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*French Connections:  
The Reception of French Sociologists in the USA  
(1970-2012)*

**Abstract**

This paper examines the appropriation of French sociologists by US sociologists over the last four decades. Taking cues from scientometrics and from developments in the sociology of reception, it proposes a blueprint for the study of reception in times of mass digital data. Through this approach, the paper reveals two salient traits. First, out of the 200 authors of the sample, a small minority received considerable attention, while the others are virtually invisible. Second, when cited in the US, French authors are mobilized almost only as social theorists. The article then accounts for this peculiar reception by considering three levels: the intellectual structures of both fields, the local logics at play in the receiving field, and the “multiple lives” of a cited author.

*Keywords:* Citation analysis; French sociologists; Intellectual structures; Reception; Social theory; Scientometrics.

RECENT EUROPEAN DEBATES about the future of the social sciences have witnessed an unexpected convergence<sup>1</sup>. In what has become a highly contentious topic following several waves of bureaucratic reforms, many have turned abroad to argue their position. Whether they wanted to demonstrate the strength or the weakness of a discipline, whether they aimed at showcasing the innovative character of research in a given area or asserting its desperate lack

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of ambition, partisans and critics have increasingly used international reputation as the ultimate yardstick with which to assess the quality of national scholarship<sup>2</sup>.

This unlikely partly consensus is the only point of agreement in an otherwise controversial discussion. Yet while both parties look beyond national borders for insights into the local situation, they rarely look in the same places. Critics of local research often bemoan the lack of internationalization of researchers, their limited visibility in international (most of the time equated with US) journals and at conferences, or their low scores in various quantitative rankings. But partisans of national research have found it easy to respond. In France, for instance, defenders of the French model pointed out that authors as different as Braudel, Mauss, Lévi-Strauss, and Foucault have mass audiences abroad. French sociologists like Bourdieu, Durkheim, and Latour are granted pride of place on college syllabi in many countries. In spite of the internal differences among such writers from the continental standpoint, the success of the so-called “French Theory” [Cusset 2008] in the New World has often been interpreted as verifying the vitality of French social science.

This debate partly persists because of the lack of comprehensive data, which is due to a number of reasons. One is the reluctance of many researchers to address what they see as a purely bureaucratic question. In fact, most scholars know there is little connection between intellectual vitality and foreign dissemination [Gingras 2014]. Another and probably more important reason is the lack of consensus on which methodological approach will effectively surpass a simplistic bibliometric approach. Repeatedly criticized for aggregating all citations together without any distinction between outlets, intensity (is there a deep engagement?) or valence (positive and negative citations are valued in the same way), these methods have also been criticized for being unable to explain the concrete logics of appropriations.

To overcome such difficulties, one could turn to reception studies. In recent decades, scores of studies have analyzed the circulation of scientific texts. In the wake of Jauss’ seminal remarks on the role of local configurations in the reception of texts [1982], many researchers

<sup>2</sup> In most European countries, these metrics are increasingly used by administrators of science at every level, from universities to government cabinets. See for instance a recent report on French Higher Education where intellectual quality is measured by

citations made to nation based researchers in other countries (*Projet de loi de finance, extrait du bleu budgétaire de la mission: recherche et enseignement supérieur*, October 2014: 18-22).

have demonstrated that studies focusing on exchanges between two areas can provide rich insights into the workings of multiple intellectual spaces at once<sup>3</sup>. Although the subfield is now well established, this has not produced a unified methodology. Currently, two alternative approaches seem to dominate the field<sup>4</sup>. A first approach, which we shall call *monographic*, focuses on one (or a limited number of) authors within a given space. Painstakingly tracing the places, the actors, and the outlets through which an author is imported, such studies offer a rich description of the process of import. An example is M. Lamont's study of Derrida, in which the sociologist recounted the introduction of the French philosopher to the US academic sphere [Lamont, 1987]. The article details the process of canonization of the prophet of "deconstructionism" and, comparing its French and US careers in print, proceeds to analyse the role of professional institutions, journals, and media in the canonization of his work. Or again, concentrating on the reception of Weber in post-1945 France, sociologist Michael Pollak demonstrated that the introduction of Max Weber was above all driven by the local controversies within the French intellectual space, and that the interpretation of the few same texts varied drastically according to the identity of their importers [Pollak 1988]. Since then, many have employed this method to investigate authors, concepts, or works, and to cast light on the functioning of one (or a limited number) of fields.

At the other extreme, a second approach focuses on broader patterns of exchange between spaces. Rather than following one author into a single field, it maps out whole flows (of ideas, of books, of authors) between spaces. This is the premise of de Swaan's pioneer study on intellectual exchanges between countries [de Swaan 1993], in which he anatomized the logics of exchange between languages in various regions of the world. The recent works by Sapiro on book translation worldwide also resort to this method. In a vast study that reveals the enduring asymmetrical flows of translation between linguistic areas, she and her colleagues show that France is now relegated to the semi-periphery, while English speaking countries have increased their dominance over the linguistic world-system [Sapiro 2008, 2014]<sup>5</sup>. Given the comprehensive view that works in this vein aim to produce, and noting the similarity with Wallerstein's

<sup>3</sup> See [Hauchecorne 2011] for an overview.

<sup>4</sup> The authors are indebted to Johan Heilbron, who evoked this distinction and provided them with several useful remarks.

<sup>5</sup> In recent articles, Heilbron developed this idea of a world-system of knowledge production. See for instance [Heilbron 2014].

terminology and overall perspective [Wallerstein 1974], we could term this approach *systemic*. Starting from a vast number of items (authors, books, etc.), it aims to describe a general system of exchanges.

Both approaches have produced undeniable results and, in the process, their merits as well as their limits have become well-known. The monographic approach excels at tracking the various sites, agents and forms of reception of authors. It offers a fine-grained depiction of the process of import of an author and helps detail the mechanisms through which authors or ideas get imported. However, it can be applied to only a limited number of cases. The depth of the analysis makes comparison—and hence some forms of generalization—more difficult. What does the reception of Bourdieu teach us about the reception of other French sociologists in a given field? That of Dewey or Peirce about other pragmatists? Such an approach also precludes serious comparison beyond a handful of cases. It is thus weaker when it comes to pointing out similarities, differences, and intertwined dynamics in the process of reception. Because their object is limited and often extra-ordinary, monographic methods can only hint at answers to broader questions.

The situation is almost reversed with the systemic approach. Its scope allows it to reveal the global structure of exchanges between entities (countries, language or intellectual areas), along with their shifting position over time. It also offers powerful means of comparison between these units. However, it has—by design—more trouble carefully identifying particular appropriation processes, locating and distinguishing contributors to reception, or laying bare its mechanisms. What this perspective gains in extension, it loses in depth. To be sure, in many cases, the two approaches are used jointly. But even studies combining them tend to favour one over the other, and often use second-hand literature to supplement primary analysis. The gap between the level of aggregation of the data collected with both approaches—very general for the systemic, very detailed for the monographic—tends to render the connection between the two difficult.

In this paper, we shall employ methodology that steers between these two poles. Rather than look at one author in detail, we shall look at many. By multiplying the number of authors under investigation, the approach is meant to favor generalization, since the multiple case studies may reveal patterns about the receptions of authors from a given group—whether a school of thought, a country, etc. The method thus allows for rigorous within-case comparisons, hence

offering information about the relative impact of an individual's reception onto a larger group. In this sense, our analysis remains monographic insofar as it investigates the reception of one group in a given space, but it conducts that investigation on a larger scale. It therefore both widens the scope of the analysis and locates authors within a larger community. In the end, this approach should not only provide us with a better picture of the reception of sociologists, but will also help uncover the multiple and sometimes interrelated logics of receptions amongst a group.

We demonstrate the utility of this approach, which we call “large N monograph”, by investigating the reception of French sociologists in the United States from 1970 until 2012. We do so primarily using citation data automatically collected using digital methods, some of which were hand-checked to avoid the well-known quality issues that plague the citation databases, and also hand-coded to not limit ourselves to sheer citation numbers (see next section for details). The analysis demonstrates that French sociologists are, in the US, read and used quite differently than their US counterparts. In particular, it shows the very strong appeal for a particular type of work, namely a certain type of theory. The paper then proceeds to account for this peculiar appropriation. In line with the results of reception studies, we find that the uses of French sociologists are highly dependent on the general intellectual structure of the importing space. Yet such general intellectual divergences alone cannot fully explain these results. The article thus turns to the local rationales driving the appropriations of French sociologists. Here, we find that the first-imports of French research depend strongly on a French scholar's being present in the receiving country, either personally or through some champions who facilitate reception. But first reception is not final reception. We eventually argue that to fully capture the visibility of French sociologists in the US, it is necessary to analyze the fate of an author after his or her first reception. We thus probe the multiple lives of French sociologists in the US, an analytic vantage point that helps understand the differential uses of authors.

#### *A note on methods*

Pursuing our middle range approach means gathering reception data on a medium size sample—in this case close to 200 French

sociologists. It also means tracing the impact of those scholars, which can be done through citation analysis. In the following section, we discuss these various tasks.

### *Samples*

In order to constitute a sample of French sociologists to be examined, we first had to define what is a “French sociologist”. Second, in order to have enough information, the sample needed to be either be very large, or to comprise French sociologists who were at risk of being cited in the United States. Constructing a sample purely on the basis of those who had been cited might miss individuals who, in some sense, might have been cited but were not. On the other hand, considering the entire population of French sociologists is nearly impossible, especially if the goal is to consider the various uses of the citations—hence looking at them in details.

With respect to the first of these issues, we adopted a narrow definition. Because we were primarily intent on comparing two fields and assessing the potential differences between their sociological cultures, we adopted a quite restrictive definition of who is a French sociologist. With respect to “Frenchness,” we retained only authors who were primarily affiliated with a French sociology department for most of the period. This led us to exclude from our analysis researchers who trained at some point in France, but spent most of their careers abroad (whom we can hypothesise were resocialized upon their arrival in the new field). With respect to “sociologist-ness,” we omitted authors who, although perhaps regarded as sociologists in US departments, were not considered as such in France. This is particularly true for authors such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Michel de Certeau, and a few others, who are seen as philosophers in France<sup>6</sup>. Finally, we also excluded demography from the sample, a discipline clearly attached to sociology departments in the US. However, due to varying citation practices in this subfield, and because of the stronger internationalization of the French demographers [Gingras et Mosbah-Natanson 2010], their inclusion would have skewed the results.

<sup>6</sup> Once again, the rationale behind this choice is methodological. Trying to assess variations in the practice of sociology across fields, we focused on what was called sociology on both sides of the Atlantic. Including

authors from other disciplines would have rendered such comparison impossible. We nonetheless studied the fate of these authors and have made several references to their work when appropriate in the paper.

The second general issue is that of constructing a sample of French sociologists who might be expected to be cited in the United States. On one side is the tautological approach of considering only French sociologists who were at some point in fact cited. On the other is the impractical approach of considering the entirety of the discipline in France, which would include many figures addressing purely French questions in purely French venues with the aim of an international audience. In order to find a middle way, we augmented a sample originally based on actual citation (the 50 “French sociologists” most cited in the US, for each of our four decades) by adding to that group two additional groups: recipients of major grants for research in the US, and authors of books translated into English<sup>7</sup>.

Finally, the question of the space of reception is far from being inconsequential. Not everyone publishing in a journal based in the US is primarily affiliated with a US institution. But filtering foreigners out to retain only the latter is not a solution, as it would exclude a statistically minor but central form of presence of foreign scholars, namely those who published an article in their own name in the US. In fact, if Bourdieu published a piece in a US journal (or if Durkheim was translated), it is important to keep this information. Thus, we carefully selected the journals under consideration and retained only those we considered to be central to the discipline in the US. We included the three flagship journals (*American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, *Social Forces*), along with the main methods one. We also added one journal per subfield, as they have become central to the field since the 1980s at least. Necessarily subjective, this judgement call about central journals has the merit of not ruling out journals which, although not published outside of the US, matter at every stage of a career in that country, from hiring to promotions to grants. As a consequence, a few journals partly or full edited in Europe (such as *Organization Studies*, *Poetics*, or *Social Studies of Science*) are part of the outlets list eventually retained. Their inclusion, just like the fact that some scholars publishing in purely US journals are foreign-based, is not a major issue as all are likely to be read and discussed by US sociologists—or rather, it is much less of a problem than ruling them out would be. Overall, the sample is made up of 34 journals (see appendix II for details).

<sup>7</sup> Appendix I details the construction of this sample, which ultimately contained close to 200 French sociologists in total.

*Measures*

Finding and analysing the visibility of dozens of scholars over an appreciable time interval is a sizeable task. It has nonetheless become much less daunting due to the increase in digital data, which provides researchers with opportunities they did not have when the two other approaches were first applied. Information about publications, authors, and practices is increasingly available, online or in various databases, and computers can be used to collect, clean and analyse that information. And such data is at one and the same time massive and comprehensive, but also fine-grained and detailed. In many disciplines, this massive availability of data is deeply affecting the way we know [Abbott, 2014]. Although the overall consequences are ambiguous and at present uncertain, this abundance can sometimes provide new empirical insights into a wide array of topics and, in some cases, revisit central questions that had previously been undecidable [Ollion and Boelaert 2015].

Most of the time, we used citation as a proxy for visibility. There are of course many well-known caveats in the use of citations to capture intellectual exchanges [Cole and Cole, 1971]. In fact, there are many reasons for multiplying references: one can do so in an attempt to pre-empt referees, to claim membership to a subgroup, to label certain work as wrong or reprehensible, and even in a purely routine way that has little to do with the acknowledgment of intellectual debt. What is more, the use of citations varies across time, disciplines, and journals. For example, Figure 1 shows that there was a significant rise in the number of references per article over the last four decades. From 18 references in 1970, the median number edged 60 at the dawn of the 2010s. This growth did not overwhelm variations between journals, and some strong variations still exist at the end of the period. In 2012, the *Journal of Mathematical Sociology* had a median number of references of 28; at the other extreme, the *American Journal of Sociology* had 100.

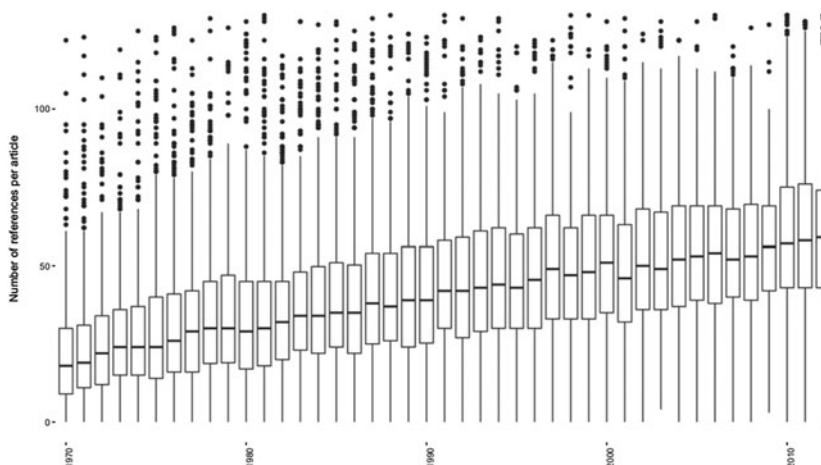
These variations require normalization of the data for intertemporal comparison<sup>8</sup>. They also call for caution when using citation data.

<sup>8</sup> This was done by dividing the number of citations received by an author from our sample by a coefficient that measures the increase in the total number of references, per journal and per year. For instance, if there were 1,000 references in 1970 in the *American Journal of Sociology* and 3,000 in

2012, we counted a citation in 1970 as 1, and a citation in 2012 as 1/3 (so as not to be dependent on the value for the initial year, we actually averaged the first three). Unless mentioned otherwise, all figures evoked in the paper have been “deflated” following this procedure.



FIGURE 1  
*Boxplot distribution of references in US sociology journals, per year  
 (1970-2012)*



The median number of references in U.S. sociology articles was 18 in 1970, 61 in 2012.

The constitution of a precise sample and the careful use of the collected information is crucial in order to obtain interpretable results. In our case, we supplemented this primary material with other sources (reviews, conference archives, publications of translations and of textbooks), or we used this primary data after (manual) recoding. Our raw data on citations come from the Thomson-Reuters Web of Science service. Having identified our sample of French sociologists, we looked for them in 34 prominent journals in US sociology, hoping to limit the risk of bias with respect to where reception should occur. We searched for citations to sociologists from the panel in a total of 33,597 articles, and their reference lists<sup>9</sup>. Of the French sociologists initially selected (slightly under 200), only 171 were cited at least once<sup>10</sup>, in 5,488 different articles.

<sup>9</sup> Note that Web of Science is not a full text database, and thus the search covers only the reference lists of articles.

<sup>10</sup> The difference is due to the absence of a handful of grant recipients and translates who were uncited. As the reader will recall,

the initial sample was partly generated by the citations themselves, but authors who received grants or published translated books. Some of the latter group were in fact cited in our data, some were not.

*The visibility of French sociologists in the United States*

Any description of the presence of French sociologists in the US should first emphasize their relative absence. Out of the 1.53 million references mentioned in the articles examined, only 11,547 were made to an author of our initial sample. However, this rather low percentage (0.75%) of the total mass of citations should not prevent us from seeing the most salient fact, namely the inequality in this reception. There is indeed a major gap between a tiny core of highly cited authors and the vast majority of the others, whose work is barely referenced at all. The two most-cited authors, Durkheim and Bourdieu, reap more than half of the total citations of individuals from the sample. The 10 most cited authors claim 82% of the total, and the first 20 claim 88%. This pattern is also stable over time, and neither the slight reduction in concentration since the 1970s nor the mild increase in the total number of cited authors have affected the overall finding (Figure 2).

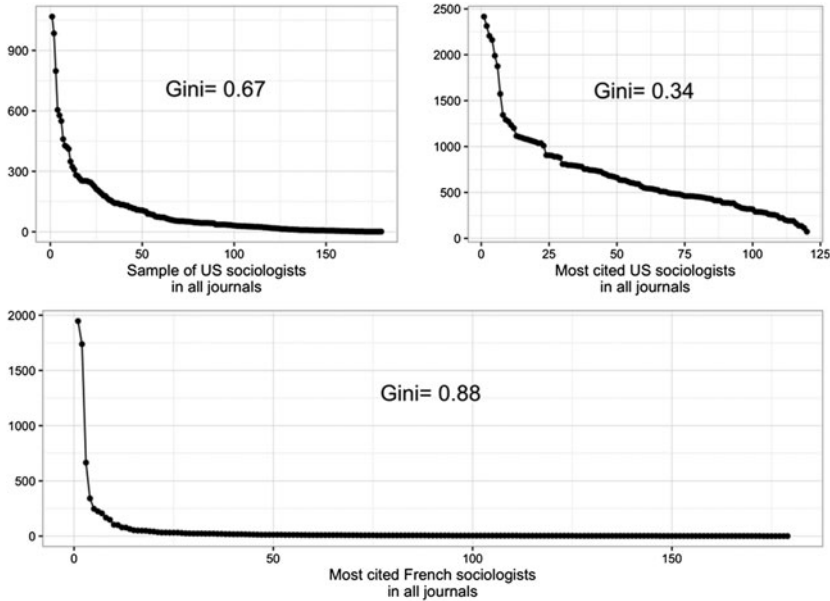
This winner-takes-all situation is quite classic. It has long been demonstrated that both the reception of intellectual production [Lotka 1926] and its contents [Merton 1968] follow such patterns. The situation is nonetheless particularly extreme here, as shown by a comparison between the reception of the French sociologists and the two others. One is a random sample of 200 US authors who published at least once in the journal *Social Forces*, and the other are the 200 most cited US sociologists over the same period<sup>11</sup>. For each group, the Gini indexes of the distributions were measured<sup>12</sup>. The differences are substantial. The index revolves around 0.34 for the top cited US sociologists, and around 0.67 for the *Social Forces* authors. The difference is already quite significant between these two, but a look at the French authors shows yet another pattern: for the latter, the index edges over the already staggeringly high level of 0.8. A transposition to a common use of the Gini index, wealth distributions within countries, is telling. The distribution for the top US sociologists resembles that of incomes in France, while the

<sup>11</sup> The reason for such a choice is that *Social Forces* authors were almost entirely affiliated with a US institution during this period. Given the standing of the journal, they are comparable to the sample of French sociologists careerwise (some are very famous, others are well-established within their

fields, some are outsiders). The list of the 200 most cited authors was compiled using the same method we used for French sociologists (50 most cited sociologists per decade).

<sup>12</sup> Following the method suggested by [Larivière *et al.*, 2010].

FIGURE 2  
*Cumulated distribution of US and French Sociologists (1970-2012)*

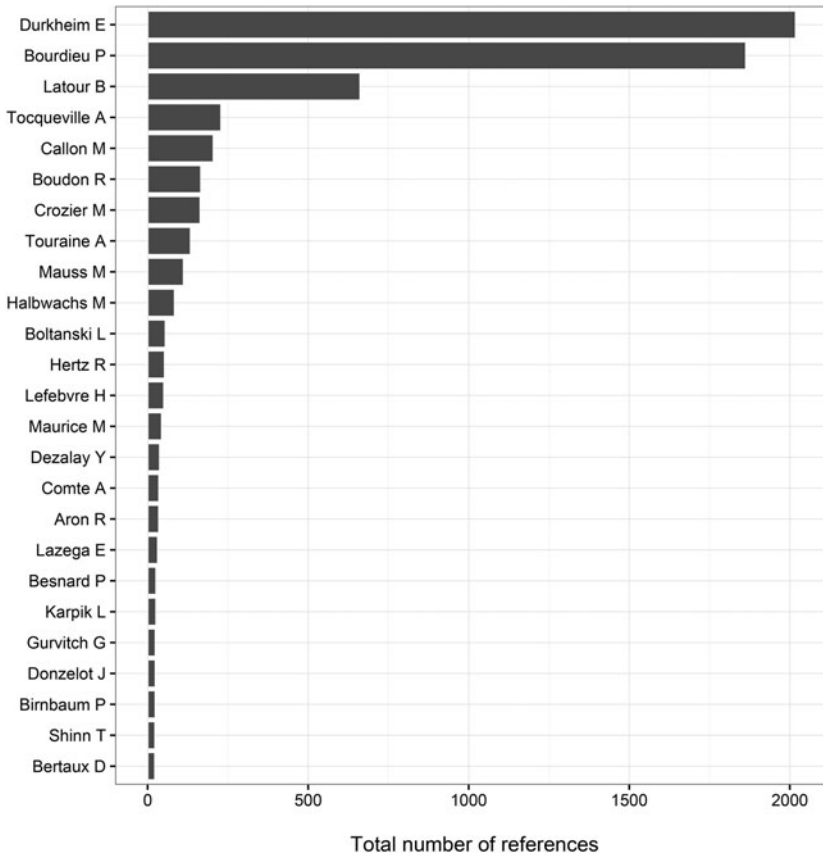


The two most cited French sociologists were each cited over 1,700 times over the period.

one for *Social Forces* authors is akin to the distribution in one of the most unequal countries in the world, Haiti. When it comes to the distribution of citations received by French sociologists in the US, the asymmetry is so stark that there simply is no real equivalent in the world with incomes. In statistical terms, while all three distributions follow a power law, as is often the case with citation data, the parameters of this law are significantly different from one sample to another (it varies less according to the group of journals selected).

Figure 3, which shows the most cited authors, further details this dual reception. Émile Durkheim received 2,018 citations and Pierre Bourdieu 1,863. Bruno Latour received 662 references, which puts him in an intermediate position between the first 2 and the following 6 authors, who each received more than 100 (from 220 for Tocqueville to 112 for Mauss). Beyond this elite group, the numbers drop abruptly. Two dozen authors are cited more than 30 times, the

FIGURE 3  
*Top cited French sociologists (1970-2012)*



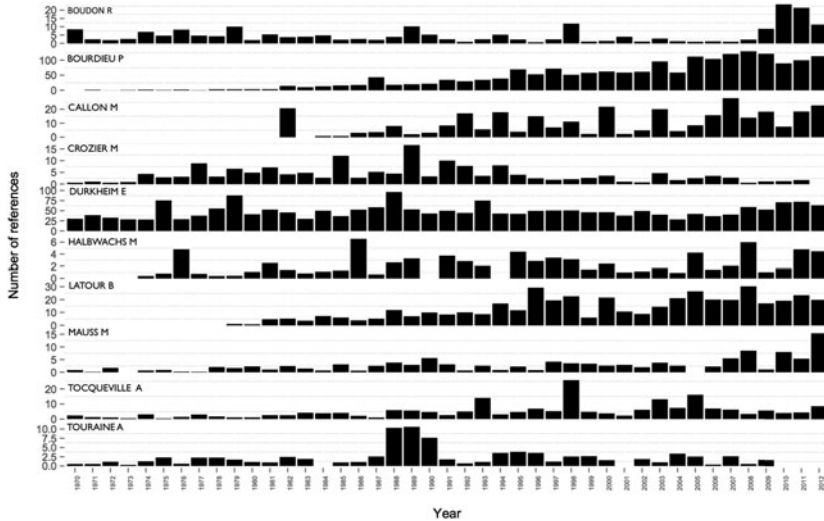
Durkheim received a total of 2,018 citations over the period.

remainder being cited much less often. After that, the numbers plummet towards zero.

The frequency of citation over time also varies greatly from one author to another. Focusing once again on the most cited authors, Figure 4 shows that the reference to Durkheim is stable over time in absolute numbers. This is not the case for Bourdieu, and to a lesser extent for Latour, who both have a strongly positive growth rate. Conversely, Boudon, Crozier and Touraine are now less cited than

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FIGURE 4  
*Top cited sociologists in time (1970-2012)*



previously. The trend is particularly clear for Crozier. References to this author peaked in the 1980s, in the aftermath of the publication of the *Bureaucratic Phenomenon*,<sup>13</sup> and then dropped continuously.

The previous analyses can be refined according to the varying forms of visibility. Table 1 features both the number of journals in which a given author is cited, and the journal that contributes most to his visibility. Some authors are present in all outlets, but do not dominate any. That is the case for Bourdieu and Durkheim. Other are less cited and, more importantly, cited in a more local manner. This is the case for Crozier, 30% of whose references come from *Organization Studies*. This is also the case for Boudon, whose work is mentioned in general journals and in those specialized in the sociology of education, but is absent from 10 other journals. Such authors are not identified with one subfield only, but remain somewhat marked by what originally made them famous. Finally, others are heavily cited but only in a single sphere. This is the case for Callon, whose reception has remained minimal outside of science studies journals. 60% of the

<sup>13</sup> See [Bezes 2014] for further details on this.

references to his work come from one journal, *Social Studies of Science*. Thus, while his work is not greatly cited in the discipline, it is absolutely central to this subfield.

Beyond absolute figures, both the location of references and temporal trends are thus central to capturing the various forms of visibility. But what is more striking is the quasi-total invisibility of a vast majority of authors. Beyond the first decile of authors, the number of references drops. These results may come as a surprise for readers attuned to the French sociological scene itself. A figure as prominent in France as Luc Boltanski has only 55 citations since the 1970s, while Robert Castel has merely 8. Between the two, one finds numerous influential (in France) authors such as Raymond Aron (35) or Pierre Birnbaum (24). Auguste Comte has received 35 references in 40 years. And past the first 30 authors, the citation levels become almost meaningless. Together, the last 30 authors from the sample (who receive only one citation apiece) command only 0.3% of the total

TABLE 1  
Most cited sociologists and the journals that cite them most (1970-2012)

	<b>% of journals citing this author</b>	<b>Journal that most cites this author</b>	<b>% of the author's total citations coming from this journal</b>
Durkheim	100	<i>Am Journal of Sociology</i>	11.4
Bourdieu	97	<i>Theory and Society</i>	15.4
Tocqueville	94	<i>Am Soc Rev</i>	11.8
Latour	82	<i>Soc Studies Sci</i>	56.4
Mauss	82	<i>Comp Studies in Hist and Soc</i>	14.0
Touraine	79	<i>Theory and Society</i>	11.7
Crozier	79	<i>Org Studies</i>	27.3
Boudon	74	<i>Am Journal of Sociology</i>	23.6
Halbwachs	70	<i>Social Forces</i>	15.5
Callon	59	<i>Soc Studies Sci</i>	59.5

citations of French authors. It is this highly-skewed visibility of French sociologists in US sociology that the following sections detail and analyze. We turn first to intellectual cultures for an explanation.

*The intellectual cultures of French and American sociologies*

*A tale of two sociologies*

Upon visiting what was then the dominant department of sociology in the United States, Chicago, French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs was bewildered by his colleagues. He described them as “innovative” but was sceptical about their research practices and theories. After a meeting with Park and Burgess, the department’s two leading figures, he declared that he found them “funnier than Mark Twain, but not really rigorous.”<sup>14</sup> In both countries, much has changed since, but perhaps not this transatlantic scepticism. In contrast to certain fields that became more homogeneous over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>15</sup>, sociology remains a discipline with large international variations, and these differences are key to understanding the skewed reception of French sociologists in the US.

Language is of course one aspect of this phenomenon. Recent studies have pointed to the role played by it in the (lack of) communication between fields. Based on a study of the two main journals in the discipline, Heilbron showed for instance that scholarship that is not written or translated into English remains invisible in US sociology [Heilbron 2009: 353 *et seq.*]. Yet, while important, language is only one barrier that prevents the import of non-English speakers to US sociology. Lack of familiarity with the receiving field is also crucial. In particular, the specific epistemological and intellectual frames which dominate each field play a much greater role. Countless studies by French scholars, at times already known in the US, did not receive any attention due to such a mismatch between their content and the expectation of their foreign readers. Alain Touraine’s *La Voix et le Regard* [1978] is an example. Despite the book’s rapid translation

<sup>14</sup> Cited in [Marcel 1999: 49 *et seq.*].

<sup>15</sup> See for instance Fourcade on economists [Fourcade 2006], but the same holds

true to a certain extent for political science and for anthropology.

(only three years after its original publication in French, relatively fast for the social sciences<sup>16</sup>) and despite the already established reputation of its author, the book barely passed the 30 references mark overall. Originally written in French and—much more importantly—primarily oriented towards French debates, the book never received much attention in the US.

Variations in the conventions of research and research presentation drive these incomprehensions. Studying US and Mexican sociologies, Gabriel Abend has demonstrated that the role granted to empirical materials, the rules of evidence, and the uses of theory have little in common across the two countries [2008]. In a recent paper, he and his colleagues also emphasized the different approaches to causality in the two countries [Abend, Petre and Sauders, 2013]. Taken together, these traits produced regular misunderstandings between the two scholarly communities. Although the specifics are different, the same holds true between French and US sociologies. Looking at the format of the articles in flagship journals of both countries in the 1990s, Pontille demonstrated that that they bore little resemblance [Pontille, 2003]: while over half of the US articles resorted to some version of the IMRAD model (Introduction, Data and Methods, Results, and Discussion), only 3% of the French articles did. The numbers are even higher in recent years. In the *American Sociological Review* in the 2000s, over 70% of the articles used this exact presentation, and over 80% followed a somewhat similar outline, a sharp increase from the 1950s when these figure revolved around 20% and 30% respectively [Christin and Ollion, 2012: 8].

This difference is not purely formal. The variation is actually indicative of variations in the ways of doing social research, from the initial research design to the presentation of findings. More often than their French counterparts, American articles are focused on the demonstration of a fact—and only one. Explicitly stated in the introduction of the paper, this fact can even be presented under the (natural) scientific guise of a formal hypothesis, which is then demonstrated following a conspicuous protocol that gives its specific form to the article. The empirical basis is presented at length, and so are the methods used to reach the findings. Such an emphasis on “data and methods” is often regarded as excessive by French sociologists, who are most likely to present their empirical material throughout the

<sup>16</sup> See [Hauchecorne 2012] for measures and analyses of the duration between publication and translation in the social sciences.



entire paper, as they unfold their arguments—which are rarely limited to a single thesis.<sup>17</sup>

The more idiographic style of the French does not mean that French sociologists shy away from theory, nor that they consider cumulativeness an impossible enterprise. But the way they do so is often orthogonal to the practices of their US colleagues. Although sociologists in both countries value empirics, pay attention to the establishment of proof, and aim to generalize from their empirical knowledge, they do so in their own manner, and do not see much value in the scientific methods of their foreign colleagues. In other words, the adoption since the late 1960s of a rhetoric of research that closely resembles that of the natural sciences in much of US sociology does not square well with many of the French ways of “doing science.”<sup>18</sup>

The research conventions that drive both communities are not the only factor at stake. Intellectual spaces breed their own research questions. They tackle similar topics with different timings and rhetorics, according to local factors. That many US sociologists have become infatuated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu since 2000 is evidence of this. The author of *Distinction* is arguably the most influential sociologist of the last four decades in France. Yet, while his insights are ubiquitous, they are developed in a less polemical style than they used to be. Bourdieu is now widely taught in sociological curricula everywhere in France where yesterday’s foes now engage with his work, trying to supplement it rather than to oppose it in full<sup>19</sup>. In other words, he is now canonized in his home country. The situation is quite different in the US, where his work remains the object of permanent discussion, as shown by the steep rise in citation data presented in Figure 4 (see also [Sallaz and Zavisca 2007]). Some of these citations bespeak acceptance, others scepticism. One could multiply such examples of debates that have been put to rest in one country (at least for a time) while they are foci of attention in another: the revival of ethnography in the US at the turn of the 2000s (initiated in France in the 1980s), the growing French interest in the sociology of social movements over the last 15 years (while the renewal started in the

<sup>17</sup> Of course, in return, American scholars often find French empirical arguments to be confused and their conclusions to be insufficiently supported by rigorous argument. For an historical analysis of the emergence of the standard American article form, see [Abbott and Barman 1997].

<sup>18</sup> See [Ollion 2011] for more details about contemporary US sociology, and [Abbott

1999] on the historical transformations of the American discipline. Some of this international difference reflects the almost complete separation of US sociology from any serious political role, in contrast with the situation in France.

<sup>19</sup> See for instance the recent publications of once first critic Luc Boltanski [Boltanski 2008].

US more than three decades ago). The list is long, but the lesson is clear: in countries with strong sociological traditions<sup>20</sup>, trending methods and topics are often quite different. Even when they are shared, the terms of a given debate may only partially overlap.

### *The importance of theory*

An immense majority of France-based sociologists thus remain invisible to their US colleagues. Data about the impact of French social scientific books translated from French to English<sup>21</sup> emphasize this statement: only a few social scientists have their work actively discussed within the academic field, but those who do are often very visible. They are also of a particular type. If the volume of citations does not tell us much about what is borrowed exactly, the list of the most cited authors provides a clue about what is sought after amongst French sociologists. To take only the top three, Bourdieu, Durkheim and Latour are all primarily known for their theoretical work, particularly in the United States. The type of works cited also shows this same affinity for the “theoretical” in any given French authors. Of all the citations to Touraine, less than five mention his work on industrial relations. Out of the 200 articles that cite Crozier, only a handful refers to his monograph on office workers or to his essays on French society (e.g., *The Stalled Society*, 1971). Even his pamphlet on the US, whose title could have lured many readers (*The Trouble with America*, 1980), did not receive much attention. Rather, almost 170 references have been made to the *Bureaucratic Phenomenon*. To be sure, this early book combines case studies and conceptual developments, but most references make no mention of a given page. Rather, they evoke the general theoretical arguments of the book.

In order to better assess this phenomenon, we hand-coded a random sample of over 2,000 citations included in our original database. References were sorted into three main categories: “empirical” (the reference points towards empirical data), “theoretical” (it refers to a concept, a general or transposable statement, a system), or “referential” (the reference is not specifically made to a concept or to an idea, but pertains to the author or his system more broadly).<sup>22</sup> The results are quite telling (Table 2). Among the

<sup>20</sup> See [Heilbron 2008] for a reflection on this notion.

<sup>21</sup> The list was retrieved from the UNESCO database. See Appendix 1 for details.

<sup>22</sup> In each group, sub-categories were distinguished for finer grained analyses.

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TABLE 2  
Types of references to the most cited authors (1970-2009)  
(%, not standardized)

	<b>Empirical</b>	<b>Theoretical</b>	<b>Referential</b>	<b>T + R</b>
Callon	1.0	69.8	29.2	99.0
Latour	1.8	68.2	31.6	98.2
Touraine	3.2	45.3	51.6	96.9
Bourdieu	4.1	76.7	19.3	96.0
Halbwachs	3.5	51.8	44.7	96.5
Durkheim	4.2	65.8	30.0	95.8
Boudon	10.4	48.8	40.8	89.6
Tocqueville	17.2	49.5	33.3	82.8
Crozier	17.7	47.6	34.7	82.3
<i>US based authors</i>	<i>17.7</i>	<i>69.1</i>	<i>13.2</i>	<i>82.3</i>

top 10 cited authors, the share of references made to empirical work is extremely limited: it almost never exceeds 20%. By contrast, references to theoretical statements are above the 50% mark in most cases. This figure is even higher when we add the last category (referential). Although we first kept it distinct, it indicates a reference to the theoretical system of an author. The comparison with US-based authors<sup>23</sup> confirms this over-representation of French authors for theoretical reasons, since only 82.3% of the references to this control group can be classified as theoretical or referential, whereas the figure hovers around 95% for French authors. Looking at the details of the references sheds light on Crozier and Tocqueville's specific position. Indeed, both are treated by US sociologists as historians—of 1960s France for the former, and of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the latter.

Here lies the answer to the enigma discussed above. In spite of the persistently orthogonal ways of doing sociology in both countries, a few French scholars are cited—but almost entirely due to their status as “theorists.” In other words, they are read and thought of as producers of general conceptual systems, an activity from which US

<sup>23</sup> To create this comparison group, we looked at the reference which came immediately after one to a French sociologist we had chosen to hand-code. If the author was US

based, we coded it. Otherwise, we continued until we reached a reference matching our criterion.

sociologists have largely retreated over the last four decades. Thus, French—and as we shall soon see, European—sociologists fill up a spot left vacant by their US counterparts. In fact, up until the 1960s, the practice of theory (understood as system-building) was a common activity amongst American sociologists. Goffman, Mills, or Gouldner are just a few names of researchers whose goal was to produce a global, consistent discourse about the social world. No author illustrates this trend better than Talcott Parsons. A towering figure in the discipline since the 1930s, the sociologist developed an imposing theoretical system. For more than four decades, he disseminated his “action theory” widely, partly due to the central position he occupied at Harvard. However, Parsons’ hegemony started to crumble as of the 1960s and, within a decade, his influence had nearly vanished. The civil rights movement, the campus protests and the arrival of a new generation dramatically changed the face of the discipline [Calhoun and van Antwerpen 2007]. Topics and methods shifted as a new epistemological model gained momentum. As sociologists moved to produce middle-range theories, grand generalizations or even system-building were increasingly considered with suspicion. Americans sociologists would rapidly retreat from this type of theory making. Nowadays, Parsons is cited in two dozen papers a year in our sample, a far cry from the over 70 citations in the early 1970s, at a time when his reputation was already on the wane.

Ironically, an aspect of Parsons’ legacy which did not disappear entirely may be the idea that theory is a European business.<sup>24</sup> Not only French sociologists, but more generally Europe-based authors are seen as potential theorists. In the list of the 50 most cited sociologists since 2003, Giddens (488 articles) or Habermas (187) rank high, next to Latour (336) and Bourdieu (955), but also along with Durkheim (510), Weber (592), and Simmel (245). The other so-called French theorists are also present. Foucault is also amongst the most cited (470), as he became prominent in US Sociology in the 1990s and has been cited in 30 pieces a year ever since. Derrida, Baudrillard and Deleuze are cited in around 40 pieces each during the whole period, Guattari and de Certeau less so.

But Table 3 further illustrates the difference between the US production and the imported European sociologists. Besides Goffman, whose concepts were based on diverse topics that were widely

<sup>24</sup> See on this point [Abbott 1999: ch. 5] and [Lizardo 2014].

applied, most of the other US-affiliated sociologists in this list are known for works in a subfield, and for concepts first meant to address its questions. By contrast, the European authors are best known for—and probably imported because of—their general theoretical ambitions. Thus, for example, Sampson’s most influential citation is an article proposing the concept of collective efficacy in the urban and criminological literatures. DiMaggio is most famous for two articles launching the idea of “new institutionalism” in organization studies, while Portes is the leader of a school of migration studies. Even Tilly was mainly a figure in historical and conflict sociology rather than a general theorist. By contrast, Bourdieu, Weber, and Durkheim are all viewed in the US as general theorists.

This explanation based on the different types of sociology produced also accounts for the apparent counter-example that the presence of Raymond Boudon constitutes. As noted earlier, the French promoter of methodological individualism stands in an intermediary position when it comes to the type of citations he receives, as only 90% can be classified as theoretical. But from his early works on, the sociologist was part of a largely internationalized group (stratification and mobility studies). Structured around the “Research Committee on Social Stratification” of the

TABLE 3  
Most cited authors in US Sociology (2003–2012)  
(citing articles, not standardized)

<b>Name</b>	<b>Number of citing articles</b>
Bourdieu P.	955
McAdam D.	772
Di Maggio P.	723
Goffman E.	710
Coleman J.	686
Sampson R.	632
Massey D.	594
Weber M.	592
Allison P.	575
Granovetter M.	563

International Sociological Association (RC 28), the scholars in these groups shared a set of common principles which meant that the French studies were not significantly different from those being developed abroad at that time. Focusing on methodology, he was also in a constant conversation with his US colleagues: Heilbron [2015] recalls that he was Lazarsfeld's assistant during the latter's two stays in Paris in the 1960s, and that the two scholars later edited several volumes together. His significant visibility throughout the period is thus less a matter of a preference for diversity amongst US sociologists as it is the consequence of a strong intellectual and personal proximity with some of them—which as we shall see is a key factor for reception.

It is worth pondering these figures, which are not only striking in the differences they reveal, but also somewhat counter-intuitive. Indeed, in classic accounts of the division of international academic labour, intellectual centres tend to control the production of what is regarded as the most valuable good, which is often equated to “theory”. By contrast, the peripheries borrow from them and are left with the collection of empirical data [Keim 2010]. This is clearly not the case here, as foreign theorists are massively imported into the dominant centre of production. Whether this fact indicates a flaw in the model or simply divergent conceptions of what is the legitimate good (thus pointing to a transformation of the legitimate ways of “doing theory” in the US) is beyond the scope of this paper. But it points to yet another intellectual difference between the two spaces, which has not faded away in spite of the recent pushes towards internationalization<sup>25</sup>.

### *Means of visibility*

Variations in the topics and in the ways of doing sociology across countries certainly account for the invisibility of the majority of French sociologists and for the strong visibility of a few of them.

<sup>25</sup> That nation is not necessarily the proper unit of analysis has been well demonstrated by various researches. While there is undeniably some truth to this insight, the stimulating criticism of “national methodologism” should not replace a thorough empirical assessment of the relevance of the nation as a unit of analysis. Due to the still

important role played by states in the funding of the disciplines, and because research agendas are, at least in certain disciplines, still determined by local social and political issues, national boundaries can very well overlap with intellectual ones in the social sciences [UNESCO 2010].

A consequence of the general differences between fields, this dual reception of French sociologists cannot however be fully explained by these structural factors. Even for those authors more likely to be read and discussed (social theorists, for example), strong reception is not certain. While a necessary condition, translation into English and “doing theory” are not sufficient. Other elements come into play. Chief amongst these seem to be local presence, whether in person or through the mediation of others.

### *Being present*

Being present personally helps in channelling the reception, by adapting the texts to the forms and debates of the field of reception. Out of the 10 most cited authors in our sample, 8 made long stays in the US. The two others (Mauss and Durkheim) were avid readers of the sociology produced abroad,<sup>26</sup> and they kept abreast of the developments of research there [Lukes 1973]. For an author to be read and cited, being personally present seems to be central. There are many reasons why presence may matter for reception. By spending time and creating bonds, an author increases the likelihood of being known by students and colleagues, and hence of being cited and discussed. Presence in the reception country is also—and probably even more—important because it helps an author to be attuned to the salient questions and forms of writing of the reception field.

That presence matters is well-illustrated by the differential fortunes of two books by Michel Crozier. As mentioned above, *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* (1964) is the author’s most cited text in the US with 167 articles referencing it, and 154 references being to a text in English. By contrast, *Actors and Systems* (1977) co-authored with Franco-Austrian sociologist Erhard Friedberg was cited in a total of 27 articles, with 16 of them being references to the French text, often by a French author.

The difference has little to do with factors such as reputation (Crozier was already well-established at the time of the second work), language (both books were published quasi-simultaneously in both languages), or even theory (which is made more explicit in the second

<sup>26</sup> According to [Besnard 1979: 277], Durkheim wrote over 500 book reviews (all formats considered), out of the 5000 published by the team of the *Année Sociologique* under his editorship.

text). Rather, the difference lies in the position occupied by Crozier within the academic field, and in his engagement with the work of his US colleagues. A recently published biography recalls that *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* was the cross-product of intense discussions between the young researcher and his Harvard and Stanford counterparts [Chaubet 2014]. While in the US (he spent a year in the United States in 1959), organizational sociology was abuzz with debates—in some of which Crozier took an active role. The book bears the mark of this presence: in it, Crozier made more than passing references to the classics of the emerging field. He discussed at length the theories of authors like Herbert Simon (*Administrative Behavior*, 1947), Philip Selznick (*TVA and the Grass Roots*, 1949), Alvin Gouldner (*Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy*, 1954) and Peter Blau (*The Dynamics of Bureaucracy*, 1955) amongst others. In other words, US sociologists of organizations constituted the “invisible college” [Crane 1972] of his peers. Theoretically elaborated in a debate with US colleagues, the book was also born there, as it was published by the University of Chicago Press a few months before it appeared in French.

The situation was quite different at the time of the publication of the second book. Deeply involved in various consulting activities in France, Crozier was less present in the US. Moreover, his interlocutors had changed. The academics of the late 1950s had been replaced by a mixed group of think tankers, bureaucrats, public intellectuals, and planning executives. Even Crozier’s academic affiliations shifted over time, moving progressively from East Coast elite universities to less prestigious, West Coast ones<sup>27</sup>. This partial retreat from academia, and certainly from the US scene, happened at a time when the old organizational sociology was being reinvented by a group of relatively young US based scholars, making Crozier’s own insights even more distant from those of his colleagues.

### *Being represented*

As well as personal, repeated presence, there are other ways of having one’s work discussed. Works can be disseminated through the mediation of another researcher. Most of these importers are primarily inserted in the field of reception. But some can also originate from the

<sup>27</sup> See [Chaubet 2014] on this shift.



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TABLE 4  
Key data on the distribution of references to French sociologists  
(standardized data)

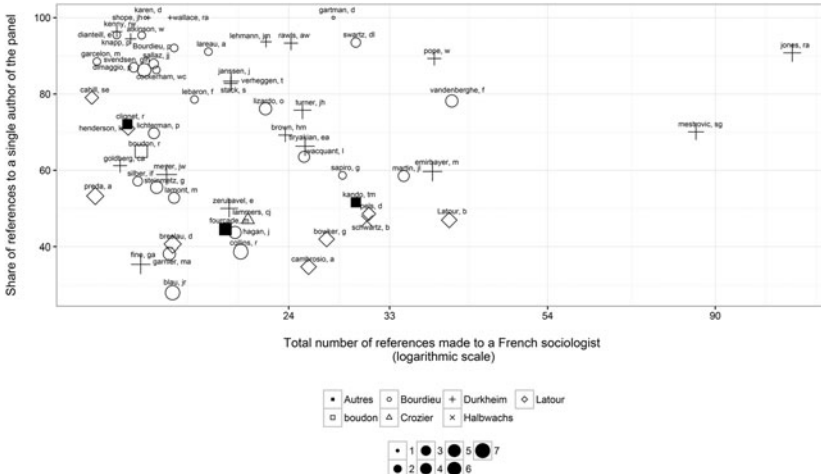
Total number of articles	7,404
Total number of references to a French sociologist	9,493
Total number of citing authors	5,815
Median number of references by author	0.82
Mean number of references, by author	1.6
Number of references per author (90 <sup>th</sup> percentile)	3.26
Number of references by author (99 <sup>th</sup> percentile)	13.0
Number of authors in 99 <sup>th</sup> percentile (and % of total references)	60 (15%)

same field as the author cited (and should therefore be regarded as “exporters”)<sup>28</sup>, or even come from yet another country. Once again, the mass of data at hand offers insights into the reception of authors, this time by looking at its agents. As Table 4 shows, the 7,404 articles citing a French sociologist from the initial sample were written by 5,815 authors. Most of the latter only rarely cite French authors. Only at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile does this figure exceed 3. The contrast is stark with the authors in the highest percentile (99<sup>th</sup>), who made at least 13 references to a French sociologist within our sample. Zooming in on these heavy consumers of French sociology shows the multiple origins of these agents of circulation. The majority of these 60 persons are US sociologists, active or retired. One can also find French sociologists (who may or may not be included in our sample). Authors writing in adjacent fields (like Cambrosio, a Canadian science studies scholar) make up the rest of the list.

Origins and affiliations are not the only principles according to which these authors differ. They are also very different in terms of age and generation, gender, or field of study. In spite of this undeniable diversity, all have one trait in common: they tend to cite extensively one—and most of the time only one—author from the sample. In other words, those authors in US journals who heavily cite French sociologists often cite only one of them. Figure 5 is a compelling representation of this. The X-axis displays the total number of

<sup>28</sup> We are grateful to M. Hauchecorne who suggested this distinction.

FIGURE 5  
*Top citers and their “champion”*



In her 3 articles citing a French sociologist, A. Rawls made 24 references to a French sociologist of the panel, 93% of which went to Durkheim.

citations made by an author to any sociologist in the sample. The Y-axis denotes the share of these references that go to a single author of the sample. It ranges between 28% and 100%. The size of the author mark indicates the number of articles a US author wrote that cite a French sociologist from our sample. The shape of the author mark indicates the identity of the French sociologist cited. Thus, in his 5 articles mentioning a French sociologist from the sample, Robert Jones made 114 references to their work, 90% of which went to Durkheim.

Figure 5 tells us a story that is only partly predictable. Unsurprisingly, French sociologists from the sample who happened to publish in US journals tend to cite French sociology, and their own work in the first place. Bourdieu, Boudon and, to a lesser extent Latour<sup>29</sup>, are no exception to this. But, at the other end of the list, those who do not cite predominantly only one famous French sociologist are a small minority. One can find only three authors in

<sup>29</sup> Partly because some of his citations went to his long time intellectual partner, Michel Callon.

this case, and all tend to have a good reason for being more diverse than their peers. Some are French, such as Marion Fourcade—a France and US—trained scholar now working in the United States. One is an American partly raised in France.

All of the others tend to cite heavily one—and only one—of the top cited authors. Whether it is Durkheim, Bourdieu, Latour, or even Halbwachs, all have their favourite. Several generations overlap on the graph, without a noticeable change in this pattern. Promoters of Durkheim (Tiryakian or Pope) wrote mostly before the 1990s, whereas the reverse is true for Bourdieu (Gartman, Swartz). Some wrote a review article on a topic involving this author (small size author mark), others mentioned “their” sociologist in many articles (larger author mark). Some specialize in social theory (Vandenbergh), others put the concepts to use on empirical cases (Di Maggio). But for the most part, all of them focus on only one author.

The lessons from this graph are several. It first shows clearly that for most of these “heavy citers”, there is no such thing as “French sociology.” Rather, there is *a* French sociologist, whom they extensively read and cite, without paying much attention to the rest of the intellectual field from which that sociologist came. This import process also started out early for most of the heavy citers. A look at those authors who dedicated a whole book to a French sociologist confirms this: R. Jenkins and D. Robbins were respectively 38 and 44 at the time of their first book on Bourdieu, C. Hamlin was 33 when she published her book on Boudon. The same holds true for most of those who furthered the reception of a particular author from the sample: the importing of that author came early in their career. In a transfer of academic capital, these heavy citers resorted to external resources to modify the intellectual and institutional balance of power within their own intellectual fields.

### *The Case of Pierre Bourdieu*

The complex interweaving of two academic life courses—that of a French sociologist and that of a US-affiliated author—is certainly best illustrated by the Bourdieu/Wacquant pair. French born and educated, Loïc Wacquant moved to the US in the mid 1980s to start his PhD studies in Chicago on the recommendation of Pierre Bourdieu, whom he had met a few years earlier. At Chicago,

Wacquant was soon active in disseminating his mentor's ideas. He was also instrumental in having him invited for several long-term stays at the university, where Bourdieu had the chance to exchange with students and faculty alike. Wacquant also maintained a regular correspondence with the professor at the College de France, in which he lengthily described the US field, and advised him on various points regarding the reception of his work<sup>30</sup>.

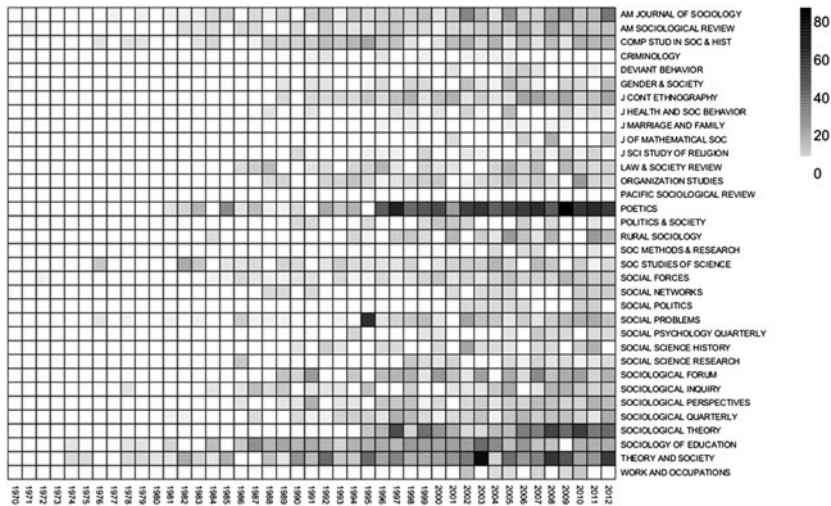
The role played by Wacquant is most visible when one looks at *Invitation to a Reflexive Sociology*, the book he co-authored with Bourdieu and meant to introduce the latter's theoretical system to the US. This goal is stated explicitly in the first section of the text, a long presentation by Wacquant in which he locates Bourdieu's theory within classic and contemporary (US) debates. The second part, a written dialogue in which Bourdieu replies to some criticisms, takes most of its examples from the Anglo-American literature. That the book was geared towards the US market in an attempt to establish Bourdieu as one of the world's leading sociologists is further evidenced by the history of its making. Originally designed as an introduction for foreign readers, the book was meant to be published at the University of Chicago Press only. Only later was it translated into French, and only variations in publication time account for the quasi-synchronous publication in both countries.

The book participated in the transformation of Bourdieu's figure in the US. In a detailed paper, G. Sapiro and M. Bustamante demonstrated the role of pamphlets and translations in the creation of Bourdieu as a public intellectual in the US at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century [Sapiro and Bustamante 2009]. This shift, which occurred as Bourdieu had taken part in several large scale social movements in Europe, was preceded by another shift, less visible but no less central for his academic reception: the production of Bourdieu as a general social theorist. Prior to *Invitation*, Bourdieu's work was obviously known, but discussions remained confined to certain specific areas. V. Zolberg had, early on in the 1970s, written about his research on art and culture, as did P. DiMaggio in a long review essay in the *American Journal of Sociology* as of 1979. At the intersection of sociology and anthropology, C. Calhoun wrote several pieces about Bourdieu's theory of practice. And, in the sociology of education, the works on the role of the school system in

<sup>30</sup> See the foreword in [Bourdieu and Wacquant 2014].

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FIGURE 6  
 Percentage of articles in the journal citing Bourdieu, per year  
 (1970-2012)



In 2010, 11% of articles in the American Journal of Sociology and 60% of articles in Poetics made at least one reference to Bourdieu.

reproduction were regarded as important. However, Bourdieu was not seen as a general theorist.

Figure 6 illustrates this, showing that citations to his work were scarce until the 1980s, and became more important in certain areas during this decade. *Sociology of Education*, *Poetics*, and Alvin Gouldner's *Theory and Society*, with its denunciation of mainstream US sociology, were early hosts for his ideas. The flagship journals also published pieces with his work, primarily about education up until the 1980s, and then about culture. This decompartmentalization, which had already begun, increased after the 1990s. That *Invitation* was published immediately before Bourdieu started being read as a leading theorist and a central sociologist in many subfields is shown in the rise of citations that began in the mid-1990s. The number of journals which had cited Bourdieu at least once in the last decade went up, from 12 in 1985 to 22 in 1994, and 33 (out of 34) in 2002. The type of citation he received before and after 1993 also changed. Until then, the number of empirical citations to his work

was over 7% (although even that figure was down from 24% in the 1970s), while it was under 3% after that date. Conversely, theoretical mentions rose rapidly. In other words, the 1990s saw a change in Bourdieu's citation profile: the dissemination of his work was accompanied by a transformation in the way he was read. To understand such citation patterns, we must reflect more closely on the dynamics of reception, as this is not a one-off process but can be an extended one.

*Reception and its afterlives*

For understandable reasons, scholars in reception studies have often borrowed from specialists on migration in analyzing their objects. There is nonetheless one aspect on which their objects part ways. Most of the elements studied by migration scholars can only be in one place at a time. This is obviously true of individuals leaving their countries, but is also true—up to a point at least—of other matters such as remittances or even communications. That is not the case for ideas, which can be multiplied at virtually no cost. But to this important and well-known difference, one should add another, less studied, one. Unlike persons, ideas can become extinct and be born again (as the familiar phrase in the American social sciences, “bringing X back in,” tends to show).

This remark has a direct consequence when studying the presence of an author in a given field: to capture it, one cannot focus only on the moment of first reception. Durkheim is an obvious example. Due to the time frame selected for this analysis, this paper does not probe his early reception in the US long before WWII. Nor does it study his rebirth through the reading of Parsons during the course of the 1930s and 1940s. Yet, he remains the most cited author in our study, the leader among a number of deceased French scholars whose work continues to be cited in US sociology. The history of Durkheim's reception in the US shows that scholars can live long after their deaths, or in Nietzsche's famous words, they can be born posthumously.<sup>31</sup>

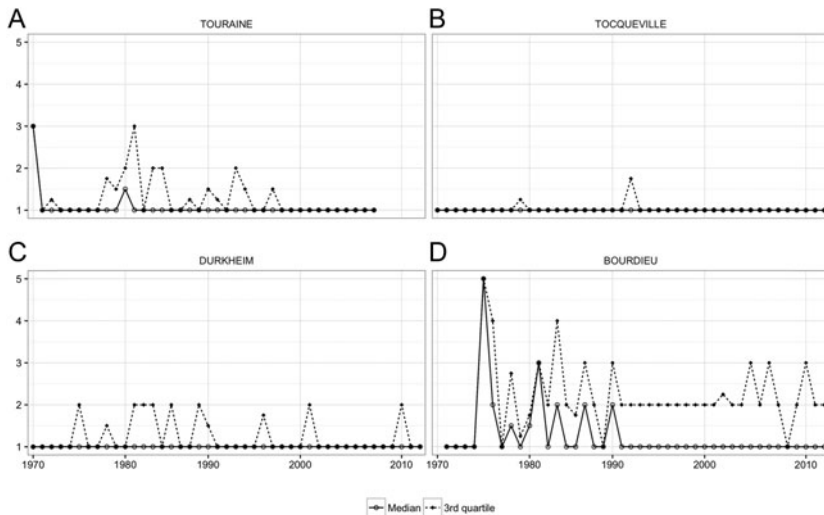
In fact, after significant interest upon reception, an author faces a number of different reputational trajectories. Once again, comparisons in citation data produce results that can be used to distinguish

<sup>31</sup> Cited in [Baehr 2015: 17].

them. A particularly useful variable is the number of citations to an author per article that cites his work. When a scholar is considered worthy of substantial interest by a few persons, they present his work at length, and this requires citing several different pieces by the scholar involved. By contrast, when an author has an afterlife as a canonical reference, the majority of citations will typically refer to one major work. Combined with the evolution in the number of citations received each year, this metric suggests three types of possible trajectories for long-term reception, at least after a non-negligible first reception.

One trajectory is simple termination, a more or less rapid *disappearance into oblivion*. According to Figure 3, this is what seems to have happened to authors like Crozier and Touraine (at least until the present). Following an episodic interest in certain segments of the discipline, they got forgotten, although at varying paces. Figure 7a shows the long-term reception of Touraine. The graph shows the median and third quartile number of citations to his work *per article*,

FIGURE 7  
*Profile of citations for selected authors*



(A) Touraine (B) Tocqueville (C) Durkheim (D) Bourdieu

In 1990, out of all the articles citing Bourdieu, 50% made reference to at least 2 of his works, 25% to at least 3 different works.

over time. The median rarely goes above 1, meaning that 50% of the articles which reference his work cite him only once. And for a number of consecutive years, one-quarter of those articles do it twice or more. This period of serious interest is nonetheless short lived: both the number of citations and the total number of citations rapidly converge towards zero after the mid 1980s. A renaissance seems to happen in the early 1990s, but it is short-lived. Since 2009, he has not been cited even once.

*Routine citation* is perhaps the opposite trajectory, although it is a much less frequent one. After a period of rising interest, a canonized author routinely receives citations, but many of them lack actual investment. Amongst the authors of the sample, Tocqueville best epitomizes this pattern of ritual citation coupled with a relative stability over time (7b). The difference with Touraine lies in his much larger (and relatively constant) number of total citations over time. In fact, Tocqueville belongs to the small group of authors who, by virtue of being considered as representative of a given approach, proponents of a given method, or emblems of an idea, keep receiving credit for this. A conspicuous example of such canonization, albeit with an ever increasing rate of citation, is Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, a work that has been cited more than once a day since its publication 50 years ago. As Abbott [2016] shows, the work has long since relapsed into a generic, routine citation for the idea that "people's views of things sometimes change sharply." This fact is evident in the relative decline of citation of Kuhn in his home disciplines of philosophy and history of science, when compared to his citation in areas such as education and management. Another indicator is the long-term decline in citation to particular pages of Kuhn's book, from about 15% in its first years to less than 3% today. For Kuhn, as for a handful of French sociologists, the rise in ritual citations to their work gave way to a drop in citations.

Durkheim also belongs to this category, although with a variation. Over the course of the years, he experienced what is always a possibility for past authors—*episodic rebirth*. Every few years, he is actively cited by researchers, who discuss his empirical arguments and analyses, while others promote alternative theoretical readings of his work. The periodic hikes in the number of citations to his work are proof of this: every few years, one or a few scholars try to resuscitate a Durkheimian perspective in analyzing the social world, hence giving way to a growing interest.



Figure 7d represents the citation profile of Pierre Bourdieu. His work still receives much interest, as demonstrated by the rising numbers in recent years. But as the years have passed, he has also started to be evoked in a more routine fashion—as shown by the level of articles citing only one of his works. In fact, the comparison between Bourdieu and Durkheim’s trajectories of citation helps clarify the routinization process that Bourdieu underwent over the last four decades. To uncover the details of such routinization, we distinguished between three levels within our empirical/theoretical categories. One (T<sub>1</sub>) is a passing mention to an author, without reference to a page, elucidation of the concept or any specification about the theoretical system mentioned. In a second type of reference (T<sub>2</sub>), this discussion is partly elaborated; the concept is often explained, sometimes with a quote by the author or a definition. However, the discussion is not central to the paper. We placed in a final category (T<sub>3</sub>) those long references that were central to the paragraph in which they were found.

The comparison between Durkheim and Bourdieu is telling. Table 5 shows that the proportions for each category remain quite stable for the former, but change significantly for Bourdieu. Empirical citations dropped sharply over time, as they were almost exactly replaced by “light” citations (T<sub>1</sub>).

TABLE 5  
Types of citations to Bourdieu and to Durkheim over time (%)  
(not standardized)

<b>DURKHEIM</b>	<b>Empirical</b>	<b>T<sub>1</sub></b>	<b>T<sub>2</sub></b>	<b>T<sub>3</sub></b>
1970	3.9	75.4	1.3	19.5
1980	1.2	75.3	2.4	21.2
1990	1.4	76.0	4.2	18.3
2000	3.4	79.6	5.1	11.9
<b>BOURDIEU</b>	<b>Empirical</b>	<b>T<sub>1</sub></b>	<b>T<sub>2</sub></b>	<b>T<sub>3</sub></b>
1970	24	51.7	2.0	22.3
1980	6.3	78.2	2.1	13.5
1990	4.9	82.4	3.9	8.8
2000	2.5	79.7	2.5	15.2

Parsons' overhaul of sociology had made Durkheim canonical by the 1970s. Most of his theories were already well known, and his key concepts now had stabilized meanings. Thus, references to his works tend to be short most of the time, but they do not disappear. Actually, Durkheim was cited an average of 40 times a year during our period of interest, most often in a "light theoretical" way (circa 75% of the references seem central, but not fully elaborated). Bourdieu's case is different. At the beginning of the period, which is also the time of his introduction to the US, the mentions made to his work are not only more numerous but also much more elaborated. As the years pass, while references to Bourdieu skyrocket, the type of those references changes, and the differences between the two authors progressively fade away as Bourdieu experiences a rise in the "light" references to his work. Yet, at present, about 15% (a quite substantial portion) still muster a deep engagement with Bourdieu's concepts (T3). Thus the data seem to indicate that a decade after his death, Bourdieu is undergoing a process of canonization that is not yet complete.

### *The virtues of ignorance*

The study of the US citation careers of French sociologists provides important insights into reception processes. Empirically, it highlights the divergent reception of these scholars: a small minority experiences extreme visibility while a few receive transitory visibility, and most are never read. Although language is a necessary condition of import, it is nonetheless not a sufficient one. Important also are the ability to insert oneself and one's work in the intellectual framework and debates in the importing country, and to negotiate local logics partially out of the control of the imported authors. In most cases, substantial reception of French sociologists is heavily dependent on local importers whose focus on spreading their work is no doubt central in the personal career trajectories of the importers. As we have seen, too, trajectories can move either towards oblivion or canonization, with episodic rediscovery as a third possible alternative.

But beyond the French case, there are other lessons to be drawn from such a study. First, the analysis highlights a method for investigating reception that combines the merits of both the systemic

and the monographic approaches. Drawing upon the ever growing mass of available data, the “large-N monograph” allows one to make the most of that data while not succumbing to the uncontrolled assertions that self-proclaimed “big data” studies often make. In particular, such a careful approach has the ability to contrast the reception of various sociologists in different outlets and at different moments while not losing sight of the context in which they take place. It thus reveals a pattern in the reception of French sociologists which is, and this is the second lesson, probably not limited to France. In fact, this situation is likely to be repeated for countries that have a long established heritage of sociological scholarship. This is in particular probably true of Germany and Italy, where there is a language difference. The same phenomenon may also occur with scholars from Great Britain, where the language barrier is not present but where the sociological tradition is quite autonomous from that of the US.

More generally, this analysis of the reception of French sociologists speaks to the debates relative to the internationalization of disciplines which have spread across Europe in recent decades. While the overall impact of French sociologists is relatively limited in the US, some of its representatives are highly visible—at times much more than US researchers themselves. According to certain metrics, the works of Pierre Bourdieu are the most discussed of any sociologist’s work at present in the United States. In some areas, the research initiated by Bruno Latour and by Michel Callon is unavoidable, and the writings of a few others are often visible. Amongst the most cited authors, some have earnestly attempted to gain recognition in the US, sometimes travelling there regularly to make contacts, but some have not.

Here lies an important result from this investigation. The most common feature between these various highly cited authors is not their endeavour to conquer a new market with their ideas. Rather, what brings together most of these past and present authors is the fact that their work did not resemble the kinds of work common in American sociology. It may even be the case that it is because their work offered systematic and different approaches to the canon of American sociological writing of the time that they received so much attention. The massive importation of French sociological theory at the very time when local production collapsed only confirms this idea. Differently put, the relative autonomy which existed—and still exists—between national fields of sociology

provided French sociologists with a way of building their own systems, independent of hegemonic interference. And these systems are the parts of French sociology that eventually have gained international recognition.

The existence of separate sub-spaces within a discipline does have well-known disadvantages. However, it also presents also some advantages [Abbott, 2011]. Quite contrary to the ideas of science administrators, who regularly require that researchers “internationalize” at any rate, there may even be serious intellectual grounds to advocate for only partial exchanges. An obvious reason why exchanges may not be so profitable is the large diversity of empirical configurations across the globe, which make concepts crafted in one possibly irrelevant in another. But there is more. Separated sub-spaces may even prove an asset to world research itself, insofar as they foster the development of research programs that have little in common, but which, once developed sufficiently, can act as counterpoints and challenges to other research programs in other locations. The existence of multiple small and separate communities may thus allow for the development of innovative research programs that may supplement the shortcomings of the others. In other words, provided that it is neither total nor obstinate, ignorance in science may be more valuable than is generally assumed.

#### *APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE OF FRENCH SOCIOLOGISTS: PRINCIPLES*

The analysis was conducted on a sample of French sociologists, past or present. In addition to the difficulties of establishing what is a “French sociologist” (see the main text for detailed explanations on this point), we could not retain all possible individuals who could be thought to match this criterion. We therefore looked for a list of sociologists “at risk of citation” in the US, a category we constructed in the following manner. We first searched for French sociologists who had received at least one citation in one of the 34 US journals from our sample (we used French journals as a proxy). With this last method, we computed a list of the 50 most cited scholars per decade (1970-2009). Since some were present across decades, there are 139 unique authors in the aggregated list. Then, in order to account for books as a separate channel of distribution in the United States, we added a list of

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French sociologists whose book(s) had been translated into English<sup>32</sup>. We thereby added another 28 authors to the initial sample. Finally, we collected the list of Fulbright recipients (a grant to study and research in the US) in France over five decades, and selected all the sociologists in it<sup>33</sup>. Overall, our final sample was made up of 188 unique authors, 171 of whom were cited at least once. This list was subsequently checked against the underlying citation database to retrieve the articles citing these authors. To avoid problems with homonyms and typographical errors, the authors manually checked the results.

Because of this particular sample construction, our analysis does not provide a definitive estimate of the odds, for a French sociologist, of being cited in the US. We also cannot say anything definitive about the general proportion of French sociologists cited in the US. Rather, our sample is designed to capture the patterns of reception, the logics of import, and the citation-career dynamics of those scholars who are its main concern, those who were in fact cited. Nonetheless, we tested three different versions of this sample in the course of the research, the last one sharing only half of its authors with the first. The fact that the results were strikingly similar across samples makes us confident as to the robustness of our results overall.

### *Full list of authors*

Amadiou J.,	Berque J.,	Caille A.,
Aron R.,	Bertaux D.,	Callon M.,
Baechler J.,	Besnard P.,	Capecchi V.,
Balandier G.,	Birnbaum P.,	Cassier M.,
Barbot J.,	Bisseret N.,	Castel P.,
Barrey S.,	Boltanski L.,	Castel R.,
Bastide R.,	Bonnot R.,	Cefai D.,
Baszanger I.,	Borzeix A.,	Chamboredon J.-C.,
Baudry B.,	Boudon R.,	Champagne P.,
Belanger J.,	Bougle C.,	Chapoulie J.-M.,
Benamouzig D.,	Bourdieu P.,	Chauvenet A.,
Benguigui G.,	Bourricaud F.,	Chazel F.,
Bensimon D.,	Brechon P.,	Cherkaoui M.,
Bernard P.,	Briand J.,	Clignet R.,
Bernoux P.,	Brossard M.,	Cochoy F.,

<sup>32</sup> Based on the results of the *Index Translationum*, published by the UNESCO.

<sup>33</sup> We are grateful to A. Roujou de Boubée, the Paris Fulbright Commission

director, for kindly providing us with such a list.

Comte A.,	Halbwachs M.,	Neveu E.,
Convert B.,	Heinich N.,	Paradeise C.,
Costa J.,	Heran F.,	Pasquier D.,
Cottereau A.,	Hertz R.,	Passeron J.,
Coulangeon P.,	Hubert H.,	Pauvert J.-C.,
Courpasson D.,	Iribarne P.,	Peneff J.,
Crenner E.,	Isambert F.,	Pinto L.,
Crozier M.,	Isambert-Jamati V.,	Poirier J.,
Cuisenier J.,	Karady V.,	Pollak M.,
Dautry J.,	Karpik L.,	Ponton R.,
Davidovitch A.,	Lahire B.,	Popa I.,
Davy G.,	Lallement M.,	Poulat E.,
Delooz P.,	Latour B.,	Preteceille E.,
Delphy C.,	Lazega E.,	Quemin A.,
Delsaut Y.,	Le Velly R.,	Quetelet A.,
Denord F.,	Lebaron F.,	Raphael F.,
Desroche H.,	Lebon G.,	Ravet H.,
Dezalay Y.,	Lecuyer B.,	Reynaud E.,
Dodier N.,	Ledrut R.,	Reynaud J.-D.,
Donzelot J.,	Lefebvre H.,	Robert P.,
Dubet F.,	Lemaine G.,	Rosanvallon P.,
Dubois P.,	Lemieux C.,	Sapiro G.,
Dumazedier J.,	Lenoir R.,	Schemeil Y.,
Dupré G.,	Letonturier E.,	Segalen M.,
Durkheim E.,	Maffesoli M.,	Segrestin D.,
Duru-Bellat M.,	Magaud J.,	Seguy J.,
Duval J.,	Mallard A.,	Setbon M.,
Duveau G.,	Marjolin R.,	Shinn T.,
Duvignaud J.,	Maurice M.,	Simiand F.,
Erbes-Seguin S.,	Mauss M.,	Simonin A.,
Fabiani J.,	Meillet A.,	Sullerot E.,
Fassin D.,	Meister A.,	Thevenot L.,
Felouzis G.,	Mendras H.,	Tocqueville A.,
Forsé M.,	Menger P.-M.,	Touraine A.,
Friedberg E.,	Mercier P.,	Treanton J.-R.,
Galland O.,	Merllie D.,	Vallet L.-A.,
Garcia M.-F.,	Metraux A.,	Victoroff D.,
Girard A.,	Michel M.,	Virilio P.,
Grignon C.,	Michelat G.,	Wieviorka M.,
Grossetti M.,	Monjardet D.,	Zarca B.,
Guiart J.,	Morin E.,	Zonabend F.
Guillemard A.-M.,	Moulin R.,	
Gurvitch G.,	Musselin C.,	

## APPENDIX 2: LIST OF JOURNALS

- American Journal of Sociology,*  
*American Sociological Review,*  
*Comparative Studies in Society and History,*  
*Criminology,*  
*Deviant Behavior,*  
*Gender & Society,*  
*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,*  
*Journal of Contemporary Ethnography,*  
*Journal of Health and Social Behavior,*  
*Journal of Marriage and Family,*  
*Journal of Mathematical Sociology,*  
*Law & Society Review,*  
*Organization Studies,*  
*Pacific Sociological Review,*  
*Poetics, Politics & Society, Rural Sociology,*
- Social Forces,*  
*Social Networks,*  
*Social Science History,*  
*Social Problems,*  
*Social Psychology Quarterly,*  
*Social Studies of Science,*  
*Sociological Forum,*  
*Sociological Inquiry,*  
*Sociological Methods & Research,*  
*Social Politics,*  
*Sociological Perspectives,*  
*Social Science Research,*  
*Sociological Quarterly,*  
*Sociological Theory,*  
*Sociology of Education,*  
*Theory and Society,*  
*Work and Occupations.*

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## Résumé

Cet article étudie les formes d'appropriation des sociologues français par les sociologues des États-Unis au cours des quarante dernières années. En s'inspirant de la scientométrie et de certains développements de sociologie de la réception, il propose un modèle pour l'étude de la réception à l'heure des données numériques massives. L'article met en évidence deux résultats saillants. Tout d'abord, sur les 200 auteurs retenus pour l'échantillon, seule une petite minorité d'entre eux retient l'essentiel de l'attention, alors que les autres sont quasiment invisibles. Ensuite, lorsqu'ils sont cités aux États-Unis, les auteurs français sont mobilisés presque exclusivement en tant que théoriciens du social. L'article rend compte de cette réception particulière en prenant en considération trois niveaux : les structures intellectuelles des deux champs, les logiques locales à l'œuvre dans le champ de réception, et les vies multiples d'un auteur.

*Mots-clés* : Analyse citationnelle ; Réception ; Scientométrie ; Sociologues français ; Structures intellectuelles ; Théorie sociale.

## Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag untersucht, auf welche Art und Weise sich amerikanische Soziologen im Laufe der letzten 40 Jahre französische Soziologen zu eigen gemacht haben. Aufbauend auf der Scientometrie und gewissen Entwicklungen der Rezeptionssoziologie, unterbreitet er ein Studienmodell der Rezeption im Zeitalter des big data. Zwei Ergebnisse stechen besonders hervor. Erstens wird nur einer kleinen Minderheit der mehr als 200 Autoren der Studie wirklich Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt, während die anderen so gut wie unsichtbar sind. Zweitens werden frz. Autoren in den Vereinigten Staaten fast ausschließlich als Sozialtheoretiker zitiert. Der Beitrag verdeutlicht die besondere Rezeption mittels dreier Betrachtungsebenen: die intellektuellen Strukturen beider Felder, die örtliche im Empfängerbereich mitspielende Logik und die „zahlreichen Leben“ eines zitierten Autors.

*Schlüsselwörter* : Zitanalyse; Rezeption; Französische Soziologen; Scientometrie; Intellektuelle Strukturen; Sozialtheorie.