

Session 1 – Sociological approaches

Benjamin GILBERT

Sciences Po

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53882 (Monday, 3.30 – 5.30 p.m.)

53883 (Monday, 5.40 – 7.40 p.m.)

21/01/2023 – 24/04/2023

Overview of the session

- 1) Presentation of the course and seminars
- 2) Round table discussion
- 3) Allocation of presentations and discussions
- 4) Questions about the lecture and/or the organisation of the seminars
- 5) Presentation of some complementary material for the course
- 6) Overview of the excerpts for tomorrow's introductory lecture

Presentation of the course and seminars

The first half of the course introduces fundamental sociological concepts such as social construction, norms, identity, deviance, and stratification, among others.

In the second half of the course, we turn to topical areas in which these concepts are applied: the economy, the family, religion, social movements, the state and so on.

The course work is organized into three complementary parts: lectures, bonus sessions and seminars. This class constitutes the seminar sessions.

Presentation of the course and seminars

The weekly seminar discussions are designed to help you actively engage with sociological ideas in more depth.

Each week, we will discuss the papers or book chapters that have been assigned and teams of students will be assigned to present (in groups) and discuss one of the assigned readings.

Presentation of the course and seminars

12 sessions of 2 hours each that follow the themes of the lecture in parallel.

Session 1 – Sociological approaches

Session 2 – The Individual in social context

Session 3 – Norms and deviance

Session 4 – Stratification and inequality

Session 5 – Identity and identification

Session 6 – Urban sociology

Session 7 – The family

Midterm exam

Presentation of the course and seminars

Session 8 – Religion

Session 9 – Education

Session 10 – Economic sociology

Session 11 – Society and the state

Session 12 – Movements and revolution

Final exam

Presentation of the course and seminars

The objectives of the seminars are:

- To become familiar with the sociological corpora through the compulsory reading of texts excerpts, presentations and discussions
- To discuss concepts and ask questions about the content of the lectures
- To work collectively on a specific question in sociology through the creation of a poster to share with the rest of the class
- To train for the final exam through continuous preparation (and a trial run)
- To discover resources and aspects of sociology different from texts

Practical information

- Except for specific arrangements, for which you can contact the administration directly or me via mail in short notice, two absences count as an *academic failure*
- Late submission of written work will be penalised unless circumstances justify them
- Computers are allowed in class for academic use, but muted
- Do not hesitate to ask questions, either in class or via mail but please allow up to 48 hours for a reply

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Typical organisation of the sessions

- 1) Group presentation on one of the mandatory excerpts (20 min)
- 2) Discussion by the designated discussants (10-15 min)
- 3) Opening of the discussion to the whole class (15 min)
- 4) Overview of the second mandatory excerpt, review of important points about the theme and time for questions about the lecture or seminars (30min)
- 5) Presentation of methods in sociology, activity, preparation for the final exam or short review of the work carried out in groups on posters (30 min)

Evaluation

A part of continuous assessment – 2/3

- An oral presentation, in groups, on one of the text excerpts – 30%
- A midterm exam – 30%
- A poster presentation – 30%
- A participation grade including the discussion on one of the text excerpts – 10%

A final exam – 1/3

An oral presentation – 20% of the final grade

Lasting roughly 20 minutes (due to time constraints, I will be forced to stop the presentation even if it is not finished at the 25 minutes mark).

In groups of two (except one group of three), with balanced speaking time.

The use of a slideshow is not compulsory, although it is strongly recommended.

Along the oral presentation, students are asked to provide a document including a written introduction (with a concise question), a detailed plan on two levels, a written conclusion (with an opening question), and an indicative bibliography. The document must be sent to the class using Moodle (in .pdf format) before 10 a.m. on the day of the course.

An oral presentation – 20% of the final grade

The required elements in the oral presentations are:

- Putting the extracts back into their contexts (general context of the work, biographical and intellectual trajectory of the author, intellectual and disciplinary landscape of the time, socio-historical conjuncture, etc.)
- Identify the question asked by the author, the hypotheses developed (and their confirmation or not) and the theses defended or attacked
- Take into account and outline the methods used (qualitative, quantitative, mixed) as well as the references used and/or ignored
- Understand the argumentative and stylistic construction of the text

Discussion – part of the 10% commitment note

Lasting between 10 and 15 minutes depending on the length of the presentation

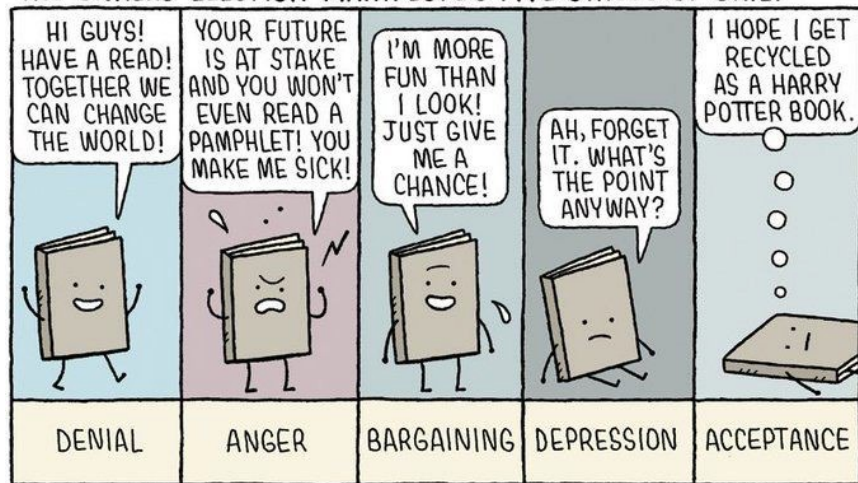
Discussants must form the same groups as the groups for presentations

Use the presentation document and the opening question to launch the discussion based on a series of salient points about the content and form of the presentation

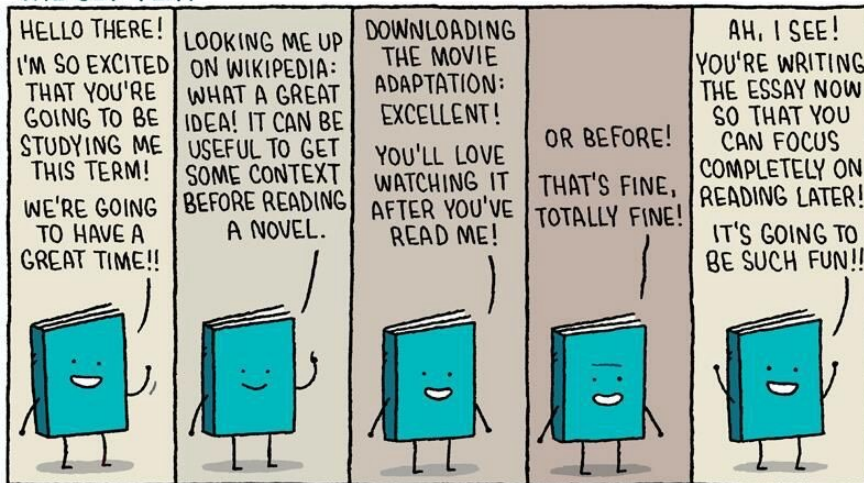
Some questions to ask yourselves when discussing the presentation are: *Are there any blind spots or misunderstandings? Which authors can be used to support or oppose the theses developed in the text? What is posterity of the text? What links are there between the text and the theme of the session? Can we find echoes in current events or cultural works (novels, films, documentaries, paintings, comics, etc.)?*

Having seminars means reading the texts excerpts!

THE UNREAD ELECTION MANIFESTO'S FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF



THE SET TEXT



[@tomgauld](https://twitter.com/tomgauld)

Round table discussion

Introduce yourself in a few words (background, knowledge of sociology).

What words come to mind when talking about sociology?

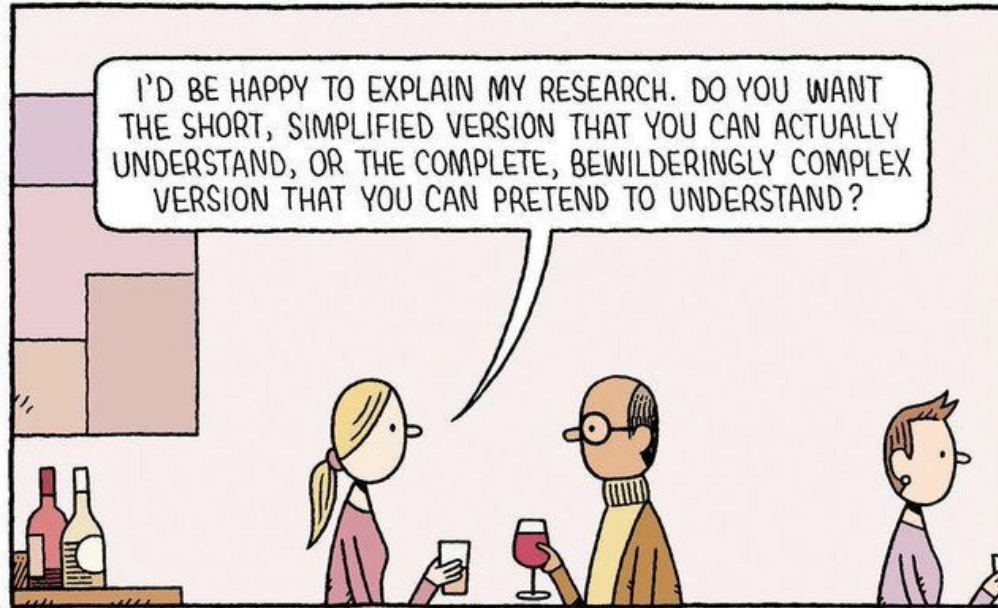
- 53882 (3.30 – 5.30 p.m.) – <https://answergarden.ch/3000580>
- 53883 (5.40 – 7.40 p.m.) – <https://answergarden.ch/3000583>

Round table discussion

Questions for the whole class:

- What do you expect from the Introduction to Sociology seminars?
- Have you ever read any social science work? Was it in sociology?
- Which contemporary representatives of sociology do you know?
- In your opinion, what place does sociology occupy in the public space?
- Can you think of any works (novels, films, documentaries, podcasts, video games, etc.) that could illustrate some sociological themes? If so, which?

Round table discussion



[@tomgauld](https://twitter.com/tomgauld)

Training in both sociology and mathematics

Master in Social Sciences and Data Science, ENSAE Paris

Training in sociology, economics and quantitative approaches to social sciences. Thesis on prison life and the consequences of prisoners' contact with the outside world on the experience of detention and recidivism.

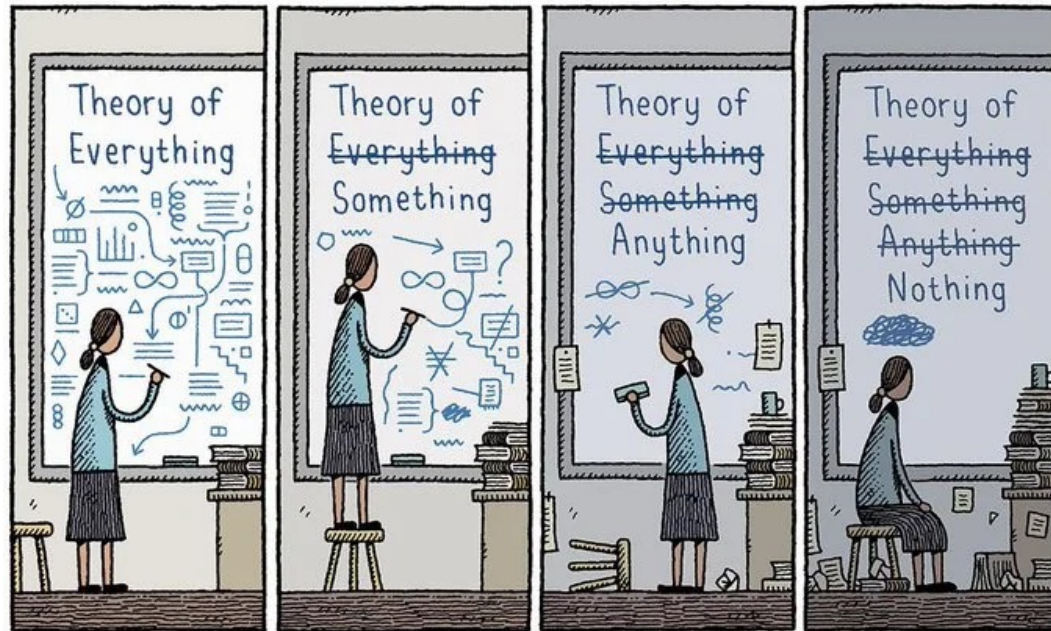
Master in Pure Mathematics, University of Cambridge

Training in pure mathematics and statistics. Thesis on novel high-dimensional approaches to inferring causal relationships from observational data.

Master in Mathematics, Vision and Learning, ENS Paris-Saclay

Training in applied mathematics. Thesis on automatic speech recognition and biases included in cross-languages ASR deep-learning models.

Onwards to a PhD...



[@tomgauld](#)

Observing trends in cultural practices based on digital data

PhD supervised by Sylvain Parasie and Pedro Ramaciotti-Morales at médialab.

My research focuses on reproducing classical results in the sociology of cultural practices with observational data from digital traces (e.g., from social networks) and using the methodological framework developed to study short-term trends in cultural practices and how these interact with the socio-economic status of individuals.

The first main end goal of my PhD is to study how the process of legitimation of tastes happens in the short-term, and the second one is to develop a mathematical framework to study observational data from online interactions.

Allocation of presentations and discussions

| Date | Session | Text excerpt |
|-------|----------------------------------|--|
| 24/01 | Sociological approaches | |
| 31/01 | The individual in social context | Douglas (Mary). Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo. 2003. |
| 07/02 | Norms and deviance | Becker (Howard). Outsiders. 1963. |
| 14/02 | Stratification and inequality | Bourdieu (Pierre). Distinction. 1979 |
| 21/02 | Identity and identification | Brubaker (Rogers). Trans. Gender and Race in an Age of Unsettled Identities. 2016. |
| 07/03 | Urban sociology | Venkatesh (Sudhir) and Levitt (Steven). History and disjuncture in the urban American street gang. 2000. |

Allocation of presentations and discussions

| Date | Session | Text excerpt |
|-------|---------------------------|---|
| 14/03 | The family | Edin (Kathryn) and Kefalas (Maria). Promises I Can Keep: Why poor women put motherhood before marriage. 2005. |
| 21/03 | Religion | Snow (David) and Machalek (Richard). "The convert as a social type". 1976. |
| 28/03 | Education | Khan (Shamus). Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St Paul's School. 2001. |
| 04/04 | Economic sociology | Esping-Andersen (Gøsta). 'Hybrid or Unique?: The Japanese welfare state between Europe and America'. 1997 |
| 11/04 | Society and the state | Dubois (Vincent). The bureaucrat and the poor. Encounters in French Welfare Offices. 1999. |
| 18/04 | Movements and revolutions | McAdam (Douglas). The Biographical Consequences of Activism. 1989. |

Allocation of presentations and discussions

Indicate your preferences for presentations and discussions.

- 53882 (3.30 – 5.30 p.m.)
 - Oral presentations - <https://simpleassign.com/poll/-NM3ld7-Q6yysZDv9NF7>
 - Discussions - <https://simpleassign.com/poll/-NM3nLvIMPRXrvm0cvZP>
- 53883 (5.40 – 7.40 p.m.)
 - Oral presentations - <https://simpleassign.com/poll/-NM3mkCZq9ccb6HETJEK>
 - Discussions - <https://simpleassign.com/poll/-NM3o5Lg3YmEL0oLJKtZ>

Allocation of presentations and discussions

| Date | Oral presentation | Discussion |
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| 24/01 | | |
| 31/01 | | |
| 07/02 | | |
| 14/02 | | |
| 21/02 | | |
| 07/03 | | |

Allocation of presentations and discussions

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| 18/04 | | |

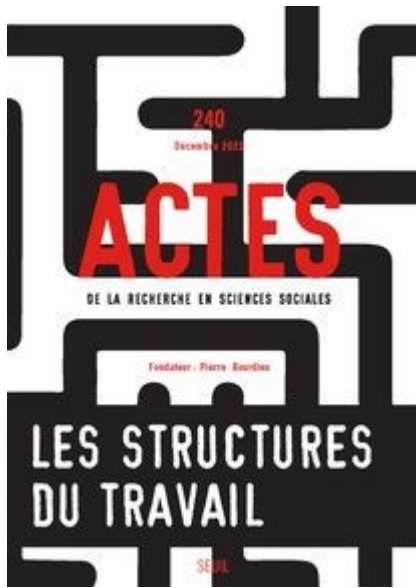
Questions about the lecture and/or the organisation of the seminars

Do you have any questions so far about the seminars?

For future sessions, do not hesitate to send me questions about the lecture or about the seminar sessions before the seminars so that I can answer them in class.

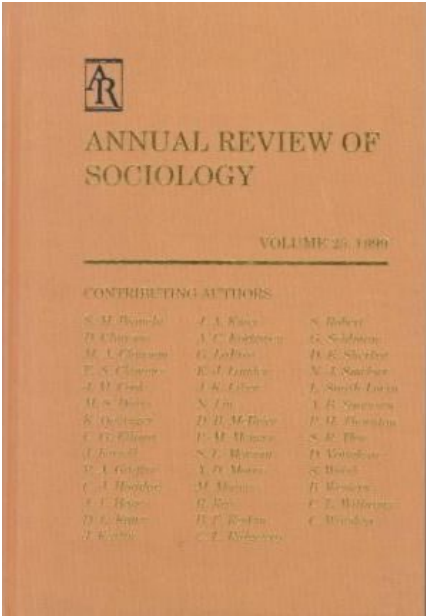
When sending a mail, please try to be as specific as can be, and do not forget to add the name of the course.

Complementary material for the course (in French)

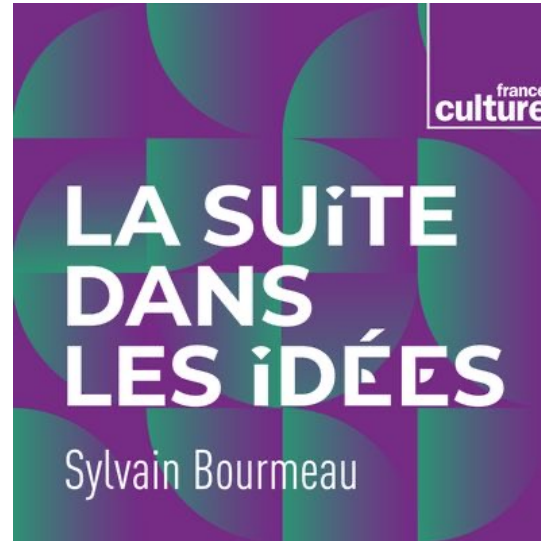


Available on [Cairn.info](https:// Cairn.info)

Complementary material for the course (in English)



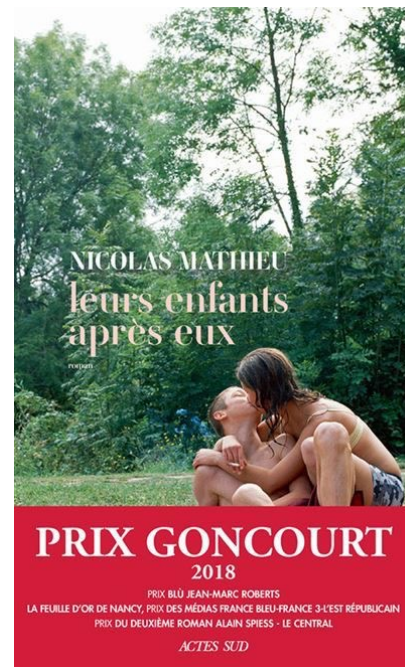
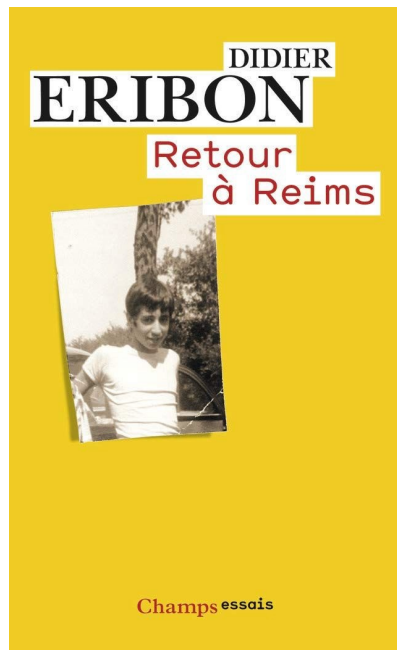
Complementary material for the course (in French)



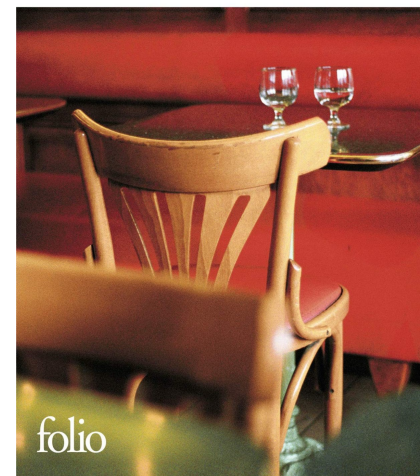
Complementary material for the course (in English)



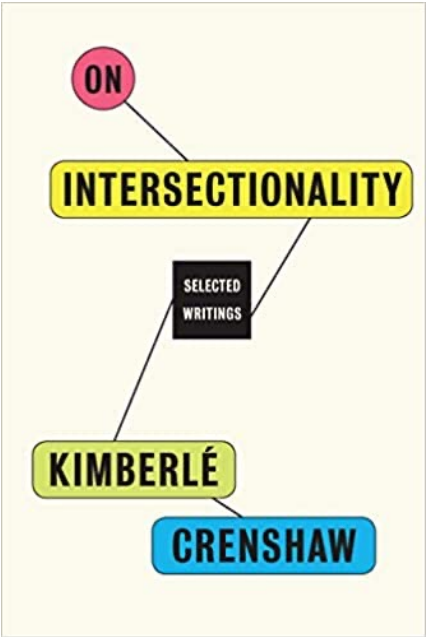
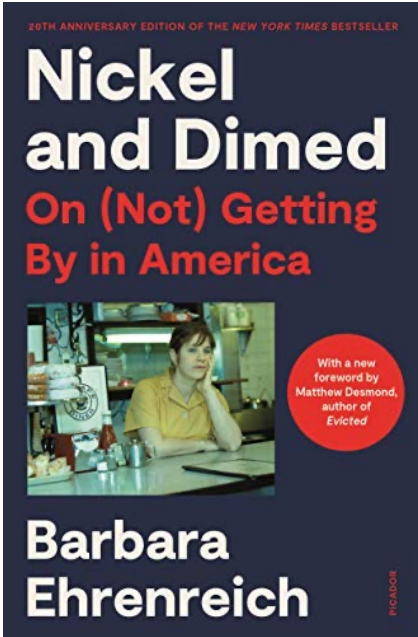
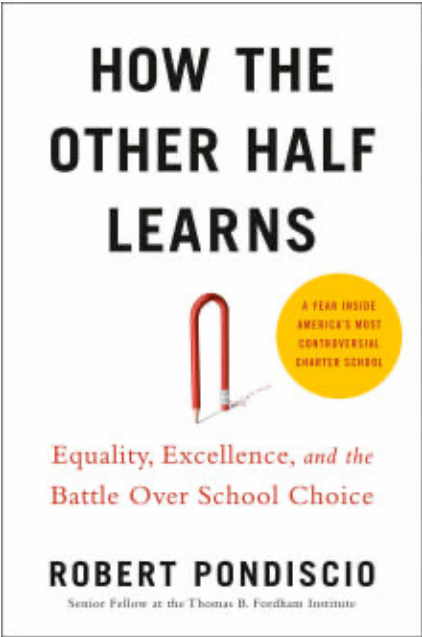
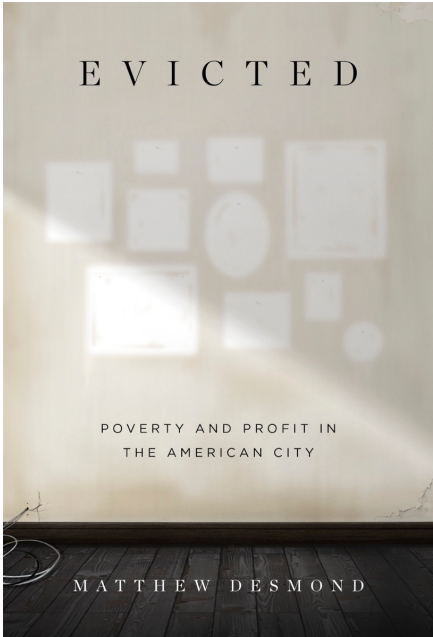
Complementary material for the course (in French)



Annie Ernaux
La place



Complementary material for the course (in English)



Mills (Charles Wright). *The Sociological Imagination*. 1959.

The Sociological Imagination is a classic work in American sociology by Charles Wright Mills (1916-1962) on 'sociological thinking' and the sociological elite.

The book is part of a trilogy with his 1951 work *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*, in which he focuses on the American middle classes, and *The Power Elite* published in 1956, in which he focuses on the American elite.

In the book, Charles Wright Mills examines the role played by scientific elites in transformations of power in the United States and argues for a conception of social science that is neither all-positivist, nor all-technocratic.

Mills (Charles Wright). The Sociological Imagination. 1959.

To support his argument, he begins by distinguishing three main trends in modern sociology and more generally in social sciences:

- the historical approach (inspired by Karl Marx, Max Weber, etc...) whose risk is historicism i.e., relativising knowledge by invoking the fact that everything is historical and relative
- the anthropological approach (inspired by Georg Simmel, etc.), the danger of which is to end up with what he calls the *grand theory* i.e, the fact of interpreting the facts only in the light of a general theory on society, non-empirical, disdainful of the concrete and produced by the sociologist

Mills (Charles Wright). The Sociological Imagination. 1959.

- the study of contemporary social problems (inspired by Herbert Spencer, Frédéric Le Play, etc.), an approach in which sociology runs the risk of falling into what he calls *abstracted empiricism*, a myopic positivism which stops at the facts and in which the sociologist forgets the underlying issues of his study out of methodological concern or hyper-pointillism

In the first part of the book, Charles Wright Mills focuses his attacks on these last two trends (the *grand theory* and the *abstracted empiricism*) on some of their contemporary authors who, in his view, symbolise the main drifts.



Mills (Charles Wright). The Sociological Imagination. 1959.

Mills starts by outlining three types of questions sociologists tend to ask:

- **What is the structure of society?** This question wants to know how different groups in a society are related.
- **What is the place of society in history?** This question wants to figure out how societies change across time and how today's societies are related to societies of the past.
- **What kinds of people does society produce?** This question seeks to describe how people's personalities and moods — their beliefs and values — are shaped by the social world in which they live.

Mills (Charles Wright). The Sociological Imagination. 1959.

He argues that in order to grasp the intricacies of these questions, one should adopt a *sociological imagination*, that is **a way of thinking and asking questions**.

This sociological imagination must be able to shuttle between the personal and historical, that is being able to explain how one's feelings may be produced by something larger than the individual's life. To clarify this connection, Mills makes a distinction between personal "troubles" and public "issues." "Troubles" are a private matter, whereas "issues" belong to a larger social structure. For instance, losing one's job can be deemed as a "trouble" by an individual, whereas the increase in the rate of unemployment belongs to the sphere of public "issues".

Mills (Charles Wright). The Sociological Imagination. 1959.

Mill then turns to the relation between personal values and public issues, and how a society does or does not support an individual's values. For Mills, individuals with values supported by society experience well-being; whereas those with values unsupported experience crisis. But some people may not have any deeply held values to begin with. These people, according to Mills, experience uneasiness.

But before sociology can accomplish this task, Mills wishes to consider some of the ways in which sociology has failed to do so. Sociology has a great “promise” but sometimes this promise has been distorted. These issues, which we have outlined before reading the excerpt, are further developed in the rest of the book.

For next time...

- Read Durkheim, E., 1997[1897]. Egotistical Suicide. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Free Press. pp. 106-110, 123-125, 146-154
- Read Douglas, M., 2003. Chapter 6: Power and Dangers. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Routledge.
- When reading, remember to note the important elements of the text: question asked by the author(s), (hypo)theses of the author(s), methods used, references, writing style, argumentative construction, etc.
- Prepare the presentation and discussion (if concerned)