



## THE PUF *SOCIOLOGIES* SERIES: A MAJOR SOURCE OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGY

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The status of sociology has changed over the years in France and is now considered a science capable of producing reliable knowledge resulting either from empirical analysis or from well-argued interpretations. After economics, sociology has also found its place in the various research institutions and organizations of France. Raymond Boudon has been a key figure in redefining the status of this field by promoting a scientific sociology. His numerous works are certainly an attestation to this, as is the creation of the *Sociologies* series with François Bourricaud (1922–1991) in 1977, published by the Presses Universitaires de France. This series is now the most impressive collection of works on sociology in French, as seen not only by the number of books published (a total of 132 in the fall of 2008), but also by the scientific quality and diversity of its corpus.<sup>1</sup>

*Sociologies* bears Raymond Boudon's intellectual influence in two ways. First, it aims to gather all types of sociological knowledge which transcend disciplinary boundaries. Second, it systematically refuses to base science on rigidly dogmatizing grounds. In this series one finds history of thought, sociology of knowledge and general sociological theory, as well as works on social processes such as unintended consequences of social action, inequalities of social movements, research on global society in the tradition of the French School of sociology, as well as studies on a

large number of social questions. The collection as a whole, in fact, has become a showcase for contemporary sociology.

Following in the wake of thirty years of publication, we propose to carry out an assessment of the *Sociologies*' series, the first of its kind. To do so, we will group the works into four overall themes: sociological thought, sociological theory, social processes/global society, and social questions.

## SOCIOLOGICAL THOUGHT

Raymond Boudon introduced France to the scholarly works of Georg Simmel by translating and publishing four of his works in *Sociologies*, including *Sociologie et épistémologie* (1981), *Les problèmes de la philosophie de l'histoire* (1984) — a major work on methodology in the social sciences —, *Philosophie de l'argent* (1987), and *Sociologie. Études sur les formes de socialisation* (1999). Numerous studies in the series also shed new light on this great German scholar now considered to be the founder of the sociology of reciprocal actions and of social forms which have become sources for many of the leading works being published in the discipline today. Simmel himself sums up the essential principles of his *Sociologie* as follows: "Individuals make society, societies make the individual".<sup>2</sup> This particular notion could also define the scientific intention of nearly all of the contributions published in the collection.

*Sociologies* stresses the importance of rereading the works of Émile Durkheim and Max Weber. The contributions published on these two classic authors show that their thoughts are still relevant today and that they can be adapted to new situations. One discovers a Durkheim that is not the holist sociologist he has traditionally been portrayed as in social science text books, but rather a scholar who promotes explicit theoretical orientations of the cognitive type and elements of authentic social action in the contemporary sense. Reinhard Wippler sums up the way in which Durkheim's thought is still very much alive: "But even Durkheim did not strictly follow what he postulated in his writings on methodology. (...) Every time he explains the effect of a social cause on a particular social fact, he refers to individual actions and to cognitive aspects linked to the motivation behind these actions"<sup>3</sup> (Wippler, in F. Chazel, *Action collective et mouvement sociaux*, 1993: 209). Thanks to Philippe Besnard

and Marcel Fournier, the publication of Durkheim's fascinating *Lettres à Marcel Mauss* (1998) in the *Sociologies* series allows one to understand the scientific intent of the author of *Le Suicide*.

Many publications in the series refer to Max Weber's various works which have contributed to a better understanding of this great sociologist in France, mainly before numerous of Weber's books were translated into French. A typical example is Wilhelm Hennis' *La problématique de Max Weber* (1996) which clarifies Weber's view on the link between the individual and society, a constant preoccupation of most of the authors in the series, or the translation of Wolfgang Mommsen's *Max Weber et la politique allemande 1890–1920* (1985), a work which reviews the German sociologist's outlook on liberalism and his concept of nation. The series also contains a translated version of other German classics such as Werner Sombart's *Pourquoi le socialisme n'existe-t-il pas aux États-Unis?* (1992) or Max Scheler's *Problèmes de sociologie de la connaissance* (1993). Sombart's well-known work is distinct in that it answers the question posed in its title by recalling the intentions of the social actors, making it a prime example of the sociology of action which can be found throughout the *Sociologies* series. In her book, *Dilthey et la fondation des sciences historiques* (1990), Sylvie Mesure analyses the works of yet another major German sociologist noted for his criticism of positivism and the search for general laws in sociology. She cleverly recalls Dilthey's well-known words that "We explain nature, we understand psychic life".<sup>4</sup> Dilthey's understanding of the actions of individuals, in contemporary terms, is also typical of the works published in *Sociologies*.

Among the publications one also finds an original reading of Karl Marx by Jon Elster and an informed discussion of the works of Troeltsch by C. Froidevaux. The series also contains two books on Vilfredo Pareto, author of a general theory on rationality: Bernard Valade's *Pareto. La naissance d'une autre sociologie* (1990) and a collective work edited by Alban Bouvier entitled *Pareto aujourd'hui* (1999). J.-C. Lamberti's study on Tocqueville deals with the controversial problem of the relations between the first volume of *Démocratie en Amérique* and the second one.

The *Sociologies* series also provides access in French to several works of contemporary American scholars which are now considered classics such as Daniel Bell, Lewis Coser, Albert Hirschman, Christopher

Jencks, Robert Nisbet, Mancur Olson, and Thomas Schelling as well as other British, German and Israeli sociologists such as Anthony Giddens, Hans Albert, Joseph-David, and Shmuel Eisenstadt. These authors all share the same goal of building a social science in which the actors, each in their own way, play an important role.

A rereading of Durkheim and Weber and a renewed reading of Simmel constitute one of the originalities of the *Sociologies* series, which emphasizes the more theoretical approach of *présentisme*, rather than a historical analysis of each authors' thinking. François Chazel, who proposes an original rereading of several sociology classics in *Aux fondements de la sociologie* (2000), points out "a moderate *présentisme* which takes into account the works of the historians and their undeniable contribution".<sup>5</sup>

## SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

If *Sociologies* has focused on the rereading of these classic sociologists it is because one goal of the series is to contribute to the development of sociological theory by opening up new venues that would also be capable of inspiring other social sciences. The publishers felt that by favouring a wide range of themes they could also interest philosophers as well as specialists in the fields of law, moral doctrine or economics. Contrary, however, to the new School of Chicago which redefines the social sciences in terms of instrumental rationality, *Sociologies* broadens the notion of rationality in the Weberian tradition by developing theoretical perspectives which focus on the intentionality of the actors and also by questioning determinism. According to Forsé and Parodi (*La priorité du juste*, 2004: 5), "contemporary sociology is presently less reticent to credit individuals with the full capacity to reflect on the social order they create".<sup>6</sup> Empirical studies published in the series attest to the richness of this point of view, which was proclaimed with the publishing of the first books in the 1970s in a context that was not favourable to the acceptance of this perspective in France and elsewhere. The rereading of the initial works reveals that they are still pertinent, something which is not always the case with books the media may have claimed to be interesting when they were first published. The *Sociologies* series has influenced contemporary French sociology which

is now less reticent to viewing social facts as the result of intention and rational acts.

The general theoretical orientation underlying the collection favours analysing the reasons for human action in terms of context and time. Rather than basing their research on the general rules that concern behaviour or the elaboration of a general theory of action such as that of Talcott Parsons, the majority of the authors of the series favour the Weberian stance with its reference to motivations and the knowledge of the actors. These scholars prefer Simmel's method of constructing formal models to understand reality and analyse the diversity of empirical situations. Special relevance is given to widening the study of rationality far beyond classic instrumental rationality by a number of authors such as the noteworthy work of P. Demeulenaere in his *Homo oeconomicus. Enquête sur la conception d'un paradigme* (1996). B. Valade reminds us that Pareto criticized the tendency economists have to exaggerate the importance of self-interest as a determining factor in human action: "One should not forget that it is principally by addressing sentiments that one persuades people"<sup>7</sup> (cited p. 147). Likewise, Tocqueville wrote: "man does not only have interests, he also has ideas and sentiments"<sup>8</sup>. Many authors of the collection of books strongly suggest that sociology should study ideas and sentiments in an empirical as well as a theoretical perspective.

For sociologists, understanding cognition means seeking out the reasons for human action rather than the causes or the statistical relations, a method favoured by descriptive sociography. For Raymond Boudon, the cognitive approach is in fact most efficient when a great variety of phenomena needs to be explained. Such an approach refers to the rational and reflexive intellectual activity — be it conscious or susceptible to becoming conscious — of the social actors and, more widely, to the fact that beliefs, opinions, or social representations make sense for them. In *Cognition et sciences sociales. La dimension cognitive dans l'analyse sociologique* (1997), an essay that presents this theoretical approach with great clarity, R. Boudon, A. Bouvier and F. Chazel state that "it is the sociologist's role to find the justifications that the social actors give or would give in good faith even when, at first glance, these beliefs seem to be absurd or enigmatic"<sup>9</sup>. One of the most important publications of the series from a theoretical point of view, this book gives various examples of the application of this theoretical approach in the field of sociology of

social movement and that of ethics and law. The words *social sciences* in the title are significant: they hint at a more general claim by the series that the new theoretical orientations of sociology could, in fact, apply to all of the social sciences.

F. Chazel demonstrates that it is easier to mobilize participants for collective action when there is a threat (i.e. a risk of loss) than in a context of conquest (i.e. a chance of winning). Another author, L. Lévy-Garboua, suggests that the economic actors rarely take into account new information that accompanies a decision through any kind of auto-persuasion or rationalization which could reduce the disparity produced by this belated information. As he states, “The individual would, after the fact, find good reasons for having acted as he had”.<sup>10</sup> Raymond Boudon had a similar explanation for the adhesion of thousands of militants to oppressive and non-liberal ideologies in the 20th century, as well for the support they received through public opinion before criticism and social movement put an end to authoritarian regimes.

The main topic of another work, *L'explication des normes sociales* (2001), is a clear example of the new sociological theory. In this publication, authors from four different fields of the humanities look at the question of the reasons driving social action and the forms of cognition they involve. Jean Baechler probes the question of why people obey norms when they have hardly ever taken part in their formulation. Such is the case when the norm is 1) accepted as an obligation by the actors, 2) symbolically accepted as just, and 3) the result of past experience interpreted differently from time to time. In other words, norms are part of certain social representations that make sense for the actor.

Such a theoretical orientation is something new in the French intellectual landscape, a landscape which has been largely influenced by Foucault's work on the social norm as structured by power and social control. This perspective is highly criticized by J.-G. Merquior in his book entitled *Foucault ou le nihilisme de la chaire* (1986), a contribution whose importance went unrecognized upon its original publication but which would be worth (re)reading. Twenty years later, Maxime Parodi undertook a more thorough analysis of Foucault in *La modernité manquée du structuralisme* (2004) focusing on Foucault's “blind power”. In his research on norms, Raymond Boudon wrote an article entitled “*Vox populi, vox Dei? Le ‘spectateur impartial’ et la théorie des opinions*”, which should not only be considered a classic of the social sciences, but

should be read by anyone who takes into account the role of public opinion polling in governance. Clarifying the cognitive mechanism at work in the expression of opinions, Boudon analyses how social positions of individuals influence various theories about reality and define the underlying dynamic that gives way to specific or universal values, indeed an important question in our contemporary democracies.

Contextual effects and positional effects, two expressions which come up often in the analyses published in *Sociologies*, indicate that the actor concerned in sociological theory is far from being considered as an isolated entity. The reference to context also includes the now well-established distinction between rational choice and axiological rationality. Boudon states that “in certain contexts, action is guided by principles and not by the consequences that may follow”<sup>11</sup> (*Les modèles d'action*, 1998: 41) which better explains the voting process during elections and many other social phenomena such as disapproval of crime for one.

The broadening of the notion of rationality also includes reference to contextual effects and, in historical situations, behaviours. This perspective was brought to the fore by Robert Leroux in his study on Cournot's thought (*Cournot sociologue*, 2004) in which he recalls the distinction the latter made (before Popper) between history and theory in societies. According to Cournot, the soundest theory requires the support of historical data, a methodological principle which is considered in several works of the *Sociologies*' series. If the actors take into account new facts, it is the whole system of reasons that is susceptible to being called into question and renewed. As with Cournot (p. 179) before him, Leroux specifies that “using the facts, the sociologist must look at the pressures exerted by the situation, the institutions and the milieu”.<sup>12</sup> Two analyses published in the collection clearly demonstrate this theoretical orientation: the study of the sense of justice and the explanation of anti-Semitism.

In *La priorité du juste* (2004), sociologists Michel Forsé and Maxime Parodi look at moral choices adapted to present-day societies with their diversity of populations and pluralism of ideas and values. In this given context, to say that the actor is rational in the narrowest sense of the term can only result in insurmountable difficulties. Taking into account one's personal interest in a pluralistic context is more or less impossible to reconcile with the needs of others. In a social context it rapidly becomes important to look for accommodations. For Forsé and Parodi,

the Good cannot be the sole basis of modern social order and a new moral reasoning which gives priority to Justice becomes “the principle of legitimacy without which even democratic institutions cannot become a reality”.<sup>13</sup> To give priority to what is considered just is the basis of the *fair spectator* model as proposed by Forsé and Parodi, and the study of various surveys on the perception of justice confirms that the data conforms to the proposed model.

In his rather original study on anti-Semitism, Guillaume Erner refutes the validity of any explanation based on the theory of the scapegoat, a theory he places in “the store of sociological accessories along with all the other myths the humanities have dreamed up”<sup>14</sup> (p. 244) — to which he opposes all forms of essentialism of anti-Semitism giving priority to contextual analysis of situations or of “anti-Jewish configurations”. The author explains the various public displays of anti-Semitic views by placing them in their historical context and recalling the actors’ motivations and reasons at the time. For Erner, the general theory of the scapegoat is associated with a form of holism and explanation of beliefs by continuous repetition.

The study of beliefs is the very object of Gérald Bronner’s book *L’empire des croyances* (2003). According to the author, beliefs have intentional content and are seen as conceivable. Often classified by those who do not believe in passion, irrationality or obscurantism, beliefs are on the contrary seen in his work as a form of subjective rationality which brings certain social actors to adhere to them. Bronner shows how one must understand and explain the logic of adhering to beliefs from the point of view of the actors themselves, even those beliefs which are seen to be most extravagant. Indeed, scientific rationality has limits which generate specific categories of cognitive adhesion. Subjective rationality is marked by bias of confirmation. In daily life, we mobilize facts and confirm beliefs much more than we try to test them by using counter-examples. Furthermore, “because one rarely believes alone”, individuals interact with other people about objects of belief in what Bronner calls a *cognitive market*, which allows the sociologist to understand why certain beliefs come into being and endure while others disappear.

Patrick Pharo’s study *Le sens de la justice* (2001) analyses a different topic: popular beliefs that deal with what is perceived as just and legitimate. The chapter on the perception of the capacity to welcome immigrants in French society is particularly fascinating. Pharo shows



how suspicious beliefs contradict moral and democratic principles and how, even if they are not empirically based, these beliefs “can spread freely as long as those who adopt them have a strong desire to see them as true and that that desire is kept alive by the illusion of objectivity that is linked to the initial proposals”<sup>15</sup> (p. 7).

The sociological theory that this series promotes is not limited to a micro-sociological perspective. Several books have purely macro-sociological aspects, notably the paradox of collective action and the appearance of effect stemming from the aggregation of individual actions. Raymond Boudon launches the collection with his *Effets pervers et ordre social* (1977), a contribution which sets the tone for the renewal of French sociology. Written at a period when the weight of structures and determinants was at the forefront of intellectual circles, Boudon claims that “a sociologist cannot neglect the importance of liberty without exposing himself to serious disappointment”<sup>16</sup> (p. 13). In Tocquevillian manner, Boudon addresses new questions such as “How could equality breed inequality?” and “How could social wrongs be no one’s the fault and not profit somebody?” He also analyses the perverse effects (later called emerging effects) which were clearly identified in the French school system.

In *Effets pervers*, Raymond Boudon examines the most important paradigms of the social sciences over the past century, classifying them into two main categories (interactionist and determinist) along with a number of sub-categories. The Tocquevillian-type paradigm is characterized not only by an individualist interpretation of actions, but also by a social interpretation of preference systems, since the individual evolves in a structured system of interactions. Preferences must therefore be explained (they are not to be seen as given) and the context becomes very important, as Tocqueville shows in his explanation of the unequal development of agriculture in France and England during the Ancien Régime, an issue with which he was familiar. New and different contexts call for new and different behaviours, as in each case actions take on a distinct meaning. This approach allows one to explain how individuals who have the same characteristics can act differently in different societies or eras. The approach is also valid particularly in studying the generation effect, a fast-developing field of research in sociology.

Two books published early in the collection bear witness to the beginnings of the study of emerging effects in contemporary sociology: Macur Olson’s classic *La logique de l’action collective* (1978) and T.

Schelling's *La tyrannie des petites décisions* (1980). The former studies the well-known figure of the stowaway and the rationality of the actors involved in various forms of collective action. The latter claims that ghetto formation has nothing to do with segregationism but rather with individuals' desire that a portion of their neighbourhood resemble them. These individuals, who harbour no ill will towards others, end up creating an environment that completely resembles them, going as far as forming ghettos, a result that was never intentionally planned.

One might wonder whether the books published in the *Sociologies* series stem from a common paradigm. A hasty reader might be tempted to conclude that *methodological individualism* is what drives the works of the different authors. While this conclusion might be accurate, it is rather simplistic. The authors of the *Sociologies* collection do not collectively represent any one school of thought. However, it must be remembered that the goal of the *Sociologies* series is to favour the expression of divergent points of view and to not let dogmatism stand in the way of new ideas.

## **SOCIAL PROCESSES AND GLOBAL SOCIETY**

A good many of the works in the series could be classified as belonging to the field of macrosociology, with each author having his own unique way of considering the link between individuals and society. While this question was most important in the middle of the 20th century, it has not aroused as much interest in the new millennium. The universal may be found in the particular and the study of one individual gives access to a whole culture, as demonstrated in the 1980s through life history studies.

One finds in *Sociologies* another important work by Raymond Boudon entitled *La place du désordre* (1984), today considered a classic. In this work the author explains how social change can, on a macroscopic scale, be conceived as being produced by an aggregation of individual actions. For Boudon it is not the principle of individualism that is problematic in the social sciences but the notion of rationality, a term whose meaning should be broadened to include more than an argument based on probabilities dear to the economists. Boudon states that even though most changes are closer to Cournot's model in that they result

from the meeting of two independent causes, as in the classic example of the tile that falls from the roof on the head of a passer-by, certain social changes are determined and others are more or less unpredictable. While it is possible to explain the causes behind both the fall of the tile and why the person was walking near this roof in the first place, one cannot explain the coming together of the two causes. The histories of most societies are full of examples of the Cournot type such as the case of the labour movement during the Lenin era studied by Boudon. In 1968, as we all know, students played a leading role in the popular uprisings in the developed countries, but it would be very difficult to draw up a general theory of social change that would always give students a fundamental role. On each occasion one must consider the forces in play in a particular era, that is, the historical context of the time. Or, to be more precise, the historical context, the state of the interaction system and the characteristics of the individuals at a certain point in time must be considered in every sociological analysis of the reasons for action, without excluding the typical case where change depends on contingent factors à la Cournot. Such is the case for the study of all social conflicts, including class conflicts.

Laurent Cordonnier's *Coopération et réciprocité* (1997) is an excellent example of the new way of conceiving the link between individual and society. Important modern institutions such as the State, the free market economy, businesses and associations organize collective action based on cooperation between individuals, one of the key factors allowing one to understand and explain the way in which they function. Not only does Cordonnier criticize economic rationality in the strictest sense and self-interested calculation, but he also explores diverse forms of social interactions and, in particular, situations where exchange is at the heart of these institutions. He suggests looking at salary relations as a form of gift and counter-gift and not as one of economic entente or a form of classic bargaining. Cordonnier invites us to seriously consider what is obvious in the social sciences: that individuals are first and foremost united by social links (p. 197). In such conditions, being rational means making actions intelligible in the eyes of others so that they can hopefully be accepted and understood or, otherwise, be seen as significant. As he states, "In other words, in the heat of the moment, each person upholds as an example his or her own conduct as a reference that might be adopted by others. (p. 198)".<sup>17</sup> The author's argument

could be summarized as follows: “Let’s cooperate so that the other can cooperate”.

Since Georges Gurvitch’s work in the 1950s, no French sociologist had tried to classify social groups from smallest to largest, that is, from the dyad and the family to larger groups such as the nation, global society and civilization. That is, no sociologist until Jean Baechler’s *Les morphologies sociales* (2005), a term that he suggested for all forms of human *socialité*, a neologism which, in French, means diverse ways of grouping individuals together in society. Although Baechler’s research is in line with Durkheim’s thesis *De la division du travail social* (1893), he is not of the same opinion when it comes to human groups. For Baechler, human groups are not the result of two forms of solidarity, but of three: 1) gregariousness (a *polity*, which refers to an organization formed by individuals who share the same cultural model as is the case with France for example); 2) sociability (all “groups of individuals placed in a position to act as a collective unity” such as the inhabitants of a town or workers of a company); and finally 3) **sodality**, understood here as the human capacity to form groups for the purpose of attaining a common objective. It is these three dimensions which form the basis of Baechler’s typology.

“solidarity”?

Shmuel Eisenstadt outlines the specific characteristics of modern European civilization in *Approche comparative de la civilisation européenne* (1994). He underlines the great variability of institutional, symbolic, and ideological responses to modernity in various developed societies, variations that appear, however, to parallel their common characteristics. For Eisenstadt, the historical experience of societies is of utmost importance. In his work, he carefully examines the roles of the leading elite and, in particular, the political elite, a group which he views as being “the most important,” formulating the hypothesis that “it is because of the activity of the governing elite that the structural principles of a society and their institutional by-products can exercise a real influence on the construction and the reproduction of institutions”<sup>18</sup> (p. 19).

## SOCIAL ISSUES

The *Sociologies* series contains an extensive number of works on a variety of different social issues such as law, nationalism, active minorities,

students, crime, aging (a privileged topic), poverty, trade unionism, fashion, beliefs, values, innovation, science, work conflicts, business, and industrial democracy in particular. In these books, which deal with various prominent social issues of their day, the authors offer both general and formal theoretical models which are not intended to apply to each and every situation that might be observed, but rather could, as Boudon proposed in *La place du désordre* (1984: 213), “be used to account for very diverse situations provided that suitable adjustments be made in each case”.<sup>19</sup>

One problem of particular interest in the latter third of the 20th century was schools and the French education system, a subject which sparked considerable debate not only in the public circle, but also among sociologists (it is still a hotly contested topic today!). The series’ first book published on education is a translation of Christopher Jencks’ *L’inégalité. Influence de la famille et de l’école en Amérique* (1979). This classic work questions the period’s shared idea that school was the most effective means of bringing about social equality and the widely accepted ideology that school was the instrument of social reproduction of socioeconomic inequality. Jencks and his collaborators believe that “The elimination of different grades in schools would contribute very little to making individuals more equal once they become adults”,<sup>20</sup> an idea which flew in the face of all sociological analyses and one which provoked much discussion in the 1970s.

Other works on education and the school system followed and the topic was therefore thoroughly examined in *Sociologies* as were questions relative to the related theme of social stratification. The books published on these two topics contributed to a renewal of sociological knowledge and opened up new fields of research, even though public policy — in France and elsewhere — did not always agree with the authors’ findings. In his summary of research on social mobility, Charles-Henry Cuin explains why the findings of this new sociology of education took so long to be accepted in France: “If school has become the main, or rather the only party on trial for ‘reproduction’, (...) it is no doubt essentially because collective mental representations have never stopped seeing the school system as a structural element in the social system and a decisive instrument for the distribution of individuals in the social structure” (*Les sociologues et la mobilité sociale*, 1993: 177).<sup>21</sup>

The study of science occupies an important place in the *Sociologies* series, especially in critiques of social science paradigms. Many contributions have been published establishing the basis of a genuine sociology of science, a basis far removed from the philosophical perspective favoured by Khun and the cognitive relativism much criticized by Michel Dubois in his *La nouvelle sociologie des sciences* (2001). These contributions follow in the footsteps of Durkheim's project, without denying the capacity of the sciences to reach objectivity and produce solid knowledge even in cases where scientific hypotheses stem from extra-scientific considerations. It is for this reason that R. Boudon and M. Clavelin published the contributions of a GEMAS colloquium on the question *Le relativisme est-il résistant? Regards sur la sociologie des sciences* in 1994. The main idea of this collective work is that one must, without excluding the principle of a third party, think outside of the restrictive binary framework which opposes constructivists on the one hand and relativists on the other. The authors suggest that one might examine when, how, and by what means social factors play a role in the sciences as suggested by constructivists, as well as how objectivity is attained no matter what, as claimed by rationalists. Each of these works employ the principles of methodology seen in other works, that is, the refusal to look for laws or generalizations and the careful consideration of context and circumstances in which sciences are developed and, more precisely, to the postulate and critique of the results.

In a book on structuralism in France in the second half of the 20th century — *La modernité manquée du structuralisme* (2004) — Maxime Parodi practices an interactionist sociology of the sciences, claiming that “studying the sciences means asking oneself why scholars agree on one theory rather than another” and adding that “the reasoning of one scholar is limited by the reasoning of other scholars”<sup>22</sup> (p. 163). In other words, scholars debate among their peers, express their ideas, present the facts and justify them. That is, whereas structuralists look to “explain social order in terms of a symbolic order cut off from its social environment”<sup>23</sup> (id.), scholars are human beings that can reason, argue and accept criticism. For Parodi, scientists, just like other human beings, make mistakes especially in cases where they accept implicit determining propositions (an idea dear to Simmel) which limit their reason and narrow their means. To have one's errors revealed and criticized by colleagues does not lead to relativism nor does it

engender scepticism but, according to Popper, gives “progressive access to truth.”

It should be pointed out, however, that Parodi’s inter-actionist sociology has a more general range. In fact, Bronner states that social interactions help to create a cognitive market which plays a role in the spreading of beliefs. In a broader sense, it might be said that an individual is not an isolated atom; in fact, he or she is part of several networks that Vincent Lemieux defines as structured systems of non-official social relations in his *Les réseaux d’acteurs sociaux* (1999), a work that formalizes this inter-actionist approach which can be applied in various situations such as in the analysis of sciences and beliefs.

Quentin Bell’s essay *Mode et société* (1992) completely redefines the interpretation offered by Veblen, who grounds his analysis only “on the situation that prevailed in his era and his country” (p. 197), something which other contemporary authors have also been prone to do. According to Bell, fashion makes sense to the social actor who can also distance himself from the dictates of the sumptuary laws of the Ancien Régime in France, taboos of the Maoist Regime in China or enticements from contemporary advertising. Bell states that, for each individual, the sense of fashion is determined by the characteristics of a particular social structure. When this structure becomes too rigid, fashion becomes more constrained and individual fantasy is reduced to a minimum, but when social stratification is more fluid, fashion becomes eclectic and leaves room for the expression of individuality. Individuals also find in their own social class (and in the group-association in the sense of Baechler it might be added) the norms of dress behaviour that they adopt. He adds that “costume does not seek to distinguish, but to classify” (p. 19) He also states that unregulated dress codes are obediently followed by a particular group, giving as an example the high heels worn by the nobles of the Ancien Régime that were considered effeminate from the moment that the social status of the other classes was modified. Once again, one sees another instance of taking into account the situation in which actors find themselves when they give sense to their action.

In *Sous l’aile protectrice de l’État* (1995) A. de Swaan provides a convincing example of sociology based on history. The author explains how collective and coercive national systems of social protection are created to fight against difficulties which, at first glance, seem to affect individuals separately and call for personal remedies. He analyses different

situations of interdependence such as “external effects” which are indirect consequences of deficiencies met by a certain group of individuals: it is advantageous for the rich to enhance the sanitary condition of poor neighbourhoods to avoid becoming victims of the health epidemics which would inevitably follow without such enhancements. He turns to historical sociology to explain the contingent character of collective solutions and goods put in place in various societies studied over a six century time span. This book illustrates how sociology must not only define consistencies with the help of conceptual instruments, but also anchor its analysis in an examination of given situations and historical data, a recurring theme throughout the *Sociologies* collection.

In *Les gens de la banque* (1992), Yves Grafmeyer studies the behaviour of individuals working in a fast-changing organisation (a large bank) that imposes its own rules and regulations but also has to compose with their personnel (their ethnicity, schooling, family obligations, place of residence) and their professional qualifications acquired in the course of their job. *Les gens de la banque* is a case study that meticulously examines the complex link between the individual and the organisation. The author shows how the rules of the firm must take into account individuals and how the organisational and market forces influence career development and mobility.

Besides economics and history, the *Sociologies* series also opens its doors to other disciplines of the social sciences that have shed new light on various subjects of interest to sociologists. These include criminology (M. Cusson), historical demography (J. Dupâquier), and ethnology (M. Spiro).

### THE “SÉRIE ROUGE”

Nineteen books have been published in the “*Série Rouge*” of the *Sociologies* collection. These contributions, though they share the same scientific orientations, are of a more applied and critical nature designed to appeal to a wider audience. First of all, their conclusions are based on scientifically demonstrated observations that often contradict the conventional way of seeing a particular question. Second, they favour arguing their theses and interpretations of the researched phenomena using the same methodological individualism approach typical of the sociology of



sciences as seen in the *Série Bleue*. Finally, they take into account the intentionality of the actors and adopt the cognitive sociology point of view alluded to above. To illustrate this perspective, we now turn to a few examples of essays published in the *Série Rouge*.

François Bourricaud gets the ball rolling in an essay entitled *Le bricolage idéologique* (1980) in which he discusses the various ideological contributions of French intellectuals and how they were perceived during the years of their greatest activity (1960–1980). The status and the role played by the individual are explicitly affirmed: “The formatting of ideologies is an exercise of persuasion in people interested in day-to-day paradoxes and scandals for which they expect explanations and remedies. Sometimes persuasion can become indoctrination. (...) ideological persuasion is a question of influence, which is a type of relation whereby the emphasis is put on a *community* of influencer and influenced interests and tastes”<sup>24</sup> (p. 195). Bourricaud also explains the decline of certain ideologies by referring to the actors: “With time, ideologies wear themselves out. They are not refutable, but they may cease to be of interest. The number of their followers then declines and the adhesion mellows. Referring to fashion is of little help. [...] Their decline cannot be wholly explained by the fleeting nature of fashion”<sup>25</sup> (idem).

In *Foucault ou le nihilisme de la chaire* (1986), J.-G. Merquior criticises this illustrious philosopher’s analyses using the methodology particular to the sociology of the sciences. Referring to works by experts and scholars who have meticulously studied these same periods, authors whom Foucault barely mentions, Merquior demonstrates first that there are a great number of mistakes in the philosopher’s interpretation of the early publications. In doing so he questions Foucault’s cherished hypothesis on the domination of analogy in analysis of the Middle Ages, highlighting that a number of authors of the epoch had condemned *divinatio* in the name of *eruditio*. Merquior then criticises Foucault’s interpretations and his well-known thesis on the break in the history of thought, stating that it had been exaggerated by the philosopher. Merquior’s scholarship allows him to assert that such was not the case; he maintains that, on the contrary, the delays and continuities in the history of sciences, particularly in the case of the history of thought, all coexist and are articulated differently at different times. He adds that magic and science develop side by side in history, up to what Cassirer named “a shift of emphasis rather than a different conception of knowledge” (p. 79).

In *Mythes, savoirs et décisions politiques* (1995), François Lacasse investigates why sound, pertinent knowledge on important social questions such as unemployment or regional development sometimes goes completely ignored by politicians and bureaucrats while at other times it is revered by them. In the case studies that he documents, which are fascinating to read, Lacasse observes that a great deal of knowledge is systematically ignored so as to leave intact preconceived ideas on societal problems. As he states, “In the majority of cases, when all of the actors’ constraints and motivations and the logic of management are brought into play, the result will be the preservation of myths”<sup>26</sup> (p. 254). Lacasse’s analysis of beliefs is in fact quite similar to that of Bronner and Pharo. Boudon’s most recent works develop this thesis that false, preconceived and erroneous ideas seem to live forever not only in the minds of ordinary people, but also in the minds of civil servants, managers, and even intellectuals.

In an altogether different field, Norbert Alter analyses how innovations in business clash with established beliefs, acquired knowledge, existent order, and various routines. He refers to one of Simmel’s cherished ideas: people like routines because they know where they stand. In *L’innovation ordinaire* (2000), the author observes that the structures of the workplace indeed are always behind in terms of social practices, and his study concludes by underlining the importance of the role played by the actors in innovation. As he notes, “everything indicates that beliefs can be overcome when considering real situations, but this conception supposes that the actors have enough influence and critical capacity to do so. Of course, such is not always the case”<sup>27</sup> (p. 269).

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In one of the first books published in the *Sociologies* collection, François Bourricaud poses a question illustrative of the situation in which sociology had found itself a quarter of a century ago: “A haunting question for the sociologist is to understand why sociology has had such a hard time freeing itself from ideology up until now”<sup>28</sup> (*Le bricolage idéologique*, 1980: 11). Our examination of about one hundred studies published in *Sociologies* shows that Bourricaud’s question would be phrased using different words today. The examples discussed above bear witness to the fact that contemporary sociology does not bear — or no longer bears

— the mark of ideology and, having escaped the prevailing relativism and simplistic positivism, can deliver sound and well-argued research results that are able to undergo critical examination by the scientific community. This means it can now claim the status of a genuine science.

Contemporary sociology is no longer reluctant to give the actors the place that they deserve. Over the past thirty years, the books published in *Sociologies* have shown that this perspective based on the premise that individuals are not programmed by social structures and that their behaviour is not simply the result of environmental influence gives conclusive results. In other words, one discovers that the behaviour of individuals is not regulated by transcendent norms or by restrictive powers.

The *Sociologies* series is not confined to the critique of deterministic sociology because it also suggests new theoretical perspectives by conceptualising diverse ways of viewing the social actor, social change or social morphology. The works that have been published tackle complex subjects, producing new sociological interpretations of the feeling of justice, beliefs, emotions, and values, which makes them valid in a time of rampant cultural relativism. The analyses published in *Sociologies* avoid the pitfall of realism denounced by Simmel and criticised by Boudon in the last pages of *La place du désordre*. In these pages, the authors bring to the fore patterns of intelligibility of social phenomena and models, indispensable tools for explaining social change and understanding both reality and singular objects.

These patterns and models must be adapted when being applied to the study of concrete cases. Sociologists will be able to define the meaning of nation, justice or values in intelligible terms, but will also have to explain the specific national particularities being considered and their development over time. Tocqueville understood this in his analysis of the French Revolution by underlining “ancient and general facts” that allowed for the Revolution, but also “particular and recent facts that determined its place” (*L’Ancien Régime et la Révolution*, vol. 3, chap. 1). For Tocqueville, one of the principles of intelligibility of modern democracies is the advent of equality. The fact that there was, however, very little equality in the societies that this illustrious *voyageur* had observed and the fact that inequalities are still present today does not invalidate his theory that our societies are driven by the fascination with egalitarianism. According to Raymond Boudon in *Les modèles de l’action* (1998: 49), “the fact that science has a history does not imply

that there are no scientific truths. The same goes for moral issues”.<sup>29</sup> In short, it is the joint study of general and specific factors as practised by Tocqueville that make the essays published in the *Sociologies* series worthy of scholarly attention.

Sociological works of the latter third of the 20th century are closer to other social sciences, most notably economics. As leading contemporary economists have recognized, while the social actor maximises his interest (and there is no need to question this premise of economic science), he does so only after limited research and on the basis of incomplete information. It is essential, however, to push the analysis further. The sociologist, therefore, can immediately add that the actor, in fact, maximises his interest for a complex system of reasons. Although understandably he acts according to the knowledge he has of the world, his beliefs may also conflict with the most profound knowledge, a situation which one observes in businesses, public policies or intellectual milieus. He acts in a certain context, at a certain time, and in a certain structure. Context, time and structure however are not mysterious black boxes insofar as these elements are taken into account in the intelligibility patterns of action and are not exogenous determinants.

To sum up, readers will find in the *Sociologies* series a source of knowledge on a great number of subjects, enlightening works of epistemology and new perspectives in sociological theory, all of which rely on rereadings of the classics that speak to us even today. Sociology can legitimately claim genuine scientific status, a prize sought after by the discipline’s illustrious pioneers, Durkheim, Weber, and Tocqueville. The *Sociologies* series, however, goes even further. Several of its authors also explain why solid sociological and scientific knowledge must come to terms with the beliefs, preconceived ideas, and routines that Simmel spoke of, an issue which complicates the advent of applied sociology.

## NOTES

1. A list of all the publications of the Sociologies series can be found on the WEB site of the Presses universitaires de France: <[www.puf.com](http://www.puf.com)>.
2. “Les individus font la société, les sociétés font l’individu”.
3. “Mais même Durkheim n’a pas suivi strictement ce qu’il postulait dans ses écrits méthodologiques. (...). Chaque fois qu’il expose l’effet d’une cause sociale sur

un fait social à expliquer, il se réfère à des actions individuelles et à des aspects cognitifs et liés à la motivation de ces actions”.

4. “Nous expliquons la nature, nous comprenons la vie psychique”.
5. “un présentisme tempéré, qui tient compte des travaux d’historiens et de leur incontestable apport.”
6. “prêter aux individus une pleine capacité de réflexion sur l’ordre social qu’ils créent”.
7. “Il ne faut pas oublier que c’est principalement en s’adressant aux sentiments que l’on persuade les hommes”.
8. “L’homme n’a pas que des intérêts; il a aussi des idées et des sentiments”.
9. “C’est la tâche du sociologue que de retrouver les justifications que ceux-ci leur donnent ou leur donneraient en toute bonne foi, même quand ces croyances apparaissent à première vue absurdes ou énigmatiques”.
10. “L’individu se donnerait a posteriori de bonnes raisons d’avoir agi comme il a agi”.
11. “... dans certains cas, l’action est guidée par des principes et non par les conséquences qu’elle risque d’entraîner”.
12. “Derrière les faits, le sociologue doit rechercher la pression des situations, des institutions, du milieu”.
13. “... le principe de légitimité sans lequel les institutions démocratiques elles-mêmes ne pourraient avoir de réalité” .
14. “... le magasin des accessoires sociologiques à côté des autres mythes forgés en sciences humaines” .
15. “peuvent librement se répandre aussi longtemps que ceux qui les adoptent ont un fort désir de les tenir pour vraies et que ce désir est entretenu par l’illusion d’objectivité qui s’attache aux propositions initiales”.
16. “ Le sociologue ne peut pas négliger la place de la liberté sans s’exposer à de sérieux déboires”.
17. “Autrement dit, dans l’action, chacun tient en exemple son propre comportement, à titre de référence pouvant être adoptée par les autres”.
18. “... hypothèse que c’est grâce aux activités des élites dirigeantes que les principes structurels d’une société et leurs dérivés institutionnels peuvent exercer une influence réelle sur la construction et la reproduction des institutions”.
19. “... être utilisés pour rendre compte de situations très diverses, à condition que des précisions convenables leur soient apportées en chaque cas”.
20. “L’élimination des différences de niveau scolaire entre les individus ne contribuerait que faiblement à les rendre plus égaux entre eux une fois adultes”.
21. “Si l’École est devenue la principale, voire la seule accusée du procès de la ‘reproduction’, (...) c’est sans doute essentiellement parce que les représentations collectives n’ont jamais cessé de considérer le système scolaire comme l’élément structurant du système social et l’instrument décisif de la distribution des individus dans la structure sociale”.
22. “Étudier les sciences revient donc à se demander pourquoi les savants s’accordent plutôt sur telle théorie que sur telle autre”. And he adds: “les limites de la raison d’un savant, ce sont les raisons des autres savants”.
23. “expliquer l’ordre social à partir d’un ordre symbolique coupé de son environnement social”.

24. “Le bricolage idéologique est un exercice de persuasion à l’égard de gens intéressés par les paradoxes et les scandales de la vie quotidienne, pour lesquels ils attendent explication et remèdes. Parfois, la persuasion peut se prolonger par un endoctrinement. (...) la persuasion idéologique relève de l’influence, c’est-à-dire d’un type de rapport où l’accent est mis sur la *communauté* d’intérêts et de goûts entre l’influenceur et l’influencé”.
25. “Avec le temps, les idéologies se fatiguent. Elles ne sont pas réfutables; mais elles peuvent cesser d’intéresser. Alors le nombre de leurs fidèles décroît. L’adhésion se refroidit. Invoquer la mode ne nous avance pas beaucoup. (...) La fugacité des modes ne suffit pas à rendre compte de leur déclin”.
26. “(...) dans la majorité des cas, le jeu simultané de l’ensemble des contraintes et motivations des acteurs face à la logique de la gestion publique va déboucher sur une préservation des mythes”.
27. “Tout indique que les croyances peuvent être dépassées pour traiter les situations réelles, mais cette conception suppose que les acteurs disposent de suffisamment d’influence et de capacité critique pour ce faire. Et ce n’est pas toujours le cas”.
28. “Une question lancinante pour le sociologue, c’est de comprendre pourquoi jusqu’ici la sociologie a eu tant de peine à se dégager de l’idéologie”.
29. “Le fait que la science ait une histoire n’implique pas qu’il n’y ait pas de vérités scientifiques. Il en va de même de la morale”.