

Boudon Reexamined

Nuts and Bolts for Contemporary Sociological Science

Gianluca Manzo (Ed.)



Boudon Reexamined presents a selection of short essays by leading scholars from several generations who critically engage and enter into dialogue with the work of Raymond Boudon. Each chapter focuses on a specific topic from his extensive writings. Readers will follow this intellectual trajectory through analyses of early correspondence with Lazarsfeld and Merton, his typology of sociological styles, and his contributions to contemporary analytical sociology, including the notion of middle-range theory. In addition to already well-discussed aspects of Boudon's work, namely his understanding of methodological individualism and the theory of ordinary rationality, the book also explores less frequently discussed topics, including his early interest in formal modeling in sociology and his understanding of the link between interdependence structures and social change. Included in the following pages are new assessments of Boudon's well-known analyses of the inequality of educational opportunity and intergenerational social mobility, as well as his lesser-known substantive contributions to the study of relative deprivation and his early dialogue with game theory. The book also outlines Boudon's study of classical authors, especially Tocqueville, before two final chapters conclude by examining how Boudon's works can be used to teach sociology at the undergraduate and master's levels. Our hope is that *Boudon Reexamined* provides readers with a fresh assessment of his legacy – how his work can be applied to conduct theoretical and empirical research in contemporary sociology, as well as to promote high-quality scientific standards for new generations.

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Chapter 2

The Transatlantic Circulation of a Sociological Scientific Ethos: The Correspondence of Raymond Boudon

Michel Dubois and Sylvie Mesure

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du social

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by Pierre Demeulenaere**

The great books of the sociological tradition are either works of theory and epistemology or empirical studies structured by a profound theoretical or epistemological reflection. Émile Durkheim's first three books, *The Division of Labour in Society*, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, and *Suicide*, each fall into one of these three categories. This heritage represents an impressive growing legacy of authors and works that foster an understanding of social life through the formation of new concepts, models, and interpretations, thereby providing a pathway to deciphering the thickness and chaotic nature of human societies.

Gianluca Manzo (Ed.)

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for Contemporary Sociological Science

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THE TRANSATLANTIC CIRCULATION
OF A SOCIOLOGICAL SCIENTIFIC ETHOS:
THE CORRESPONDENCE OF RAYMOND BOUDON

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The international circulation of sociological ideas between France and the United States has long interested historians of the social sciences as well as sociologists themselves. There are multiple approaches to studying this phenomenon. Some focus on a detailed study of singular “trajectories” – for instance, Maurice Halbwachs’s (Topalov 2005), Jean Stoetzel’s (Stankiewicz 2008), and Michel Crozier’s trips to the United States (Chaubet 2013). Others take a broader view, discussing the social and political conditions surrounding this flow and its more or less structural effects (Pollak 1976, Heilbron 2005, Boncourt 2016).

Comparative studies of how individuals and their ideas have been received – whether Americans in France (Marcel 2004) or the French in the United States (Ollion and Abbott 2016) – often highlight two key points. First, sociologists differ greatly in terms of their ability to transcend international borders in the long run. A small minority manages to catch and hold their foreign peers’ attention, but most simply remain invisible and overlooked, and this invisibility is often not of the kind one might expect. Second, a small group of *mediators*, fixtures within their national academic landscapes, plays a crucial

This chapter has been adapted from M. Dubois and S. Mesure, “La circulation transatlantique d’un ethos scientifique pour la sociologie. La correspondance de Raymond Boudon,” Revue Européenne des Sciences sociales, 56, 2, 2018, pp. 41–63, DOI: 10.4000/ress.4228. Translated and edited by Cadenza Academic Translations. We are sincerely grateful to Rosemarie Boudon, who granted us complete freedom to examine Raymond Boudon’s archives. We would also like to thank Brigitte Mazon, who led the archival work on the Boudon Collection at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales.

relational role by securing research visits, book translations and adaptations, and conference appearances.

This chapter contributes to our understanding of these international flows among sociologists by focusing on the case of Raymond Boudon. In terms of the relationships between the French and American sociological communities, his career in sociology is of considerable interest, for at least three reasons. First, as a recent study points out, Boudon features among the most-cited French sociologists in American sociology journals¹ (Ollion and Abbott 2016). Second, recently established archival collections² make it possible to examine his international trajectory via new material that highlights the importance of two classical figures in American sociology: Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton. These two sociologists played a central role in Columbia University's Department of Sociology and, more broadly, in shaping a scientific conception of sociology during the postwar era. Finally, circulation between France and the United States involving Boudon have already given rise to various remarks, and these can now be assessed against archival evidence. One memorable and notable example is his strong criticism of the reconstruction of his time at Columbia that Henri Mendras provides in *Souvenirs d'un vieux mandarin* (Mendras 1995).³

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first examines the nature of the documents recently deposited in the French National Archives, highlighting their diversity as well as detailing how, in the autumn of 2014 and for the purpose of this chapter, we began studying a specific portion: Boudon's general correspondence. In particular, this first section serves to highlight the distinctiveness of this correspondence and to broadly characterise the nature of the informal personal network around which Boudon's scientific activity was organised from the 1960s through to the early 2000s. The second section focuses on a subset of Boudon's general correspondence, namely his exchanges with Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton. It sets out both the characteristics of

1 The citation analysis (Ollion and Abbott 2016) covering the period 1970–2012 puts Raymond Boudon in sixth position, behind Émile Durkheim, Pierre Bourdieu, Bruno Latour, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Michel Callon.

2 This case is of course not unprecedented. Recent deposits of researchers' archives have served to encourage new research perspectives on the development of sociology in both France (Borzeix and Rot 2010) and the United States (Dubois 2014a, 2014b).

3 "Moreover, the book contains factual errors and rough guesses that make it an unreliable source for future historians. To take an example that has the disadvantage of being personal but the advantage that I can judge it directly, Mendras claims, 'Stoetzel sent Boudon to Lazarsfeld at Columbia.' Nobody sent me to Columbia, and certainly not Stoetzel, whom I had not yet met and who was not even aware I existed" (Boudon 2001). [Translator's note: Our translation.] Unless otherwise stated, all translations of cited foreign language material in this article are our own.

the available material and how the nature and significance of the relationship between the Sorbonne's and Columbia's sociology departments have been described therein. The third and final section analyses the available correspondence between these three sociologists. The chapter emphasises the significance of what this new material reveals about the processes surrounding learning, reputation, and academic mobility, as well as highlighting the nature of the scientific ethos shared by the three sociologists.

THE RAYMOND BOUDON COLLECTION

Originally intended to support the creation of a future archival centre for social science research (Sène 2014), the Boudon Collection was deposited in the French National Archives in 2013. In a series of interviews conducted by Brigitte Mazon to mark the creation of this collection (Boudon 2013), Boudon recounted key moments in his career and reflected on the nature of the archival material itself. When asked, "What do you think your archives contain?" he replied:

It's probably mostly everyday items – that is, everything that makes up the life of a teacher and researcher: thesis reports, candidate evaluations, recommendation letters, administrative documents, funding requests, and so on. Maybe some more original things as well. [...] But most of it is probably routine, everyday documents. I do not think that makes them uninteresting, though, because if one day a historian wanted to write the history of social sciences in the second half of the twentieth century, they might find them useful (Boudon 2013, p. 608).

The archival catalogue shows how this "routine" of academic life had, as one might expect, multiple dimensions. The Raymond Boudon Collection is divided into six main document categories. The first relates to institutional activities within the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) (French National Centre for Scientific Research), other national and international research organisations, and the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques. The second concerns teaching and supervision activities at various institutions, including Paris-V Descartes University (now Paris Cité University), Paris-IV Sorbonne University (now Sorbonne University), the University of Geneva, and Harvard University, and it includes Boudon's contributions to reports from thesis defences that he was involved in.⁴ The

4 The inventory of these contributions to thesis defence reports gives us a snapshot of an academic community, made up, in alphabetical order, of: Abdelmajid Arbouche, Michael Ballé, Enric Becescu, Daniel Benamouzig, Henri Bergeron, Emmanuelle

third category concerns trips, conferences, and interviews. Notably, it contains evidence of an initial application for US permanent residency made in 1969, as well as texts from seminars and lectures he gave in France and abroad. The fourth is a collection of various publications and offprints from 1962 to 2011. The collection also includes all books written or cowritten by Boudon plus their various translations, along with interviews and reviews published in the press when these works were released. The fifth category focuses on Boudon's publishing activities, including publishing contracts, press kits, manuscript preparations, and correspondence with publishers – and especially, of course, with Presses Universitaires de France about day-to-day matters related to the renowned “Sociologies” collection (or the “Blue Collection,” as it is sometimes known, for its signature blue covers) (Langlois 2008). Finally, the sixth category, which is the main focus here, contains general correspondence sent and received between 1961 and 2012.

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Was Boudon part of the community of epistolary sociologists? He answered plainly: “There is no correspondence, strictly speaking, in my archives. [...] I mainly had conversations with several people [...] [which] led me to develop certain ideas and texts and revise others” (Boudon 2013). Should this apparent lack of interest in epistolary relationships – which nevertheless gave rise to a not-insignificant eleven archival boxes of correspondence⁵ – mean these documents offer no insights into Boudon's career in sociology or into French and international academic life more broadly? This seems doubtful, especially as Boudon, when discussing his “intellectual friendships,” recalled his relationship with Lazarsfeld and Merton:

Betton, Martin Blais, Raymond Bourdoncle, Alban Bouvier, Alain Boyer, Gérard Bronner, Nathalie Bulle, Shim Chang-Hack, Mme Chchenkova, M. Choi, François Cusin, M. Damoiselet, Jacqueline Deguise-Le Roy, Pierre Demeulenaere, Lilyane Deroche-Gurcel, M. Dies, Annette Disselkamp, Michel Dubois, Éric Dumaitre, Patrice Duran, Joseph Facal, Mme Fericelli, Renaud Fillieule, Erhard Friedberg, Frédéric Gérard, Claude Giraud, Francine Gratton-Jacob, Benoît Grison, Alexandre Guillard, Dominique Guillo, Boris Guroy, Taik-soo Hyun, Agata Jackiewicz, Loïc Jarnet, Marc Lambret, Marc Le Menestre, Philippe Lefebvre, Marc Leroy, Éric Letonturier, Carlo Lottieri, Raul Magni-Berton, Gianluca Manzo, Jean-Christophe Merle, Bruno Milly, Albertina Oliverio, Lucien Samir Oulahbib, Maxime Parodi, Dunia Pepe, Emmanuel Picavet, Emmanuel Plot, Jocelyn Raude, Emmanuel Renaud, Sandra Rocquet, Michel Routon, Bertrand Saint-Sernin, Gérard Spiteri, Anne Staszak, Philippe Steiner, Mohamed Taleb-Khyar, Ada Teller, Dominique Terré-Fornacciari, Laurent Tessier, Kei Tsujihara-Sakata, Patricia Vanier, Fiorella Vinci.

- 5 A quantity that is admittedly modest when it is compared to the available correspondence by some epistolary sociologists, Robert Merton being one example (Dubois 2014b).

You may find some letters from Lazarsfeld in the archives, and perhaps a few from Merton. I don't know whether you'll find the one where Merton wrote to Lazarsfeld saying that he had the impression, upon reading my work, that I had been listening to their conversations at Columbia. Lazarsfeld, thinking I would appreciate having it, sent me the letter (Boudon 2013).

Before offering a more detailed description of the correspondence between the three men, it seems useful to provide an overview, albeit a brief one, of Boudon's general correspondence and the work undertaken on it since autumn 2014.

Work on these eleven boxes of correspondence took place across two phases: first on premises at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) archives service, then at the French National Archives' Pierrefitte-sur-Seine site after the collection was transferred there. The initial objective, agreed with the head of the GEMASS⁶ laboratory, which Boudon founded in the early 1970s,⁷ was to examine and catalogue all the correspondence to enable further processing on several subsequent occasions. To date, an epistolary corpus of approximately 2,150 items (letters received, sent, or shared in copy) has been compiled for the 1961–2001 period. About 40 percent of the items were sent by Boudon, while the remaining 60 percent are letters in which he was the primary or secondary recipient (including items sent in copy).

Most of the correspondence in the general corpus relates to the period between 1980 and 2000. Table 1 shows the composition of Boudon's main epistolary circle. Although we will not go into detail regarding the names in this table – some are well known, others less so – two observations are worth highlighting here. First, many names are tied to the French academic environment, particularly the university and publishing spheres. Second, among the foreign colleagues in Boudon's epistolary circle, Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton stand out, being ranked second and third respectively. The correspondence of intellectual friendship between Boudon, Lazarsfeld, and Merton is therefore a key element of Boudon's general correspondence, making this subset and the three sociologists' relationship an essential focus of study.

6 GEMASS stands for Groupe d'Étude des Méthodes de l'Analyse Sociologique de la Sorbonne (Sorbonne Study Group on Methods of Sociological Analysis).

7 See in this regard the pages dedicated to the Boudon archives on the GEMASS website, see <http://www.gemass.fr>.

Table 1: Boudon's epistolary circle, n=40, ordered by decreasing frequency
(ranked 1st to 40th)

Id.	rank	Id.	rank	Id.	rank	Id.	rank
Busino-G.	1	Coenen-Huther-J.	11	Casanova-J.C.	21	Drouard-A.	31
Lazarsfeld-P.	2	Peyrefitte-A.	12	Pellicani-L.	22	Forsé-M.	32
Merton-R.K.	3	Helle-H.	13	Poussou-J.	23	Lautman-J.	33
Eisenstadt-S.	4	Saint-Sernin-B.	14	Barker-P.	24	Lazar-J.	34
Bouvier-A.	5	Bronner-G.	15	Berthelot-J.M.	25	Lindenberg-S.	35
Prigent-M.	6	Morin-J.M.	16	Birnbaum-P.	26	Marot-G.	36
Bunge-M.	7	Paquetteau-B.	17	Massot-A.	27	Montbrial-T.	37
Bell-D.	8	Rezsohazy-R.	18	Rotariu-T.	28	Picavet-E.	38
Assogba-Y.	9	Terré-D.	19	Sakata-K.	28	Pithod-A.	39
Leroy-M.	10	Boyer-A.	20	Delara-P.	30	Renaut-A.	40

BETWEEN PARIS AND NEW YORK:

A CORRESPONDENCE OF INTELLECTUAL FRIENDSHIPS

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Boudon's correspondence with his two "accomplices" from Columbia University (Boudon 2010) spanned a fairly lengthy period, beginning as it did in the 1960s and continuing until the early 2000s.

The archive collection contains thirty-four letters from Lazarsfeld to Boudon (between 1 December 1965 and 11 August 1976) and sixteen from Merton (between 11 June 1970 and 7 November 2001).⁸ Both correspondences were cut short by death – Lazarsfeld's in August 1976 and Merton's in February 2003. In both their duration and content, these exchanges demonstrate a profound elective and cognitive affinity, one that endured throughout Boudon's intellectual journey, from his thesis on the mathematical analysis of social data, across his formation of the methodological individualism paradigm, and on to the progressive extension of that paradigm towards a theory of expanded rationality incorporating axiological rationality.

The correspondence also documents shifts in the French and American professional environments. These two aspects – the formation of a sociological paradigm in France; and the national and international transformation of disciplinary frameworks – are what make the correspondence valuable today, for both historians of the social sciences and sociologists themselves.

The epistolary exchange began in the mid-1960s, a period when the social sciences in France were undergoing both institutionalisation and professionalisation. The period also involved substantial financial and

8 On top of these letters, there are those which Lazarsfeld and/or Merton sent in copy to Boudon. It should be noted that the majority of the archived correspondence was sent by Lazarsfeld and Merton. Copies of letters sent by Boudon himself within this correspondence are rare.

organisational investments from American foundations – Carnegie, Rockefeller, Ford, etc. – and international bodies – e.g., the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) – the goal being to facilitate and speed up the integration of teaching and research, and it was a time in which transatlantic exchanges intensified (Drouard 1982; Miéville and Busino 1996). Reflecting on the state of French sociology in those years, Boudon summed up the view he held as a young *normalien*, a student of the prestigious École Normale Supérieure (ENS): “In the field of French sociology, three men ran the show: Aron, Stoetzel, and Gurvitch” (Boudon 2013, p. 345). They were the three leading figures within sociology at the Sorbonne during this period, where a sociology degree had been established in 1958, and they were essential references for anyone wishing to study in this field. Gurvitch, the sole professor of sociology at the Sorbonne from 1948 before being joined by Raymond Aron, established himself as a key figure in French sociology at the time (Marcel 2001). Boudon, who himself subsequently became a major international figure in sociology, would attest to Gurvitch’s status: “He held the only sociology chair at the Sorbonne, edited the only sociology book series at Presses Universitaires de France, the ‘Bibliothèque de sociologie contemporaine’ collection. He presided over the only flourishing sociology journal of that period, *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*. He ruled French sociology as a despot” (Boudon 2013, p. 344). Raymond Aron, having joined the Sorbonne in 1955, went on in 1960 to found the European Sociology Centre (Centre Européen de Sociologie, CSE) and the *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, which is now the *European Journal of Sociology* (Heilbron 2015, p. 172). As for Jean Stoetzel, whom Boudon would later acknowledge as his “true mentor” in France (Boudon 2003, 38),⁹ he entered the Sorbonne in 1955 – the same year as Raymond Aron – as chair of social psychology. Prior to that, in 1938, largely inspired by Lazarsfeld’s survey research, Stoetzel had established France’s first polling institute, the French Institute of Public Opinion (Institut Français d’Opinion Publique). He was also behind the founding, in 1960, of the *Revue Française de Sociologie*, whose mission was to publish empirical research findings.

Boudon never hid his reservations about Gurvitch’s sociology or his indifference to Aron’s: “I could see that Georges Gurvitch’s sociology was respectable for the energy it conveyed and contained, but it had little future. Raymond Aron seemed to be above all [...] a great intellectual. He himself told me that he saw his role as popularising the social sciences” (Boudon 2003,

9 Boudon was elected on 29 May 1990 to the seat left vacant by Jean Stoetzel at the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques (see Boudon 1992).

p. 38). It was therefore only natural that the young *normalien*, a mathematics enthusiast with a passion for scientific rigour, would place his hopes in Lazarsfeld and his French theoretical counterpart, Jean Stoetzel.¹⁰

At the time, Columbia's sociology department, which gravitated around Lazarsfeld and Merton, was at its peak (Boudon 2003, p. 37; Pollak 1979). Whereas Parsons's functionalist sociology began declining from the 1950s and the famed Chicago school was losing momentum, Lazarsfeld's empirical, quantitative sociology – founded on the intensive application of mathematics and statistics to produce an “empirical analysis of action” – was gaining scientific prominence and institutional importance. By the early 1960s, Lazarsfeld's Bureau of Applied Research, and Columbia University more broadly, constituted the most prestigious sociology centre in the United States. Reflecting on his career and intellectual journey, Boudon observed by way of a quip: “Scientific sociology exists: I've met it myself” (Boudon 2010, p. 4). One might say, in those years, he encountered it in the form of Lazarsfeld.

32

Having secured a Ford Foundation grant through Raymond Aron, Boudon decided, like Stoetzel before him, to go to Columbia, spending the 1961–1962 academic year there: “No one sent me to Columbia, but I decided to learn under Lazarsfeld after my military service because, quite by chance, I came across *The Language of Social Research* while browsing the shelves of the ENS library on rue d'Ulm. Rightly or wrongly, the book struck me as offering an alternative to the Gurvitchian sociology that then dominated in France, which I had always suspected of hiding trivialities within its thickets of typologies and nitpicking definitions, as well as to structuralism, which I thought needed to be handled carefully, both for its totalising ambition and for its Platonism” (Boudon 1996, p. 77).

The dialogue initiated in the early 1960s between Boudon and the top figures from Columbia's sociology department remained intense and lively for many years. However, it was a dialogue that extended well beyond correspondence, which was but a small part of a much broader exchange. Transnational scientific circulation also involved the movement of people, methods, and ideas (Chaubet 2014), and Boudon's dialogue with thinkers from Columbia was no exception to this rule. Boudon, who, as Aron remarked, was “a kind of island of American sociology on French soil” (Boudon 2010, p. 13), made many visits to the US:

I lived in the United States several times: first as a student at Columbia for a year, then in 1972 as a fellow at the Palo Alto Centre in California [the Center

10 On the theoretical and methodological convergence between Lazarsfeld and Stoetzel, see Blondiaux (1990).

for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences]. I was invited to several universities, including Harvard in 1973, Chicago in 1986, Indiana University, and New York University (Boudon 2013, p. 607).

We also know that Lazarsfeld, born in Vienna and very keen to export his sociological vision to Europe, likewise made many trips to France (Gemelli 1998; Lécuyer 2002). Lazarsfeld's visits began in 1948 with a seminar at the Centre for the Scientific Study of Domestic Policy (Centre d'Études Scientifiques de la Politique Intérieure) of the French National Political Science Foundation (Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques), on an invitation from its president, André Siegfried. They peaked in the mid-1960s, starting with UNESCO-related work in 1960 and continuing with two extended teaching periods at the Sorbonne in 1962–1963 and 1967–1968 organised by Stoetzel, and culminated in Lazarsfeld receiving the title of professor emeritus from the Sorbonne.

The transatlantic circulation of scientific ideas also occurs through the production of books, their translation, and their necessary adaptation to particular intellectual contexts. Between 1965 and 1976, the period covered by the available correspondence with Lazarsfeld, Raymond Boudon published several works. Aside from his two theses (*L'Analyse mathématique des faits sociaux*¹¹ [1967] and *À quoi sert la notion de structure?*¹² [1968]), these included *Les Méthodes en sociologie* (1969), *La Crise de la sociologie*¹³ (1971) and the book that established his international scientific reputation, *L'Inégalité des chances*¹⁴ (1973). Lazarsfeld closely supervised the development of Boudon's theses and made sure the translations of his works were of a high quality so the conditions under which the American scientific community received them were as favourable as possible. In return, Boudon helped disseminate Lazarsfeld's thought in France by coediting several of his books: *Le Vocabulaire des sciences sociales* (1965), the first volume of the "Méthodes de sociologie" series; and its second volume, *L'Analyse empirique de la causalité* (1966); and, with François Chazel, *L'Analyse des processus sociaux*, the third volume (1970). He also published selected writings by Lazarsfeld in French (1970) and later in English (1993), after Lazarsfeld's death (Lazarsfeld 1970; Lazarsfeld 1993).

11 Regarding the English translation of this work, see Lazarsfeld's comments in the next section.

12 Translated into English as *The Uses of Structuralism*, by Michalina Vaughan (Heinemann, 1971).

13 Translated into English as *The Crisis in Sociology: Problems of Sociological Epistemology*, by Howard H. Davis (Macmillan, 1980).

14 Translated into English as *Education, Opportunity, and Social Inequality: Changing Prospects in Western Society* (John Wiley & Sons, 1974).

As for Boudon's relationship with Robert Merton, they continued to share their publications with one another and discuss their work until late 2002, shortly before Merton's death (Boudon 2010, 13). As Lécuyer (2002) recalls, Merton's arrival at Columbia in the same year as Lazarsfeld (1941) was the product of the inability of two figures in the sociology department at that time – theoretical sociologist Robert MacIver and methodologist Robert Lynd – to make a choice between them. MacIver wanted to hire Merton, while Lynd wanted Lazarsfeld. Rather than making a decision, the people in charge at Columbia chose to divide up the position, simultaneously recruiting Lazarsfeld and Merton. The complementarity between these two men and, through them, between the two dimensions of sociological analysis – methodology on one hand, theory on the other – had a deep impact on Boudon: “We had the impression that the duo of Lazarsfeld and Merton offered an example of remarkable collaboration” (Boudon 2003, p. 390). Likewise, in one of his last works, he comments, “The symbiosis between the one's methodological inspiration and the other's theoretical tendency impressed me” (Boudon 2010, p. 9).

Rejecting overarching approaches to society, Boudon saw Merton as the person who would make it possible to rethink the scales of sociological analysis: “Merton convinced us all that the concept of middle-range theory raised a vital question, because it contrasted theories explaining well-defined phenomena with ‘theories’ that claimed to address society as a whole” (Boudon 2010, p. 9). Indeed, much of Merton's theory of action and unanticipated consequences became central to Boudon's work, and particularly to *Effets pervers et Ordre social*¹⁵ (1977) and *La Logique du social*¹⁶ (1979). Merton was well aware of the importance of Boudon's novel theoretical contributions, noting, “Your book on *effets pervers* [perverse effects] strikes me as being of the first importance” (letter dated 15 May 1979). That said, Merton sometimes expressed concerns – light-heartedly – about the consequences that the international circulation of Boudon's publications might eventually have on his own publishing projects.¹⁷

15 Translated into English as *The Unintended Consequences of Social Action* (Macmillan, 1982).

16 Translated into English as *The Logic of Social Action: An Introduction to Social Analysis*, by David Silberman with the assistance of Gillian Silverman (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

17 Such as the 21 June 1982 letter in which Merton shares his astonished response to the English translation of *Effets pervers et Ordre social*: “Dear Raymond, It was kind of you to have a copy of the English translation of your *Effets pervers* sent to me. [. . .] I was a bit startled and, for a time, put off—just as you must have been when you discovered that the English publishers adopted the title of *Unintended Consequences of Social Action*. Let's hope that this title is not also adopted by

“IN THE MERTON-LAZARSFELD SPIRIT”:
PROFESSIONALISATION AND SCIENTIFIC ETHOS

On a personal level, what stands out in this correspondence of intellectual friendships is the warm tone running through the exchanges between the three men: “Dear Raymond,” “Dear Paul,” “Dear Bob.” When one reads the letters sent back and forth, it is easy to pick up on the men’s joy at seeing one another again, their disappointment of missing the chance to meet, and the growth of their friendship. The letters provide evidence of – though only partly capture – a sustained dialogue. For instance, while on a flight taking him back to Columbia, Lazarsfeld, who frequently travelled across Europe and between France and the United States, wrote a letter continuing a conversation he had just been having with Boudon in Paris: “Dear Raymond, On my flight back I read your new chapter very carefully and I want to comment on one point in some detail” (letter dated 11 January 1965).

The three sociologists held one another in high regard, and the letters reflect this. Boudon expressed all the admiration he felt for Lazarsfeld, whom he called “his mentor” (Boudon 2013, p. 346), and on many occasions he spoke of his respect for Merton. Reading the letters to Boudon reveals that this feeling was mutual. In a letter dated 27 March 1991, for example, Merton tried to express to Boudon how much he agreed with Mario Bunge’s sentiment that Boudon should be seen, along with James S. Coleman, as one of the “very best brains in all of social science.” This mutual respect and admiration also emerge in responses to Boudon’s early works. Regarding his thesis, Lazarsfeld wrote, “It is a compliment to your thesis that I keep on thinking about it” (letter dated 14 June 1966). Writing a few years later to the prospective American publisher of *L’analyse mathématique des faits sociaux*, Lazarsfeld stressed its importance:

I was always sure that Boudon’s book is very important. It would have a very salutary effect in this country. There are so many mathematical sociologists that break up in little cliques favoring one method or another. Boudon shows that most of these trends are just special cases of the more general idea which he presents competently (letter dated 1 March 1971).

an American publisher. It doesn’t quite preempt the title of the volume I have been editing, so perhaps no damage will have been done. I know how publishers sometimes make decisions without bothering to notify authors about them and so we’ll both have to live with it as a *fait accompli*. In a way, this is also poetic justice. After all, the volume on unanticipated consequences should have been in print at least two years ago, were it not for a variety of events that intervened [...].”

Beyond this personal dimension of affinity and mutual respect, the correspondence sheds light on different closely linked dimensions of Boudon's years of learning and professional socialisation. Boudon referred to Lazarsfeld as his "mentor," and Lazarsfeld clearly comes across as such in their letters. Upon returning from Columbia, Boudon decided to base his principal thesis, supervised by Jean Stoetzel, on the contribution of mathematics to social sciences and, at Lazarsfeld's suggestion, to dedicate his secondary thesis to the concept of structure, with Raymond Aron as supervisor.

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Many letters demonstrate how seriously Lazarsfeld took his role as mentor. Reflecting on his formative years, Boudon emphasised how demanding Lazarsfeld was: "He was a formidable thesis supervisor. He made an American friend redo his thesis three times before ultimately denying him the chance to defend it" (Boudon 2013). The correspondence between the two men shows Lazarsfeld meticulously read Boudon's thesis; he did not hesitate to have Boudon clarify certain points and be more rigorous about the concept of "structure," so as to define it in contrast to how their "enemies" understood the term (letter dated 14 June 1966). Some suggestions were more exploratory. For instance, Lazarsfeld invited Boudon to introduce the idea of "*sondage sociologique*" in France as an equivalent of "empirical social research":

After all, the word 'sondage' had a more general meaning before it was taken up by the public opinion people. It has a connotation of general inquiry by soundings, mean[ing] indicators, and this is, after all, what we do. While you cannot help that sondage now [often] means [...] public opinion research by sampling, you have a good chance if you turn [things] around and now call sondage sociologique all the other types of empirical soundings on contemporary social topics, irrespective of the specific method used (letter dated 11 January 1965).

Above all, though, the best measure of Lazarsfeld's commitment is his work on the ultimately unfinished translation of *L'Analyse mathématique des faits sociaux* (1974).¹⁸ Finding the initial translation "catastrophic," he personally

¹⁸ This translation endeavour fell through because of a series of difficulties connected to the translator Lazarsfeld himself initially chose: "I was responsible for Little, Brown having commissioned Dr. Kenneth Land for the translation. His wife is French-Belgian and he is a well-trained mathematical social scientist. I promised Boudon to go over the final English translation from a didactical point of view. [...] I got a copy a little while ago. It is mere coincidence that I became aware of the language problem. [...] The translation is still abominably bad [...] I would advise you and urge Boudon not to proceed with the publication of the book without a thorough revision" (letter from Lazarsfeld to Alfred L. Brown dated 1 March 1971).

retranslated parts of the text, finding intellectual satisfaction in the process: “I enjoy working on the translation because it forces me to think through a lot of matters to which I have not given enough attention before. Thus, for instance, I try to develop a direct derivation of what you call complex structures without interaction; I mean a derivative that comes directly from your decomposition of probabilities. I think I am on the right way but in any case, your book should not be burdened with this” (letter dated 9 March 1971).

Concerned about how Boudon’s book would be received by a readership accustomed to empirical and statistical analysis, Lazarsfeld was most demanding when it came to the argumentation’s substance. His letters from this period often included detailed handwritten memoranda urging Boudon to thoroughly revise this or that argument or passage: “Please reread your chapter 3 because it is the most important for the overall strategy of the publication” (letter dated 22 March 1971). Punctilious about the need for scientific rigour, Lazarsfeld let “nothing get by” him, while taking care not to offend or discourage Boudon:

I was glad to learn that my comments were useful. [...] You will see that nowhere do I disagree with your findings. I am essentially concerned with matters of presentation. But for an American edition, this is important because you have here a public which is much better prepared for your book than the French (letter dated 27 October 1969).

Lazarsfeld’s strictness as a mentor was simply the flipside of his unwavering support for the promotion of Boudon’s work in the United States. When *L’Inégalité des chances* was published in America as *Education, Opportunity, and Social Inequality*, Lazarsfeld had the opportunity to express how well he thought Boudon had responded to Robert M. Hauser (Hauser 1976 and Boudon 1976). In a letter Boudon often quoted, Lazarsfeld wrote, “Thank you very much for sending me the debate between you and Hauser. I was impressed by your reply and angry with Hauser. He is a very typical example of [a] statistical zealot although he is undoubtedly competent” (letter dated 15 August 1975).

The correspondence also shows how Lazarsfeld, in the 1970s, and Merton, in the 1980s, each played their part in establishing and strengthening Boudon’s reputation and visibility in American academia. In 1976, Lazarsfeld served on the American Sociological Association’s committee for the Stouffer Award, which rewarded outstanding methodological contributions to sociology. Having won an award in 1973, and with James Coleman having done so in 1975, Lazarsfeld, very understandably, was quick to contact Boudon and ask him to send him the supporting materials for an application:

There is a reasonable chance that you will be one of the awardees. It would be of great help if you were to send me a list of your publications – including translations – and your guest appearances like your stay at Harvard. You have to understand that the final outcome of such a competition often depends upon quite unforeseeable circumstances. So what I am writing you here is a reasonable guess, but by no means a firm forecast. Still it would be worthwhile if you were to send me the material I just mentioned (letter dated 30 June 1976).

A few years later, Merton played a similar role in bringing Boudon to Columbia University. In February 1983, Boudon was invited to deliver the Fifth Paul Lazarsfeld Lecture, a prestigious event organised by Merton. Merton wrote, “Dear Raymond, Interest is mounting in your giving the Fifth Paul Lazarsfeld Lecture. So much so, that we are eager to give it the greatest possible advance publicity – to colleagues, Paul’s many former students and longtime friends, the entire Columbia community, and social scientists from Boston and Washington, some word-of-mouth has gotten round and we have had inquiries about the exact date and other such details in recent weeks” (letter dated 27 September 1982). Barely a week after the lecture, Merton shared his enthusiasm with Boudon and relayed others’ glowing feedback: “Even in short retrospect, it seems that the blizzard of ‘83 did nothing to dim the occasion of your lecture. Quite the contrary; even now, members of that hardy crew who made it through the deepening snow to Low Rotunda are talking of their experience with evident relish. We can count, I think, on this event being told and retold for many years to come. I trust that you had a sense of the warm and interested response to your lecture.” Merton even hints that Boudon should extend his stay at Columbia indefinitely: “All of us here enjoyed your stay beyond easy description. A pity that you can’t manage a truly extended time with us – say, a semester or an academic year (to say nothing of your joining with us for good)” (letter dated 18 February 1983).

Beyond academic reputation and mobility, the correspondence among the three men more broadly reveals a shared scientific ethos. What Boudon found in Lazarsfeld and Merton was above all the idea there could be a “scientific analysis of action” (Boudon 1998, p. 371) and a “sociology [that was] centred on the individual” (Boudon 1970, p. 41) and was organised around the individual’s decisions. Affirming that he had always identified with a “scientific conception of sociology,” Boudon noted that he never struggled to understand Lazarsfeld’s writing, navigating his mental universe with ease (Boudon 1996, p. 76).

This is confirmed by a letter from Merton to Lazarsfeld about Boudon’s introduction to *Philosophie des sciences sociales*, which Lazarsfeld proudly shared with Boudon:

Dear Paul, When you get home from your Parisian triumph – not mere ovation – I want you to know how much I liked Boudon’s introduction to your book. It is splendid. It has caught your ‘obsessions’ right down to their roots. [...] It is almost as though he had been there through the years, listening to some of our endless conversations and now hearing your own insistence on what really matters. Boudon’s introduction belongs in the same class with your introduction to Sam’s book and that is saying a great deal. Not least, his French is as crisp and clear as your written English (letter dated 11 June 1970).

In a letter to Merton dated 24 February 1993, Boudon reiterated his admiration for what he called the “Merton-Lazarsfeld spirit.” To him, this spirit represented minimal concessions to the ideologies of the moment and *hic et nunc* values. And it was also – and above all – about choosing to make the creation of knowledge the discipline’s primary function. This choice, central to Lazarsfeld and Merton alike, clearly resonates throughout Boudon’s account of Columbia in his intellectual autobiography, *La Sociologie comme science*:¹⁹ “The studies produced by the Columbia sociologists attracted me because they created knowledge. [...] They focused on concrete, specific subjects [and] [...] managed to touch the universal through the particular” (Boudon 2010, p. 11).

The attention Boudon and Merton paid to “universalism” as a governing ideal for scientific activity explains to a large extent why, from the early 1990s,²⁰ their correspondence conveys a sense of two men “converging” in the same intellectual battle against the different variations of scepticism and relativism that were prominent in the social and human sciences at the time. When Merton received from Boudon a copy of his *L’Art de se persuader des idées douteuses, fragiles ou fausses*²¹ (1991), he was quick to share his enthusiasm and confidence about the future: “I haven’t the least doubt that the extravagances of radical cognitive relativism are time-bound and that they will be increasingly recognized for the self-deceptive and self-destructive opinions that they are. But it may speed up the process among our faddish tribe of sociologists to have calm analyses such as yours. [...] That we are on the same wavelength of course needs little further demonstration” (letter dated 2 March 1991). Nearly thirty years later, with various forms of relativism clearly receding, Merton’s confident optimism seems a clear case of the fabled self-fulfilling prophecy.

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19 Translated into English as *Sociology as Science. An Intellectual Autobiography*, by Peter Hamilton (The Bardwell Press, 2013).

20 Before the famed “science wars” triggered by the Sokal hoax in 1996.

21 Later translated into English as *The Art of Self-Persuasion: The Social Explanation of False Beliefs*, by Malcolm Slater (Polity Press, 1994).

This chapter is an initial exploration, based specifically on Boudon's correspondence with Paul Felix Lazarsfeld and Robert King Merton, of the Raymond Boudon archival collection. The correspondence of "intellectual friendships" between the three men forms but a subset of Boudon's far-reaching general correspondence, which included nearly nine hundred correspondents between 1961 and 2001. Using new materials, this study examines the variety of interactions between academic communities in France and the United States. More specifically, it highlights how, beyond their initial mentor-apprentice relationship, Boudon and Lazarsfeld acted as mediators for each other within their respective national academic spheres. Such mediators play a critical role in the international circulation of sociological ideas. From this perspective, there is little doubt that the significant dissemination of Boudon's works in the United States – evident in citation analyses referred to in this chapter's introduction – owes as much to their intrinsic qualities as to the attention paid to adapting and integrating them into the receiving academic environment.

Our analysis of the correspondence between Boudon, Lazarsfeld, and Merton also demonstrates how Boudon attempted to bring to France the qualities of a sociological scientific ethos embodied, in his view, by the Columbia duo – what he termed the "Merton-Lazarsfeld spirit": methodological rigour, an appreciation for sociological theorisation, and the determination to define sociology as a science that creates broader knowledge. Described in the preface to the English translation of one of his works as an "Unfrench sociologist," Raymond Boudon always claimed to feel he was part of an international academic community, and in doing so he kept his distance from the numerous ideological conflicts that drove French sociology during the 1970s and 1980s (Boudon 2013, p. 607). This correspondence shows how, for Raymond Boudon, the Columbia school was, from this perspective, a genuine resource, both strategically and intellectually.

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NOTES ON THE AUTHORS

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ACCLAIMS

This remarkably well-structured volume accomplishes two feats at once. It offers a critical engagement with the multiple facets and contributions of Raymond Boudon's sociological oeuvre, for example: the modeling of relative deprivation, the generative approach to social stratification, the plea for methodological individualism, the analysis of unintended consequences and social change, the epistemology of sociological investigations, and the reflection on rationality and belief formation. Through this critical engagement – here is the second feat – this volume tackles substantive and methodological issues central to contemporary developments in the discipline of sociology, whether the focus is on formal models, simulation work, counterfactual reasoning, social mobility and its measurements, the significance of Rational Choice, or our understanding of processual dynamics.

Ivan Ermakoff, Professor of Sociology,
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Without indulging in praise, this collective volume – bringing together 18 substantial chapters – aims to shed light on the enduring legacy of Raymond Boudon's sociology. It addresses a notable gap: the lack of a detailed, multifaceted examination of the work of one of the foremost figures in both French and international sociology. The reader will find not only an assessment of Boudon's intellectual contributions but also a critical appraisal of their limitations and the avenues they open for further research into contemporary issues. The book will appeal both to specialists familiar with the evolution of Boudon's thought over time and to those wishing to discover it, explore it in greater depth, or draw upon it for teaching purposes.

Gérald Gaglio, Professor of Sociology,
Université Côte d'Azur

This book is a splendid tribute to Raymond Boudon, one of the most important sociologists of the second half of the 20th century. The contributions, in their appreciative and critical aspects alike, clearly bring out the intellectual depth and challenging nature of Boudon's work and its continuing relevance in the study of modern societies.

John H. Goldthorpe, Emeritus Fellow,
Nuffield College, University of Oxford

This collection of papers, expertly curated by Gianluca Manzo, is as wide-ranging and thought-provoking as Raymond Boudon himself. It is sure to stimulate interest in a now-sometimes-forgotten giant of French sociology.

Neil Gross, Charles A. Dana Professor of Sociology,
Colby College (Maine)

This Memorial Festschrift honors Raymond Boudon (1934–2013) by considering his contributions to conceptualization, theory, and empirics, as well as their associated methods, across foundational topical domains in sociology and guided by expert commentators. It is not only a superb assessment, and its value will grow in three main ways. First, like most Festschriften, it provides a portrait of the growth and trajectory of Boudon's ideas, embedded in his relations with other scholars, both teachers, peers, and students. This portrait will grow over time. Second, as the historian David Knowles wrote about the *quaestiones quodlibetales* of the medieval university (especially the University of Paris) and the debates held during Advent and Lent when anyone could ask any question of any master, Festschrift discussions are a valuable index to what is “in the air” – in this case both when Boudon was working and now. Third, Boudon believed in the promise of mathematics, and it will be possible to trace over time the progress of the $X \rightarrow Y$ relations in the book, as they travel from general functions to specific functions.

Guillermina Jasso, Professor of Sociology,
Silver Professor of Arts and Science, New York University

This book is not a hagiography. Unusually, its title truly reflects its content. Twenty-two sociologists from different countries and different generations take a fresh look at the work of Raymond Boudon. In keeping with his approach but without complacency, they highlight the theoretical and methodological contributions of his sociology, its limitations, its errors, its relevance for teaching sociology to the new generations, and the perspectives that remain open in several thematic areas.

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