's ethnomethodological programme, and current developments in grounded theory (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, 2022) and interviewing (Tavory, 2020). What I want to elucidate is how this usage of phenomenology in qualitative research design produces innovation within the discipline by engaging critically and productively with its concerns and problematics.

Despite its originality and iconoclastic thrust, ethnomethodology carries phenomenological architectonic principles (see Belvedere, 2020; Eberle, 2012a; Psathas, 1968, 2012, pp. 4–9).

However, Garfinkel does not take phenomenology as solid grounds for theory-building or as a saturating tool to validate his empirical findings or innovative techniques. Phenomenology offers, at most, sufficient epistemological foundations from which a plethora of research strategies and ethno-methods – not all of them phenomenological– emerge and find justification. Put succinctly, phenomenology offered a way of seeing the world which challenged much of the then prevalent sociological approaches and redirected the sociological gaze to a whole unnoticed area of research that required a whole research programme to be performed into being.

The phenomenological input to the different techniques and procedures associated with ethnomethodology is a set of architectonic principles to think empirically about mundane and social cognition as an intersubjective achievement with no external support apart from the interactions sustaining it (Heritage, 1984: especially Chapter 3). Sociological theorising emphasising institutionalisation and internalisation (represented by Parsons in Garfinkel's time) glosses over the fact that orderly and mutually referring social actions depend on the premise that an overarching frame of intelligibility is shared by actors. Consequently, it loses sight of the fact that such frame is locally achieved in an ongoing fashion rather than something unproblematically given due to the internalisation of values, language and norms, or the institutional bounding of actions in reward systems (Heritage, 1984, pp. 70, 71, 304–306). Phenomenology is used to uncover the cognitive and localised intersubjective aspects of the problem of order - otherwise glossed over in the Parsonian framing of the problem of order - and in doing so opens a whole new area for empirical observation.

However, Garfinkel parts ways with Husserl and the larger philosophical ambitions in order to reorient the insights of phenomenology towards empirical research. Whereas Husserl attempts – via the *reduction* and the *epoché* – to reconstruct the transcendental structures of intersubjectivity, Garfinkel, following Schutz in a critical way into radically empirical paths, takes intersubjectivity to be locally achieved and maintained in the ongoing intercourse of actors (Heritage, 1984, pp. 54–61). In their local and ongoing interactions, actors sustain, negotiate and recreate the structures that allow for intersubjectivity, which have no external (let alone *transcendental*) support apart from their local, contingent, and ongoing emergence and management. Ethnomethodological procedures (such as conversation analysis or the so-called breaching experiments) come into being through this effort to take phenomenology against its own grain as an architectural framework to study social cognition and intersubjectivity as an empirical, local and contingent achievement performed by actors themselves in the face of different challenges, discrepancies and disruptions: '*whatever* the intersubjective knowledge and understanding is that is achieved and *however* it is achieved become legitimate topics of investigation as to their "what" and "how"' (Heritage, 1984, p. 71). Interestingly, many of the insights of conversation analysis in the works of Harvey Sacks (Sacks et al., 1974) point to formal structures (such as turn-taking) making intersubjectivity possible. Yet, these formal structures are arrived at *against* the grain of the transcendental ambitions of phenomenology; these structures are reconstructed through empirical analysis and not obtained by forms of transcendental argumentation (on transcendental arguments and their place in phenomenology, see Taylor, 1995, pp. 20–33).

If Garfinkel's ethnomethodology illustrates a usage that takes the phenomenological style of thinking to structure a whole domain of empirical research, another inspirational (rather than saturating) use takes phenomenological insights to re-structure or inform different types, aspects or phases of the research process. A brilliant contemporary example is found in Iddo Tavory's phenomenological problematisations of different qualitative methodologies, ranging from grounded theory to interviews and ethnographies. I will later focus on the other uses of

phenomenology in Tavory's work, namely those oriented towards concept correction within interactionism. For now, I attempt to isolate the role and place of phenomenology in his different methodological writings, and in particular in relation to grounded theory (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, 2022) and interviewing (Tavory, 2020).

Two things must be borne in mind when approaching Tavory's methodological, empirical or more theoretical writings. The first relates to the way phenomenology is employed. To put it bluntly, rather than taken as an insight that structures a whole, the use of phenomenology operates as patchwork destabilising aspects of larger and different wholes. Since the use is oriented to how to conduct different types of qualitative research, this strategy is very fertile in showing what is the use or upshot of a phenomenological sensibility towards interviewing or ethnographies, or what phenomenological leitmotifs can contribute towards an abductive refashioning of grounded theory.

The second is interpretative and relates to the status of phenomenological insights in Tavory's arguments. Phenomenology often remains highly implicit (as in the writings on abductive analysis and grounded theory) or even unmentioned (as in his more recent work on interviewing). Considering the place of phenomenology in these arguments underscores how it works in tandem with other insights in creative ways in relation to the problematics and orientations of specific qualitative techniques or methodologies.

Timmermans and Tavory's proposal of abductive analysis is framed as an innovation in grounded theory rooted in a pragmatist-inspired way of thinking about the relationship between data and theory in qualitative research. Pragmatism and phenomenology cover to a large extent the same grounds. In their different versions, pragmatism and phenomenology share concerns about experience, embodiment, action and reflection. It would be nonetheless mistaken to gloss over the fact that they pull towards different directions. A confrontation of pragmatism and phenomenology is an important philosophical enterprise[3] with crucial purchase for sociology and the philosophy of social sciences (see, for instance, Baert, 2011). But what we find in Timmermans and Tavory's (2012, 2022; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014) work on abductive analysis is a different way to make phenomenology and pragmatism work in synergy with regards to grounded theory as a data-analytical approach that yields theoretical formulations.

Grounded theory problematises the relation between data and theory in qualitative research and informs overall qualitative research design.[4] Timmermans and Tavory (2012) make the case that two crucial problems dogging grounded theory are better resolved if one takes abductive analysis as the overall framework to refashion its procedures, and not only as a complementary phase of a more traditional inductive-oriented procedure. The two interrelated problems at the centre of grounded theory are the theory-laden nature of observation and the problem of generating theories from data via induction. If theories are supposed to emerge from iterative and inductive analysis of data, the collection of the latter is supposed to be theoretically neutral. Yet, neither inductive procedures generate theoretical statements in a strict sense, nor can observations be unsaturated by explicit or implicit, theoretical or non-theoretical ways of seeing. The abductive process, in contrast, presupposes the theory-laden nature of observations in order to achieve the emergent and theory-generative procedures of analysis based on findings that are surprising or unexpected.

The starting point of grounded theory, as presented by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is the disavowal of pre-existing theories and concepts to avoid straightjacketing data, and to build theories and theorems in a bottom-up fashion on the basis of iterative and comparative analyses with inductive inferences at their core. A naïve attempt to bring phenomenology into contact with grounded theory would try to make this postulate of grounded theory work in tandem or

synergy with the phenomenological bracketing and the method of *eidetic* variations. Phenomenology would then operate as a philosophical foundation and justification for the operations of grounded theory that attempt to get rid of our theoretical-cultivated or socially induced ways of seeing and to formulate theory from controlled procedures based on variations and comparisons. In other words, phenomenology could be taken unproblematically as a philosophical foundation of the methodological procedures of grounded theory (see Tarozzi, 2020). But this would be a case of employing phenomenology in an uncritical way to gloss over pressing problems, rather than a productive engagement that would allow grounded theory to confront its deadlocks.

Yet, taking on an abductive framework, Timmermans and Tavory put phenomenological leitmotifs to work in synergy with a pragmatist architecture to produce more fertile and innovative results that bring grounded theory in a whole different direction. Abductive analysis does not start from bracketing off theories or prototheoretical ways of seeing; it presupposes apperception rather than perception. Thus, the emergence of new theoretical constructs depends upon surprising observations that de-stabilise the expectations associated with the researcher's scholarly and social positionality. We hence start off with the idea that research emerges from deep familiarity with a range of theories which allows for surprises, anomalies or unexpected observations to emerge through specific methodological heuristics (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 173, see also 2022: Chapter 3).

The methodological heuristics oriented to produce surprising findings in a methodic and controlled manner is the kernel of Timmermans and Tavory (2022) approach. Precisely at this juncture, phenomenological leitmotifs enter the scene to work in synergy with the larger pragmatist-inspired framework to produce novel ways of construing the relationship between data gathering, primary analysis and theoretical constructs.

Drawing upon the phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion, Timmermans and Tavory (2012, p. 176) build guidelines to revisit observations over time, defamiliarise the known world, and alternate casings. In contrast to pragmatism, phenomenology does not take the laden aspects of perception, and hence expectations, to be the exclusive result of habits and commitments to a community. Crucially, the perceived relevances, aspects or figures emerge out of the dynamics of background and foreground. In other words, the phenomenological idea of the saturation of perception entails that a 'way of seeing' accompanies and configures any observation; moving within a perceptual field can in principle produces shifts in our ways of seeing over time.

To produce surprising observations, the researcher hence has to revisit their observations and produce switches in the ways of seeing the phenomenon by acts of foregrounding and backgrounding aspects of the data through different codings that produce alternative casings (Timmermans & Tavory, 2022: Chapters 4 and 5). This switch in Gestalts that the researcher is commended to perform iteratively is aided by the fact that they have begun with familiarity with a range of theories and ways of seeing that were built into the initial data collection process. These theories and ways of seeing are conducive to alternative casing and redescriptions of our different observations and can then be built into the ways in which data is further collected in a later stage. The act of redescribing (and re-coding) familiar observations in unfamiliar terms (and of moving back and forth between analysis and data gathering) allows the researcher to defamiliarise themselves from their ways of seeing. The phenomenological bracketing, otherwise seen as a cultivated procedure towards the suspension of scholarly induced ways of seeing, is here substituted by methodical analysis oriented to *defamiliarise* explicitly adopted or implicitly developed ways of seeing through minute redescription and revisiting of the familiar in unfamiliar terms. This process of slowing down and revisiting our

observations is conducive to the shedding of our acquired habits of seeing and thinking. In this case, the phenomenology of perception works in synergy with a pragmatist framework to produce 'a sophisticated research design that conceptually links a substantive topic with multiple bodies of theory' in such a way that, built into our research design and the way data is analysed, is 'an opening for the surprises and empirical challenges that stimulate abductive reasoning' (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 182).

I would like to underscore the role of phenomenology in this proposal. Timmermans and Tavory start with a methodological issue dogging grounded theory: the problem of induction. This problem relates to the alleged generative relation between data and theory and the theory-laden nature of observations. Their solution consists of adopting a pragmatist-inspired abductive model as a framework to refashion the premises of grounded theory. According to their framework, we do not need to presuppose the bracketing of preconceptions, but should rather orient our methodological efforts to be productive of surprises from which abductive inferences emerge. Yet, precisely at this juncture, pragmatism remains ambiguous and purports abductive reasoning to be a contingent matter of guessing. How exactly can we generate surprising findings if we start with a deep familiarity with multiple theories? How should we collect and relate our data to these theories in order to generate surprises and produce new theories? Pragmatism provides no guidelines at this juncture, but a phenomenology of perception and ways of seeing proves helpful in providing a solution to achieve more methodical, iterative and controlled procedures that allow for successful defamiliarisation, alternative casings and revisiting of the phenomenon over time.

Tavory has employed implicitly, in other cases, this pattern of usage of phenomenology, whereby the phenomenological style of thinking is used to tackle specific methodological issues and problematics. A particularly interesting case is the design, analysis and interpretation of interviews (Tavory, 2020). He starts with a problem dogging interviewing as a qualitative method: namely, how to analyse data obtained through interviews to draw larger inferences about other contexts. This problem emerges from the discrepancy – largely debated within sociological quarters – between 'talk' (settings) and (situated) 'action'; that is, the fact the researcher faces some aporias in trying to infer how situated action unfolds 'in the wild' from accounts of actors produced in an external and controlled setting.

Tavory provides a typology of interview design and analysis grounded on the desired inferences. I will focus on what he calls open- and refracted-context interviews. Open-context interviews (that he also calls 'ethnographic interviews') are oriented to produce thick descriptions of events as they unfold throughout time. The researcher should gear the interview and data analysis to grasp how the social process unfolds, asking questions of *how, when, who, where*. However, the researcher is not trying to understand motivations, beliefs or meaning-orientation through *why* questions. The more phenomenological aspects of the phenomenon are hence discarded in favor of an attempt to uncover the social process as it occurred or failed to occur (by asking counterfactual *what if* questions), and not as it was experienced or shaped by the actor's beliefs or values. These sorts of questions allow for relatively automatic inferences from the interview setting to a achieve a thick description of situated action and social processes (see also Becker, 1998; Katz, 2001; Spradley, 1979).

In refracted-context interviewing, in contrast, the researcher gears the design, analysis and interpretation of interviews to get at the landscapes of meaning and the promissory structure orienting and configuring what motivates actors and how events are experienced. The inference, however, is not direct. The 'talk' of the interviewers represents 'refracted indications of how our interviewees represent their world in other contexts' (Tavory, 2020, p. 456). In other

words, the researcher cannot infer directly the landscape of meaning from what people say, but can use what they say to reconstruct the 'grammars of representation' or 'narrative structures' ordering experience in accordance to meaning.

Tavory does not mention phenomenology, but it is evident that refracted-context interviews constitute a case (but not the only one) of phenomenological interviewing (for other proposals and defenses of phenomenological interviewing, see Høffding & Martiny, 2016, Høffding et al., 2022, 2023). It constitutes an attempt to gather and interpret interviews with an eye of reconstructing events in relation to their 'adequacy to meaning'; that is, to how social processes are experienced and not only to how they effectively unfold. Furthermore, Tavory draws upon a crucial phenomenology insight to connect both open- and refracted-context interviewing. A crucial phenomenological tenet (found also in Ricoeur and Taylor) remains that the social process is shaped by the actor's narratives or self-interpretations and that these create sequences of interaction which cannot be reduced to causal patterning, precisely because they are oriented by intersubjective normative commitments (or what Tavory calls a 'promissory structure'). Implicit to this theoretical move is the idea that the researcher cannot get at the social process by asking only what people do, but by reconstructing what things mean to them, so that the collective act cannot be reduced to a process ordered by dynamics that are not defined, sustained, and challenged within it (see also Abbott, 2016, pp. 198–232). Had Tavory acknowledged the phenomenological basis for this type of interviews, the paper could have been framed as a typology of ethnographic (open contexts), ethnomethodological (closed contexts), and phenomenological (refracted contexts) interviews, each with design and analytics hinging on particular inferences the researcher wants to draw about the social world. Again, the use of phenomenology is not as a general framework opening a field of empirical study nor a tool to saturate the whole research process, but a source of insights that act in synergy with other approaches in relation to problematics specific to the discipline and its techniques.[5]

I have so far elucidated the different uses of phenomenology for qualitative research design and argued that they can be classed in usages oriented to *saturation* or *inspiration*. Saturating uses occasion for phenomenology to *overtake* the whole process of inquiry in detriment of the specific disciplinary issues. A better use consists of using phenomenological leitmotifs or sensibilities as inspiration to innovate disciplinary specific tools or general methodological orientations. I have argued furthermore that there are at least two types of inspirational uses. On the one hand, phenomenology can be used as an architectural principle that opens a whole new area of empirical research by working through meta-theoretical questions in the discipline. On the other hand, phenomenology can be used *vis-á-vis* particular problematics of specific research tools and techniques. In this case, phenomenology allows us to innovate within established methodological procedures. In both cases, the use of a phenomenological style of thinking spurs innovation within the discipline, starting by reckoning with dilemmas, aporias and problems acknowledged within it.

3 | PHENOMENOLOGY AND INTERDISCIPLINARY CROSS-VALIDATION: BETWEEN OVER-ASSIMILATION AND SPECIFICATION

The second use of phenomenology involves the triangulation of empirical results obtained in different disciplines in the spirit of cross-validation. Phenomenology, in this case, operates as a

communicating vessel amongst different disciplines (psychology, sociology, cultural and gender studies) that produce different insights into, for instance, embodiment or cognition, and its relationship with experience or situated action. The result of cross-validation can go in one of two directions: either it pushes to the specification of the scope and limits of each discipline, or it pulls to disciplinary over-assimilation.

I would like to focus on cognition to elucidate the different ways in which phenomenology can contribute positively and innovatively (or negatively) towards the triangulation of different empirical findings. Since the emergence and consolidation of the field of the cognitive sciences, many social sciences have felt the pressure of its challenges and achievements. Given its longstanding focus on perception, phenomenology in fact has already operated as a communicating vessel within the larger project of the cognitive sciences both before and beyond its encounter in sociological quarters (see Gallagher, 1997, 2001; Gallagher & Varela, 2003; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2020, pp. 145–176). The basic embodied, extended and embedded nature of perception, as described and advanced by different phenomenologists (ranging from Husserl to Samuel Todes via Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Dreyfus), provides the basis for an understanding of cognition as embodied and situated in scaffoldings that direct and contribute to different cognitive processes, such as memory, classification and attention.

Again, this use of phenomenology entails taking it against its own self-imposed limitation to exclude third-person explanations and remain within first-person reconstructive descriptions. In using phenomenology in this way, scholars are in fact espousing a sort of heterophenomenology, albeit not entirely in the manner advanced by Dennett (2003). These sort of third-person accounts grounded on and validated by a credible phenomenology of cognition constitute the kernel of John Levi Martin's (2011, 2019) insistence that field-theoretic explanations remain the best possible way in which sociologists can connect and align their studies of culture with the recent rise of the cognitive sciences. The only caveat, however, is that – for Martin (2011) – this approach entails abandoning the hermeneutics of suspicion (which pits against each other the third- and first-person account) inherent to Bourdieusian field-explanatory accounts. Cleansed of this tendency, it seems as if the sociological study of culture has found a way – *implicitly* through phenomenology – to triangulate its results with the cognitive sciences (see also Lizardo, 2004).

However, this path is not straightforward. Heterophenomenology indeed makes room for third-person explanatory accounts of culture that remain consonant with the phenomenology of cognition. However, it does not prescribe the *explanans* of our accounts, nor does it proscribe combining explanation with interpretation. In principle, then, heterophenomenology allows for a communicating vessel of different disciplines, each with a particular *explanans* combined or not with another non-explanatory (i.e., interpretative or historical) dimension. In this case, the challenge of heterophenomenology is a demand for disciplines towards *specification* of their techniques and objects in the light of a robust and credible phenomenology of cognition. Thus, cross-validation underpinned by phenomenology could give raise to forms of *culturalist* cognitive sociology, in which synergy and innovation can take place via disciplinary specification. However, it can also pull in a different direction, in which the sociological study of culture *over-assimilates* its *explanans* and objects to that of other disciplines, giving rise to a form of cultural *cognitivism*.

This ambivalence is pressing within *cognitive* sociology, and goes back to its two-pronged origins in Zerubavel's (1997) and DiMaggio's (1997) texts. While the former pushes towards a distinctively sociological approach, the latter calls for the strong incorporation of explanatory aspects of psychology into sociological analysis (for a more detailed analysis of this tension

within the field, see Brekhus & Ignatow, 2019; see also Kaidesoja et al., 2022). Recently, scholars taking DiMaggio's route have continued this project of disciplinary integration with the (neuro)cognitive sciences (Cerulo, 2010; Lizardo et al., 2019). The tendency to over-assimilation is clear in the demands to 'embrace a minimalist form of physicalism compatible with naturalism' (Lizardo et al., 2019, p. 19), which effectively culminates in effacing interpretivism in our approaches to culture and espousing an *explanans* blind to legitimate sociological concerns that reduces social space to cognitive scaffoldings (see Cerulo, 2002, 2019), affects to neuronal channels (Abrutyn & Lizardo, 2020), or intersubjectivity to interaction between bodily automatisms and mirror neurons (Lizardo, 2007) and 'entrainment' loops (Summers-Effler et al., 2014). This type of triangulation of disciplines hence results in over-assimilation of sociology to (social) psychology and (neuro)cognitive sciences.

Yet, there is no reason to remain with a cross-validation that leads towards the unification instead of the synergy of disciplinary approaches. Such synergy points towards a more complete picture based on the specification and self-clarification of the limits and scope of each disciplinary approach. My claim is that the sort of over-assimilating triangulation of disciplines through phenomenology relies in fact on a double assimilation. The argumentative line goes more or less as follows. In order to triangulate sociological studies of culture and action with studies in the cognitive sciences, we need a strong foundation in the phenomenology of perception and cognition. The crucial point, however, entails reducing the phenomenology of perception to the mechanics of 'seeing that' (cf. Martin's appeal to cognitive scientist Howard Margolis in 2011, p. 188). But this move relies on an understanding of phenomenology as a precursor of the cognitive sciences. If cognition is reduced to the mechanics of 'seeing that', a reductionist naturalisation of phenomenology ensues, which in turn culminates in the over-assimilation of phenomenology to the cognitive sciences that thus precludes integrative pluralism of disciplines (see also Gallagher, 2018a, 2018b). If we buy into the reduction of cognition to the mechanics of 'seeing that', then the over-assimilation of different disciplinary *explanans* emerges as the result of any form of cross-validation on that basis.

If, in fact, we return to a non-reductionist phenomenology, we discover that perception (and cognition) entangles the mechanics of 'seeing that' with the stylistics of expressive acts (see Kelly, 2004). In other words, phenomenology shows that the phenomenal field is embedded in a larger horizon of meaning, that the experience of 'seeing that' entails that which solicits our attention also calls to be interpreted in a certain way primarily through bodily action; that perception, motility and interpretation are in fact entangled in any genuine act of cognition. In other words, the phenomenology of perception affords for *explanans* focusing on the cognitive scaffoldings of the situation but also for accounts focusing on expressive acts and interpretative frames. Seen in this way, there is no reason to believe that accounts must be strictly explanatory, but rather good reasons to introduce interpretative or participatory methods and specify what is the target of each disciplinary account (a similar phenomenological argument in a different context has been presented in Surak, 2017). For instance, triangulating the results in this direction demands our specifying the limit, scope and contribution of cognitive studies on memory and attention *vis-à-vis* sociological studies of interpretative frames or rituals of forgetting and remembering, and vice versa. Put abstractly, this use of phenomenology to triangulate results does not rely on a commitment to any form of physicalism in the different disciplines, but actually encourages methodological diversity and pluralism rooted in a robust phenomenology of cognition.

In other words, while *cognitivism* reduces the phenomenology of perception to cognitivist theses of embodied, embedded and extended mind, a phenomenologically-minded *culturalism* can exploit the fact that, as Merleau-Ponty (1964, pp. 19, 161, 1978, pp. 54, 67, 2012, pp. 152, 153, 2020, p. 12) made evident, the phenomenon of expression (and its interpretative structure) is constitutive of perception to the point that acts where perception and (bodily) expression intersect (such as painting) constitute the foundation of culture (see Landes, 2013). A problematisation of the phenomenology of perception, hence, opens up the possibility of incorporating disciplinary approaches that go beyond the naturalistic *explanans* and that attend to the interpretative and expressive dimensions that are crucial for perception and cognition. Evidently, my appeal to a phenomenologically-rich account entails also dispelling the quasi-structuralist notion of 'grid of perception' – which impoverishes culturalisms – in favour of a more aesthetic (as well as embodied, extended and embedded) rendering of cognition (for a criticism of culturalism's underlying notion of 'grid of perception', see Martin, 2011). For, it takes seriously that a crucial aspect of embodiment is its expressive motility.

My claim is that the internal tensions that emerge from the encounter of the sociology of culture and cognitive sciences could be seen from a different perspective if we allow phenomenology to be the vessel of communication between them in this more robust way. In entering into triangulation with the cognitive sciences, contemporary cultural sociology has engaged in cross-validating its different empirical results and concepts in the light of phenomenologically-inspired principles of extended, embodied and embedded cognition. This triangulation, as I attempted to show, can lead towards *over-assimilation* or *specification* of the discipline. Those that lead towards over-assimilation assume that sociological theorems or explanatory accounts must be refashioned through the incorporation and adoption of the cognitive sciences in naturalistic directions (Cerulo, 2010; Lizardo et al., 2019; Vaisey, 2009). Sociological studies about groups and classification, ideology, identities, memory and logics of action must be seen as studies of the social scaffoldings and dynamics of cognitive processes such as schematising, mapping, foregrounding and backgrounding, attention, perception, and deliberate and automatic or habitual processing (see also Cerulo, 2002; Strydom, 2007).

In contrast, taking phenomenology as a cross-validating device can also lead towards specification in a way that challenges sociologists to clarify and specify the limits and scope of their accounts, which results in interdisciplinary pluralism. Crucial to these endeavours is the affirmation of the relative autonomy of phenomenology *vis-à-vis* the cognitive sciences and *vis-à-vis* sociological theories of culture and social action. In other words, this usage entails that interdisciplinary dialogue is possible on non-reductionist grounds. This relative autonomy is rooted in a more robust construal of the phenomenology of perception that includes not only its embodied, embedded and extended dimensions, but also its expressive and interpretative ones. Cognitive scientists (such as Gallagher, 2018a, b) have indeed argued that the sort of phenomenology of perception that is in fact useful to enactivism must incorporate the more interpretative, expressive and hermeneutical dimensions that are left behind in reductionist attempts to *naturalise* the phenomenology of perception and to use such phenomenology to advance different studies on cognition. Seen in this way, there is no attempt at full convergence, but mutual enlightenment and proper cross-validation of disciplines to limit scope, organise theorems, specify diverse *explanans* in combination with other methodological strategies within each discipline and carve out new avenues of research whilst recognising the limits and targets of their inquiries (see also Gallagher, 1997).

4 | PHENOMENOLOGY AND THEORY BUILDING: BETWEEN GRAND THEORISING AND MIDDLE-RANGE THEORISATIONS

In sociological theory, phenomenology is closely associated with the works of Alfred Schutz. He employs the phenomenological style of thinking to develop a full-blown sociological theory, which starts off from sociological concerns and reads phenomenology accordingly. In his case, the object and methods of sociology are dissolved into phenomenology, making both look like one and the same enterprise. Similarly, it is not enough to declare phenomenology a 'proto-sociological' endeavour (see Luckmann, 1979). Again, in this case, too many sociological concerns are mapped onto phenomenology. If phenomenology is seen as 'proto-sociological', its applications, sensibilities and *leitmotifs* are seen exclusively from the perspective of a fully accomplished sociological theory. To put it bluntly, phenomenology is seen merely as a proto-science of the lifeworld that must be complemented with other sociological approaches in order to achieve a full-blown theoretical framework to deal with the social construction of reality, social order, action and change (that is, the traditional self-imposed questions of sociological theorists), and not as a productive endeavour that in itself might guide and validate further theorising. I argue that a better use of phenomenology for theory-building consists in taking it away from grand theorising and into the space of middle-range theorisations (albeit in a significantly different way than that intended by Robert K. Merton). In this case, we start from a concrete phenomenon (where an empirical problem or puzzle becomes evident) which we put under phenomenological scrutiny in order to find guidelines and criteria for further developing specific conceptual frameworks. The advantage, in this case, is that phenomenology grounds theoretical frameworks oriented to grasping specific empirical phenomena.

In Schutz's work, the phenomenological style of thinking is meant to provide a key for sociology to successfully address its main theoretical concerns with meaningful social action and the possibility of social order, thus his *phenomenological* sociology. Some have argued that phenomenological sociology in fact solves the perennial problem in sociological theory of integrating social action and structure, but that its concept of meaning should be complemented with Bourdieusian practice theory, pragmatism or neo-structuralism, if it is to account for the fact that motivational structures and cultural schemas are not always transparent for actors themselves (see Heiskala, 2011). We might riposte that these combinations could betray phenomenological tenets (especially, the turn to neo-structuralism), or indeed that the opacity of the meaning of social action, with respect to the actors themselves, could be accounted for if we follow the phenomenological movement down certain hermeneutical paths. Be that as it may, what is crucial is that phenomenology is reduced to sociological problematics. The systematic description and analysis of the invariant and fundamental structures of lived experience (temporality, spatiality, habituality, embodiment and intersubjectivity) and the analysis of the social construction of meaning and the dynamics of social action are one and the same endeavour (see Schutz & Luckman, 1974). The 'social' (*qua* object of sociology) hence coincides with the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*), and sociology turns phenomenological (in methodological and theoretical levels) all the way down, and subsumes all phenomenology within this endeavour.

This argumentative line comes into purview in Schutz's reading of Husserl largely from the vantage point of the accomplishment of Weber's programme of a *Verstehende Soziologie*. Schutz starts with the issues and concerns of such a theoretical agenda and reads phenomenology accordingly. The Husserlian notion of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) is turned into the main sociological category for the study of the intersubjective meanings orienting action, and phenomenological procedures are taken as the foundation of sociological research. Schutz

effectively wants sociology to take on a wholly phenomenological outlook to describe and interpret the different structures of the social world in terms of relevance, stock of knowledge, motivation, typification, et cetera (see Belvedere, 2022 for an updated introduction to phenomenological sociology).

It is not difficult to notice that such an approach is conducive to an overtaking of sociology by phenomenology, where we are commended to accept that the sociological interests in social structures and social action are exhausted through phenomenological studies. Other sociological concerns, such as that of the aggregate effects or unintended consequences of action, in fact prove more complex to cash out in phenomenological terms and take us towards structural modes of analysis. A solution that does not fully problematise the role given to phenomenology in sociological theorising consists in arguing that the notion of the lifeworld remains 'proto-sociological' (see Eberle, 2012b; see also Psathas, 2012; Gros, 2021). This is the argument found in Luckmann (1979), which leads him to draw fundamental lessons from phenomenology but contrasts these lessons with sociological theories with more macro and structural orientations. Luckmann recognises a gap between the phenomenological style of thinking and a sociological analysis, but still insists on reading the former exclusively in terms of its contributions to the latter *tout court*, in relation to its abstract object (i.e., 'the social') instead of a concrete phenomenon.

Luckmann's project of complementing phenomenology with sociological theorems and structural analytics results in his and Berger's highly influential framework to study the social construction of reality *qua* abstract object of sociology (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The argument consists in showing that social analysis involves not only the reconstruction of cultural maps and stocks of knowledge, but also the analysis of power relations that could have crucial effects in the way in which knowledge and meaning is constructed (see also Reay, 2010). What is suggested here is that the place of the phenomenological style of thinking is alongside that of full-blown sociological theories, interested in the foundational (and now old-fashioned) concerns of the discipline with action and structure, stability and change, power and order and the social construction of reality. A similar use of the phenomenological style of thinking informs Habermas' foundational system/lifeworld distinction. For him, phenomenology brings to sociology (and more, specifically, critical theory) a crucial dimension that perhaps could not be found within the discipline (or tradition for that sake) but that remains insufficient for a complete critical social analysis. The 'social', in this case, cannot be captured merely by the lifeworld and phenomenology, but rather encompasses systemic dimensions which require an explanatory, third-person account of the more structural dimensions of social life. However, phenomenology remains employed in relation to sociology's abstract object (i.e., 'the social') and critical theory's programme instead of being directed at a concrete phenomenon.

Although these approaches set some limits to the scope of phenomenology for sociological theory-building, they agree in conceptualising phenomenological leitmotifs and sensibilities from the vantage point of sociological grand theorising. Less obvious perhaps, there is also an overtaking dynamic at stake where phenomenological insights and leitmotifs risk being overtaken by sociological concerns. This use too maps many sociological questions (action, order, structure, social differentiation, modernity, rationality, etc.) onto phenomenology. While it might seem that these usages give more autonomy to both sociology and phenomenology, my claim is that the gap must be widened by considering that the phenomenological style of thinking is most effective for middle-range theorisations instead of sociological grand theorising. Put differently, the phenomenological style of thinking is more productive when employed to develop middle-range theories of specific social dynamics, practices, dimensions, than when

employed to develop totalising theories of society, when it is directed at concrete social phenomenon and not at 'the social' as an abstract object.

The use of the phenomenological style of thinking for middle-range theorising has two central tenets. First, it does not aim to inform or ground, partially or in its entirety, a totalising and systematic theoretical framework capable of encompassing or solving the major dilemmas and concerns of sociological theories related to action, order, power, meaning, functional differentiation, social change, etc. Instead, phenomenology validates and provides grounds and guidelines to develop theories relevant to grasping the crucial dimensions of a specific social phenomenon. These middle-range theories can touch upon general aspects, dimensions or dynamics of the social world but do not aim at fully encompassing it theoretically. Their object is not 'the social' – however this is seen – but specific social phenomena. In other words, these middle-range theories can enter in dialogue with, and effectively contribute to, more full-blown theories of society and issues pertaining to grand theorisation, but the overarching target of the phenomenological style of thinking is a specific phenomenon.

Second, this use does not take phenomenology to conceptually exhaust the domains it targets. Instead, phenomenological descriptions point us to dimensions, themes and dynamics crucial for grasping a puzzling or problematic aspect of a phenomenon. In signposting these dimensions and their dynamics, phenomenology fixes some metatheoretical precepts for further theorising. Further theorising returns to the phenomenological description to validate its concepts. Phenomenology, in this sense, remains the indispensable presupposition from which middle-range theory-building emerges and to which it returns for validation of its concepts. In this sense, the middle-range use takes phenomenology to constructively and metatheoretically direct theory-formation.

A classic and exemplary use of phenomenology for middle-range theory-building is found in the works of Paul Ricoeur. In his early work, Ricoeur starts with the description of the experiential dimensions of the process of will-formation, which provides the basis for his theory of narrative identity and human action. The phenomenological description of the relational dynamics of voluntary and involuntary aspects of the will directs the inquiry to those structures of human action that incorporate acts of interpretation, narration, and symbolisation – and herein phenomenology finds its limits but provides fundamental guidelines (Ricoeur, 1965, 1967). These elements (uncovered in the opaque way in which the involuntariness of one's character, and inner and historical life, is experienced) are not entirely given or cashed out in phenomenological descriptions, yet they are encountered through them (Ricoeur, 1966).

In short, the phenomenological inquiry into the will unveils that human action is interpreted and narrated from within. These self-interpreting and narrative structures go beyond the experience of deciding, choosing or setting in motion a project. Thus, the turn to hermeneutics and semiotics (Ricoeur, 1990) to furnish a theory of symbols and interpretation that provides the basis for a theory of narrative identity rooted in and validated by a prior phenomenological inquiry into will-formation (Ricoeur, 1973, 1986, 1995) and temporality (Ricoeur, 1984: Chapter 3). Crucially, phenomenology is not subordinated to questions of human agency, but human agency is neither thought of as encapsulated fully by phenomenology. Still, phenomenology is allowed to yield results that point beyond its limits towards further theorisations that remain consonant but irreducible to phenomenological descriptions. The pattern of usage to which I want to call attention is that, in opposition to usages oriented to grand theorising, phenomenology starts – in this case –with a phenomenon (will-formation) and not with a set of disciplinary concerns that are dissolved or mapped into phenomenology.

A contemporary approach pointing in the same direction can be found in Hans Joas' (2021) sociology of the sacred and sacralisations. His sociological account begins from a phenomenology of religious experiences. Joas takes the pragmatist cue of William James and Josiah Royce for his reconstructive description of the structures and dynamics of religious experiences. Not only the experience of transcendence, illumination, self-surrender, conversion, and being seized by something larger radiating authority out of the quotidian, but symbolisation and the articulation of insights are also at stake in religious experiences. The sacred not only imposes itself onto us but also calls for articulation and modulation. The way in which the sacred is experienced – its experiential form – depends on this process of articulation and symbolisation. This articulatory-symbolic dimension configures the variety of processes of sacralisation (Joas, 2021, pp. 31–57). Hence, a theory of religious experience must be tied to a theory of articulation, which must also account for the different symbolic forms in which sacred-like beliefs are shaped. Joas' conclusion from phenomenology is that to understand the variety of experiences of sacralisation and symbolic forms of the sacred, it is crucial to seriously engage with the processes by which the sacred is felt, articulated and known.

This phenomenological description of religious experiences paves the way for a complex theory of articulation, integrated into a theory of cognition, which in turn posits the possibility of the sacralisation of different value spheres. Integrating semiotics into theories of cognition, this theory of symbolic forms, which emphasises the role of signs in different thinking processes and the constitution of selfhood and communities, provides the basis to conceptualise various forms of sacralisation and sacredness, ranging from more totemic to reflexive sacredness (cf. Joas, 2021, pp. 66–72, 154–194). This phenomenologically guided middle-range theory-building allows Joas to engage in many sociological debates, ranging from the notion of disenchantment and the role of rituals in sociality to the different forms of accounting for ideal-formation. Yet, there is no attempt to provide any full-blown theory of society nor to solve problems associated with grand theorising.

Hartmut Rosa's (2019) *Resonance: A Sociology of World-Relations* constitutes another case of middle-range usage of phenomenology for theory-building. In my interpretation, Rosa's (2013) full-blown theory of society is his *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*. There, he engages with traditional questions about systemic dynamics and social action within social forms which maintain their order through speeding up. In some instances, Rosa appeals to a phenomenology of time or time pressure to illustrate the dispositional squeeze occasioned by acceleration. But soon it becomes clear that his theory of acceleration, and specifically the central notion of dynamic stabilisation, remains a macro-structural account of the advent and nature of modernity which employs phenomenology only for didactic purposes (see, particularly, the very concise account and the tension between micro and macro levels in Rosa, 2016).

Rosa's theory of resonance is, on the other hand, a phenomenologically-grounded middle-range theory that attempts to analytically and evaluatively capture different ways of relating to the world. In principle, the theory of resonance does not have to be connected to his theory of social acceleration, but can be used to analyse the social dynamics across cultures and practices configuring different forms of life and their respective world-relations. *Resonance* (Rosa, 2019), in fact, starts with a phenomenology of world-relations. The starting point is not only the notion of situated and engaged agency, but rather what is it like to experience the feeling that one is engaged with the world in a situated manner.

On the one hand, phenomenological descriptions make evident a call-response structure in our situated relationship to the world; that is, that any engaged experiencing of the world

entails an act of appropriation entangled to a state of responsivity. On the other hand, phenomenology uncovers that this call-response structure takes place across different axes (intersubjective, transcendent, or self-actualising). From these basic phenomenological descriptions, the sociology of world-relations starts with the fact that the call-response structure has different phenomenological forms and variations, which analytically can be reduced to resonance and alienation along different experiential axes – that is, to relations in which we are in tune with an axis of world, where the world responds to us and we respond to the world, and others in which nothing talks back to us, we are closed off to the world and it or its demands are mute to us. This phenomenological argument provides the foundation to build partial theories of family, friendship, politics, work, education, consumption, sports, religion, art, etc., *qua* ways of relating to the world that could take many forms in different socio-cultural forms of life.

Rosa's theory of resonance has a twofold development. On the one hand, it encourages a study of the socio-historical variability of world-relations. The *empirics* of this line of inquiry are opened through phenomenological arguments, but there is no restriction as to the plurality of methodologies to study world-relations. On the other, it provides the *normative* foundations to criticise specific social arrangements, dynamics or forms of life. Only in tandem with the theory of resonance does the theory of social acceleration acquire a distinctive normative orientation. The middle-range usage of phenomenology for theory building in this case shows that it yields not only new empirics and concepts. More crucially, phenomenology can also provide normative foundations to develop a *critical* theory of society (see also Gros, 2019).

There are many other illustrations of this use of phenomenology for middle-range theorising, which in fact have repercussions for or engage, albeit not directly, concerns more commonly associated with full-blown social and sociological theories. For instance, Jack Katz's (1990) focus on how offenders experience crime allows him to build very persuasive middle-range theories of criminal projects based on different emotional states associated with moral attractions; this approach ultimately offers a counterpoint to rational choice theory by showing that criminal motivation and decision-making cannot be accounted by the weighing of cost and benefits, but must encompass the sensual and moral allure and seduction of crime within specific environments and socially conditioned lifestyles. The key point, as I noted above, is that this usage starts from a phenomenon, and not from disciplinary concerns, questions or problematics or with 'the social' as the object of phenomenological argumentation. When we start with the latter, too often we either dissolve or map too many concerns peculiar to sociology into phenomenology. Rather, by starting with an empirical problem or puzzle, phenomenology can elucidate some of its constituents in order to ground and direct further middle-range theorising. My use of Merton's notion of 'middle-range theories' is purely casuistic. By no means, I advocate for a use of phenomenology oriented to generate hypotheses, nor that the validity of the emerging partial theories rests upon its explanatory capacities and that these apply only to a limited conceptual range. I use the notion of 'middle range' only to stress the initial divorce from 'grand theory' and that it kicks off from a phenomenological elucidation of an empirical problem pertaining to some clearly defined phenomenon. The results of this phenomenological mode of theorising are diverse and may engage empirical, conceptual, theoretical and normative issues in the discipline. In some way, I have preferred the notion of 'middle range' over 'empirically anchored (or focused)' theorising to avoid confusions with the idea of grounded theory. The type of theorising I am annotating does not start with data or even a case, but with an empirical problem that is phenomenologically elucidated.

5 | PHENOMENOLOGY AND CONCEPT CORRECTION: BETWEEN UNDERDETERMINATION AND RECONFIGURATION

The last use in my typology consists in retrieving or returning to lived experience to correct a conceptual framework. In this case, the pattern of usage starts off not from specific phenomena but from concerns, problems or aporias of a specific theoretical programme. The phenomenological style of thinking is employed to discover or make evident that the theoretical framework and its models are insensitive, blind or distort a crucial dimension of the phenomenon they purportedly grasp. It is not so much that phenomenology is used for grand theorising, but it is employed to show how specific theories or concepts miss crucial aspects of its objects. However, there are at least two patterns of usage. Either phenomenology is cut short and is employed only to signal to the weaknesses of a theoretical framework, or it is given a crucial role in reconfiguring it.

In sociological theory, the most well-known example of an attempt at phenomenological concept correction is Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice. Bourdieu starts his criticism of objectivism by appealing to the lived experience of practical undertakings. In taking practice as an object of observation and analysis, any sort of objectivism (in his case, structuralism) inflicts on practical activity a fundamental alteration. Phenomenology challenges objectivism's tendency to commit the 'scholastic fallacy' that conflates the model of reality with the reality of the model by attributing to practice a set of dispositions or principles that pertain to the theoretical attitude towards the world (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 1–71, 1990a, pp. 30–41, 1990b, 1977, pp. 1–71). More specifically, Bourdieu argues that objectivist theoretical models render reversible what is experienced as irreversible, and hence miss from their purview the temporality and rhythm inherent to practical undertakings.

Yet, Bourdieu cuts phenomenology short at this juncture, and the potential of phenomenology is accordingly truncated. Instead of letting phenomenology inform the concept correction, his aim is to treat the return to lived experience as a phase of analysis that must be integrated in a second phase, which consists of a return to an objectivism that integrates the subjective moment. A phenomenological detour is taken to see what is wrong with the model, but the correction is not guided by phenomenological precepts. In other words, Bourdieu's theory is not *phenomenological*; it appeals to lived experience to detect mistakes, but the concept correction remains consonant with the original, more objectivist, framework (Bourdieu, 2002). Put differently, phenomenological notions are forced into a larger framework at odds with some of phenomenology's principles and that perform a reduction of its insights (for a similar criticism, see Throop & Murphy, 2002).

This is the signature move of Bourdieu's appeal to the phenomenon of gift exchanges. He argues that the Lévi-Straussian structuralist approach loses sight of the fact that the practice of gift-giving involves an irreversible sequence of actions that, conceptualised in terms of rules of cycles of exchange, are rendered reversible (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 4, 5; see also Silber, 2009). Yet, this detour to lived experience is not a return to phenomenological sensibilities, neither does it allow phenomenological leitmotifs to correct the theoretical framework. Rather, the lived aspects of gift-giving are taken to co-exist with the objectivist model. In the world of practice, both truths co-exist, and this 'double truth' is taken to unveil a fundamental mechanism of the social world – the logic that pertains to all practices. The gift is supposed to show paradigmatically that participation in *any* practice presupposes objective dynamics at play which are not recognised as such by the participant and which only an observer can reconstruct. This 'double truth' of the social world is at the basis of Bourdieu's theory of practice, according to which the dynamics

and logic governing a practice are non-accessible to participants and answer in the last instance to a mode of symbolic domination that requires us to break with common sense in order to account for it (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 5–9, 171; see also Bourdieu, 1990a, pp. 59–76, 98–111).

Bourdieu's use of phenomenology for concept correction does not pave the way for a phenomenologically grounded or guided sociological theory. The theory of the habitus incorporates, in fact, phenomenological notions of the embodied nature of schemes of perception and action, as well as Husserlian notions of protention and retention. But Bourdieu ties these notions into a larger framework of fields, unintended strategies, symbolic power, misrecognition, and economies of practices in a way that risks dissolving phenomenological. Thus, his approach remains a relational (or genetic) *structuralism*. In this sense, phenomenological lessons remain underdetermined. In this context, it is irrelevant whether Bourdieu misappropriated Husserl (Atkinson, 2018; Myles, 2004). Any phenomenological addition or transformation to Bourdieu's theory (Atkinson, 2010, 2020; Crossley, 2001) needs first to address the subservient role of phenomenology in his theoretical edifice; that is, it needs to grapple with the fact that any phenomenological insight is dissolved into his notions of fields, symbolic power and capitals (see also Frère, 2011). The only way to maintain Bourdieu's theory consonant with a qualified phenomenology would be to dispel any notion of the 'double truth' (and consequently any strong notion of doxa or *illusio*), which would transform the field-theoretical vocabulary to an explanatory account of embedded and embodied cognition. But this move is both phenomenologically weak and deprives Bourdieu of some of his most notable accomplishments, such as his class analysis and the critical-revelatory nature of his accounts.[6]

It is possible, however, to find another use of phenomenology for concept correction that allows the phenomenological style of thinking to orient further reconfiguration. As in the previous case, the usage starts with some aporia or limitation in an existing theoretical framework which phenomenology helps to detect, articulate and make evident. However, the goal of concept correction is not to resolve such aporias or overcome limitations at a high theoretical level (as in Bourdieu's case, where the target is to reconcile objectivism and subjectivism in an abstract level). Instead, phenomenology is allowed to guide concept correction to arrive at an unfamiliar way of seeing familiar problems or objects, which calls for further empirical investigation or theoretical analysis. In other words, the phenomenologically guided conceptual reconfiguration does not result in a conceptual framework, whose superiority relies on having overcome all previous aporias at an abstract level, but in one whose superiority relies on the fact that it facilitates the seeing of – even to some degree provisionally – both more and new objects and problems.

A particularly productive case of phenomenologically guided concept correction can be found in the works of Iddo Tavory (2016, 2018). He points out that one crucial limitation of interactionism is its highly contested and criticised situationism. Interactionism has gained much traction and opened a whole field of studies by restricting itself to 'the situation' – in its present-progressive tense – as the locus of the interaction. Tavory (2018) argues that this conundrum could be solved if we take a closer look at the aspects of the situation that temporally overflow it, that is, to the many ways in which the past survives in the present and bleeds into the future at the experiential level.[7] Tavory argues against falling back into habit-based explanations stressing the dispositional structures that actors supposedly carry within them (in the form of internalised schemas) (see Lizardo, 2021). The temporal structures of a situation as experienced encompass not only such retentions and protentions (that result from the structuring power of dispositions), but also imagined *trajectories* taking place within *temporal landscapes*. In this sense, Tavory's argument in fact constitutes an iteration of one valued

by hermeneutical phenomenologists, according to whom the concept of a horizon is essential to the concept of a situation (Gadamer, 2004, p. 301; Ricoeur, 1991, p. 73).

These temporalities are not simply structurally entangled in every situation but effectively resolved and co-ordinated throughout and across situations. In every situation, social actors are called to maintain the rhythm of social life through interactions. This reconfiguration forces us to look and think of different phenomena *intersituationally* and to make evident the different aspects of future-coordination at play in interaction (see also Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013 for a more detailed exposition of a theory of future-coordination). This conceptual reconfiguration has been productive, for example, for opening a new way to think about the rhythm and constitution of national experiences (Surak, 2017) and the social construction of climate change as an event with multiple levels of future-coordination (Tavory & Wagner-Pacifici, 2022).

Yet, this conceptual correction brought as well about new way of thinking about old problems. Tavory (2016, pp. 6–13, 151-1) has raised interesting challenges as to what is entailed in thinking of identity in such *intersituational* terms. What comes into purview is that the intersituational orientation bypasses positing either an overly static 'core' to identity (be it in the form of an essence or an internalised habitus) that plays out in every action or an overly dynamic presentist idea of situational identification. Identification instead consists of a process of *summoning*, whereby we are called within interactions to attune ourselves with the moral and temporal demands of social life. To answer to a summoning through interaction is more than simply attuning oneself with the rhythm of the situation: it entails acquiring commitments that define what kind of person one wishes to be. Thinking intersituationally allows us to bypass some problems in dispositional and situational approaches to identity and identification, and brings about a plethora of new considerations. Firstly, it allows us to avoid any strong notion of socialisation *qua* internalisation. There is no reason to believe that something gets under the skin of the actors, but only that they are constantly called to be oriented in the world in patterned ways. This approach, in turn, opens a new way of thinking of socialisation as habitualisation, as the study of the experiential trajectories marking the acquisition of the skills and embodied postures needed to be open in order to engage and become oriented by the world in a specific way (see Tavory & Winchester, 2012).

Secondly, it allows to bypass some of the more traditional dead ends if we remain captive in the dispositional or situational approaches to identity and identification. Seen intersituationally, both the questions as to the automaticity or reflexivity of action as well as the question of multiple selves emerging from multiple situations become largely obsolete. It is one and the same person acting in and across different situations, and to do so they must reply to different acts of summoning in ways that are legible and make sense both to them and others throughout time. Only in sustaining and modulating a set of commitments, an actor recognises themselves and is recognised by others as one and the same person. Concomitantly, the actor is capable of modulating, contesting and challenging the response to the summoning in a way that makes sense to them: the call-response structure of experience implies that, strictly speaking, there is nothing like an automatic reply, but effort and reflexivity are always at stake – in different degrees – at every moment an actor has to read and interpret the situation and its demands according to their past and future trajectory. Before moving on, I want to stress the extent to which Tavory's intersituational approach to identification resembles a phenomenological theory of the self (for an interesting phenomenological concept correction of the pragmatist notion of self, see Zahavi and Zelinsky, 2023). Unsurprisingly, his treatment of emotions, moral orientation and selfhood resembles Charles Taylor's theory of the self (which is built upon a phenomenology of moral experiences). Like Tavory (2011), Taylor (1989: Chapter 1 and 2) defines

intersubjectivity as the locus whereby actors define what sort of person they are and, in turn, what sort of person of they are relies on their moral orientation, which ultimately ties in with emotional reactions as directing the agent to evaluative aspects of a situation that call for articulations throughout time. In fact, Tavory (2011, p. 289 fn. 13) announces that his theory of moral action should be complemented with a theory of 'moral topographies', which incidentally is the title of one of Taylor's (1988) lesser known but richer articles. This paper makes evident that Taylorian notions of moral sources, frameworks, strong evaluations, articulations and self-interpretations in fact are part of a basic notion of the self as the constant actualisation of the capacity to engage and become oriented in a world ridden with contradictory and multiple claims laid upon us, with obstacles and dilemmas that demand effort and reflexivity (but not necessarily of the kind that relies on disengagement or detachment) (for a larger exposition of my take on Taylor's theory of the self where I connect it rather idiosyncratically with some themes in Max Weber, see Raza, 2023).

There are other examples of a similar phenomenologically guided concept correction. A particularly interesting approach characterises the so-called critical phenomenologies. Fanon (2008), in a chapter entitled 'The Lived Experience of the Black Man', turns to the lived experience of racism, which provides the foundations and validation for theoretical reflections concerning institutionalised racist othering, structures of colonialism and selfhood. The phenomenological structures of the experience of racism unveil that the phenomenological notion of body schema fails to recognise that intersubjective misrecognition effectively disrupts the allegedly improvisational, transparent nature of embodied agency. An essential fact of the experience of racism consists in being accompanied by constant negative attention to oneself in the way one carries on with everyday bodily movements (Fanon, 2008, p. 90; for a phenomenology of feminine existence and inhibited intentionalities and queer orientations, see Young, 1980; Ahmed, 2006, respectively). Fanon's earlier insights have been employed to undertake more detailed phenomenological studies of the corporeal and habitualised intersubjective dynamics that 'confiscate' racialised bodies in racially saturated forms of spatiality. To be captive in a social space entails not only the doubling of awareness over oneself and one's movements, but also the distortion of one's intentions and meaning occasioned by the corporeal dynamics that inscribe in social spaces a dense semiotics which relies on and reproduces larger systemic and historical dynamics of oppression (Yancy, 2008). In this sense, phenomenology offers an alternative to thinking about racism as socially constructed discourses or as a matter of cognitively false beliefs, which occlude that racism in fact reproduces itself in corporeal habits and is inscribed in the dense semiotics of social space. Even if actors do not hold racist beliefs or discourses, racism (or colonialism) endures in the way we inhabit social space. This points to a phenomenologically guided concept correction that allows us to think of categories such as whiteness and racism as systematic power relations and not in terms of beliefs attributable to people or discourses without hold in experience and reality. These phenomenological conceptual developments allow us not only to think of racism differently at the empirical level. Crucially, they allow us to think about racism differently at a political and normative level by showing how agents can be held responsible for perpetuating it even if it occurs at a systematic level expressed in habitualised gestures and perceptions and it is not a matter of explicitly held beliefs (Ngo, 2016; see also Al-Saji, 2010).

My argument in this section is that concept correction employing phenomenology is most productive when the phenomenological style of thinking is not cut short at making evident a limitation or inattentiveness of a theoretical framework, but when it is given a crucial role in the process of conceptual reconfiguration.[8] Allowing phenomenology to guide concept correction

leads towards an enlarged theoretical framework that has acquired new objects and themes, as well as new ways of thinking empirically and even normatively about their subject matters.

6 | SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

My typology of uses of phenomenology can be summarised as follows (see Table 1). Firstly, I argue that the phenomenological style of thinking can be employed in four areas: design of qualitative research, interdisciplinary cross-validation, theory building and concept correction. I have detected and reconstructed two patterns of usage in each category and provided ample illustration of each usage across traditions and places (Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the United States). My intention has been to showcase how phenomenology could and should be used to advance empirical or theoretical knowledge in sociology. Accordingly, I found patterns of usage lacking in each category. In general, these unproductive patterns display the tendency for phenomenology to overtake sociology or sociology to overtake phenomenology.

I have argued that employing the phenomenological style of thinking in order to *saturate* qualitative research design proves inattentive to specific methodological problems of the discipline. Also, the actual role or expected achievements of phenomenology in this role are unclear. The more productive use starts precisely with specific theoretical and methodological issues of the discipline and employs the phenomenological style of thinking to find a way out of these specific problems. In these cases, phenomenology is capable of either opening a whole field of empirical observation or clarifying questions of research design, or data collection and analysis regarding particular methodologies such as interviews, ethnographies or grounded theory.

The phenomenological style of thinking can also be employed to cross-validate empirical results from different disciplines. Taking the example of sociological studies of culture *vis-à-vis* the cognitive sciences, I argued that phenomenology is best employed when it starts with the phenomenon *as it is given*, and not *as it is construed by one of disciplines*. The tendency I have detected is that the over-assimilation of the *explanans* of sociology to that of the cognitive sciences (so that sociological studies of culture and action resemble explanatory accounts of embodied, embedded or extended cognition) relies in fact in a previous, implicit, assimilation of the phenomenology of cognition to the model of the cognitive sciences. A better use starts from the phenomenon as described by phenomenology itself. Perception (and, consequently, cognition) is seen in an expansive way that allows for multiple accounts to coexist. Instead of veering towards the over-assimilation of disciplines, this type of cross-validation forces different discipline to specify their scope and limitations *vis-à-vis* each other. The insights of the (neuro-) cognitive sciences and social psychology could then be integrated into sociological studies of culture and action without demanding that the latter take on explanatory forms or models of the former.

TABLE 1 Typology of uses of phenomenology.

	Productive	**Unproductive**
Qualitative Research	Inspiration	Saturation
Interdisciplinary Cross-Validation	Specification	Over-Assimilation
Theory Building	Middle-Range Theorisations	Grand Theorising
Concept Correction	Reconfiguration	Underdetermination

I have detected two distinct patterns of the use of phenomenology for theory building. In one case, the argumentation starts with the disciplinary concerns, problems or dilemmas of the discipline and aims at a grand theory in which these are overcome or resolved. The phenomenological style of thinking is used here to contribute to resolve or exhaust partially or totally the disciplinary concerns or problems. The problem here is that phenomenology is overtaken by sociology (or vice versa). I propose that a better use of phenomenology consists in starting with a particular phenomenon and aiming at a middle-range theory. Phenomenology, in this case, is taken outside self-contained sociological discussions and effectively enables new ways of seeing and posing empirical and normative questions. As I showed, this restriction to concrete phenomena does not entail that phenomenologically grounded and valid middle-range theorisations are precluded from contributing to questions typically pertaining to grand theorising. I have, in fact, shown that the potential of phenomenologically valid theorisations to contribute at conceptual and normative questions typically associated with grand theorising relies on their middle-range nature. The main target are not the issues of grand theorisation, but a specific middle-range theorisation.

Finally, the last usage I have explored is phenomenological thinking oriented to concept correction. Here again, there are two patterns of usage that share a starting point. Given that the aim is to correct a conceptual framework, we start with the limitations, blind spots, dilemmas or aporias inherent to a theory. In one case, phenomenology is employed merely to make evident or clarify the problems with the existing framework. The concept correction does not need to be guided or validated by phenomenology and – as I have shown – in fact it can be geared towards dissolving the phenomenological insights into an allegedly larger framework that incorporates its argument in a form that betrays phenomenological principles. The resulting framework is hence phenomenologically underdetermined and the potential of phenomenology was truncated in an attempt to bring about an all-encompassing framework, where all problems, aporias or limitations are supposed to be solved at an abstract level. In its most productive uses for concept correction, the phenomenological style of thinking is employed also for conceptual reconfiguration. In this case, there is no attempt at solving once and for all every dilemma or limitation. Rather, phenomenology is allowed to guide the conceptual reconfiguration only because it promises to ground and offer a shift in our theoretical ways of seeing that can bring about unfamiliar objects of analysis or novel ways of addressing old questions.

Overall, behind my defence and criticisms of different usages of phenomenology is a basic plea: sociology cannot remain the same after encountering the phenomenological style of thinking, but it must remain itself by distinguishing questions in and of sociology from the scope of phenomenological insights. Behind this plea stands a pragmatist-hermeneutic way of understanding and practising the intersection between styles of thought. The encounter between two styles of thinking (in this case, sociology and phenomenology) is the most productive when there is an openness to alterity conducive to self-clarification and self-transformation. This encounter cannot be held in abstract. Rather, as I attempted to show, most commonly it happens in regards to pragmatic subject matters (that is, with regards to some *usage*).

In keeping the right distance and openness, phenomenology cannot take over disciplinary concerns and expertise. I have argued that overtaking not only results in the impoverishing of the discipline, but effectively constitutes phenomenological argumentation which is often poor in relation to its own standards. It results in cases where it is unclear what phenomenology is supposed to achieve or cases where phenomenology is over-assimilated and dissolved into a disciplinary concern or grand theoretical questions alien to its practice. Instead, I have argued for more local and specific uses of phenomenology that start with specific theoretical and

methodological problems or concrete phenomena and that employ the phenomenological style of thinking to achieve new ways of seeing old problems as well as different and partial forms of disciplinary self-clarification.

An evident drawback of the systematisation I have undertaken is the great overlap of schools of thought, themes, and areas of inquiry. In fact, one could trace back the relations of influence and the dialogues opened by different phenomenologists with an eye to systematising the development of their conversation with other schools of thought within different disciplines (such as pragmatism and practice theory within sociology). Similarly, phenomenological leitmotifs (such as perception, cognition, embodiment, intersubjectivity and temporality) are areas of inquiry across different disciplines. A systematisation of phenomenology according to areas of inquiry or dialogical partners would have perhaps avoided what could be considered as unnecessary overlap.

However, both approaches would miss the question as to what and how phenomenology is contributing to specific disciplinary inquiries. These approaches may present a neater overview of the relations between phenomenology and pragmatism, practice theory, or ethnomethodology, or an overview of phenomenological leitmotifs or arguments in sociology; however, such systematisations would risk being no more than an exegetical review. In contrast, the systematisation according to use yields not so much a critical historical review of the encounters of phenomenology with other currents of thought or an overview of the different subject matters to which phenomenology has contributed, but a typology which can foster more reflexive and precise usages of the phenomenological style of thinking in social-scientific research. The main point of this paper is not to provide a critical review of the uses of phenomenology in the discipline; rather, it has been to provide an analytic way of thinking about how phenomenology can and should be used in different instances. I have provided ample illustrations as inclusive as possible to showcase the richness of phenomenology to those more sceptical of its potential, but I am well aware that there are further examples beyond those I have utilised. I believe, however, that most of these examples fall into one of the categories I have delineated. Overall, I believe that the typology I have delineated has applications beyond phenomenology and sociology and can easily be employed to think about the uses of other more philosophical approaches in social-scientific research, such as hermeneutics, pragmatism or ordinary language philosophy in sociology, or about phenomenology in anthropology, cultural studies, history or geography.

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ENDNOTES

[1] This is the case once phenomenology is divorced from Husserl's transcendental project. For Husserl, the so-called *reduction* and *epoché* were supposed to follow the phenomenological bracketing in order to bring back phenomena to their constitution in transcendental subjectivity. The phenomenological *method*, as

Husserl presented it, was however a procedure to answer philosophical questions. Seen as a *style* of thinking, phenomenology is divorced from the Husserlian philosophical project and its sensibilities and leitmotivs can be seen as contributing to multiple and different endeavours.

[2] My conceptualisation of phenomenology as a *style* of thinking constituted by a *sensibility* and *leitmotifs* is intended as a contrast with conceptualizations of phenomenology as an *approach* constituted by a *method* and *concepts* (see Gallagher, 2012). In general, I agree with Zahavi's (2020) point that phenomenology should not be seen as a rigorous method or procedure, but as an open-minded attitude and set of concepts that could be used in conjunction with other methods or within other disciplines. I differ from Zahavi inasmuch as I am not so interested in seeing how phenomenological concepts (such as embodiment or intersubjectivity) have informed or been developed within different disciplines, but in how a *style* of thinking can be used to conduct specific tasks, such as designing qualitative research, triangulating results from different disciplines, building theoretical frameworks or correcting concepts. Undoubtedly, notions of embodiment (and the like) or contextual orientations and appeals to lived experience will be present, but not so much as an attitude and concepts, but as *sensibilities* and *leitmotivs*.

[3] For instance, both Heidegger – most famously in the analysis of *unready-to-handness* – and Dewey – in his analysis of problematic situations – give a central place to practical breakdowns, but from very different points of view. While the former attempts to make evident the phenomenon of *worldliness* – that is, the fact that reflective thought is entangled in an unsurpassable framework –, the latter aims at displaying the patterns by which reflective thought and action come together in inquiry to transform larger frameworks. These and other crucial differences are glossed over in attempts that assimilate pragmatism and phenomenology (see, for instance, Okrent, 1988; Rorty, 1982, pp. 37–59, 1991, p. 27).

[4] Interestingly, the relationship between grounded theory, phenomenology and ethnomethodology is one of family resemblance in the strict Wittgensteinian sense: while they might be lumped together as sharing one essential common feature, in fact very few features are common to them. All apparently share a commitment to disavow and bracket theoretical preconceptions as an attempt to return to experience in its fullness and minute aspects. But phenomenology is a *philosophical* method or sensibility; ethnomethodology, albeit inspired in phenomenology, constitutes an *empirical* research programme oriented to describe the world in its minute aspects; and grounded theory is an empirical *research technique* and procedure oriented at relating data and theory in productive ways.

[5] I have not attempted to provide a whole overview of every use of phenomenology in qualitative research, but merely pointed out analytically different patterns of use. Similar patterns of inspirational use of the phenomenological style of thinking in qualitative research are found in Jack Katz (2001, 2002a, 2002b). In fact, Katz proposes a *phenomenological-oriented* ethnographic approach that aims not so much at *thick descriptions* of events and acts as they took place and the subsequent reconstruction of symbolic systems, but at the reconstruction of events as they were experienced by actors and the subsequent reconstruction of phenomenal fields and narrative structures. To get at this, Katz argues, we need to start our research strategy with a social ontology that reckons with its phenomenological aspects.

[6] A promising alternative is to connect the notion of the habitus with a thicker notion of subjectivity compatible with a more phenomenological notion of selfhood (see, for instance, Dorschel, 2022).

[7] More recently, Tavory (2022) has developed an analogous argument that focuses on space rather than time. He again makes use of phenomenology to make interactionism more attentive to the fact that 'the present' encapsules multiple provinces of meaning simultaneously, and how intersubjectivity emerges out of the dynamic stabilisation of multiple worlds.

[8] Finally, medical sociology has also initiated a phenomenological concept correction of its concepts and categories (Slatman, 2014; Williams, 2006). The turn to embodiment and the lived experience of illness, disability or medical practices provides a way of correcting sociological notions of action or selfhood that, given their implicit endorsement of different versions of the mind-body dualism, prove sterile for the field (Turner, 1992). At the same time, phenomenology operates as a way of limiting the scope of discursive and constructionist approaches to medical institutions.

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