

Lecture 1.  
What's sociology?  
*Qu'est-ce que la sociologie?*

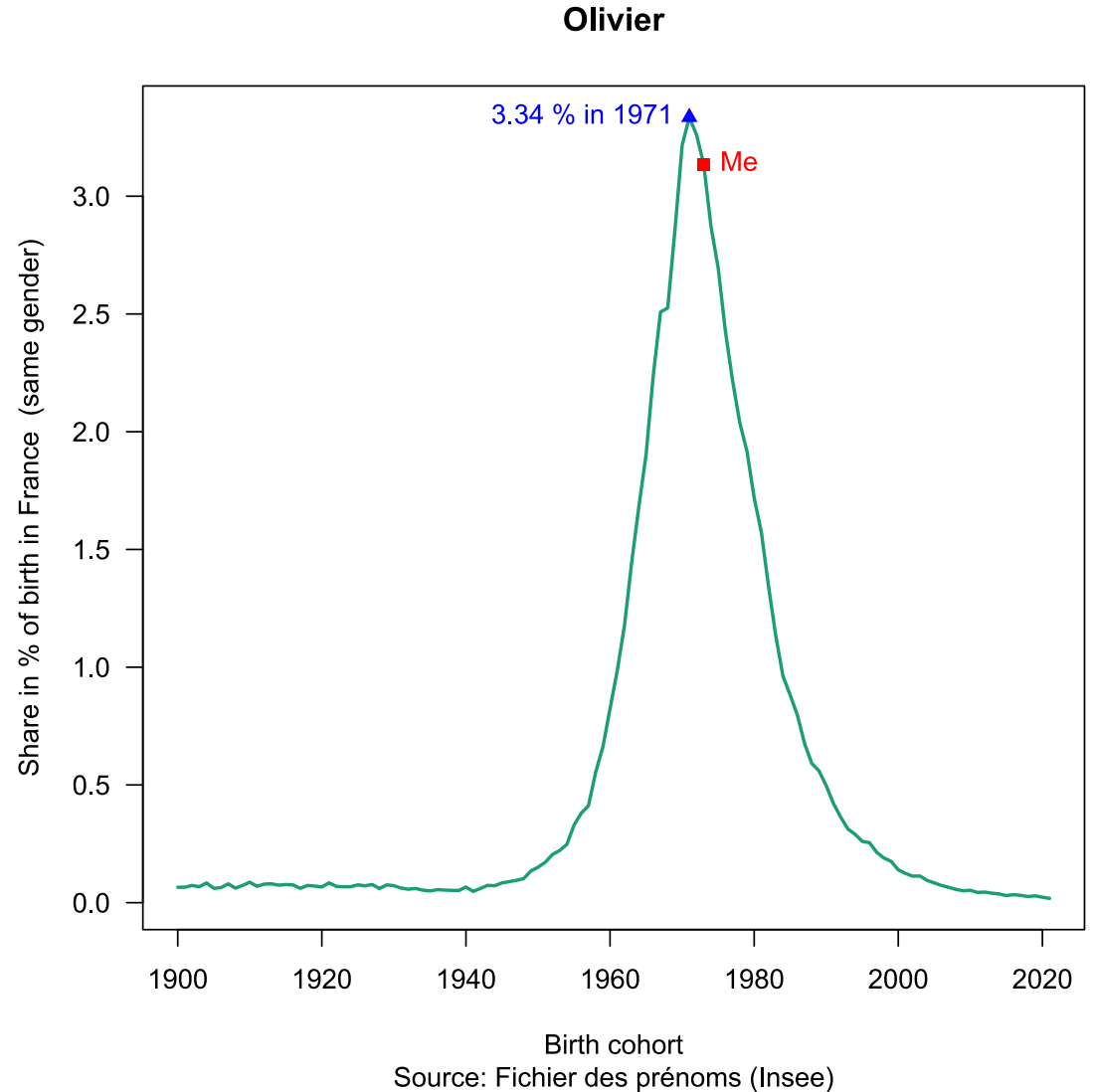
Olivier Godechot  
Sciences Po – L1. Campus Dijon  
2023-204

A little bit about me...

My name is OLIVIER

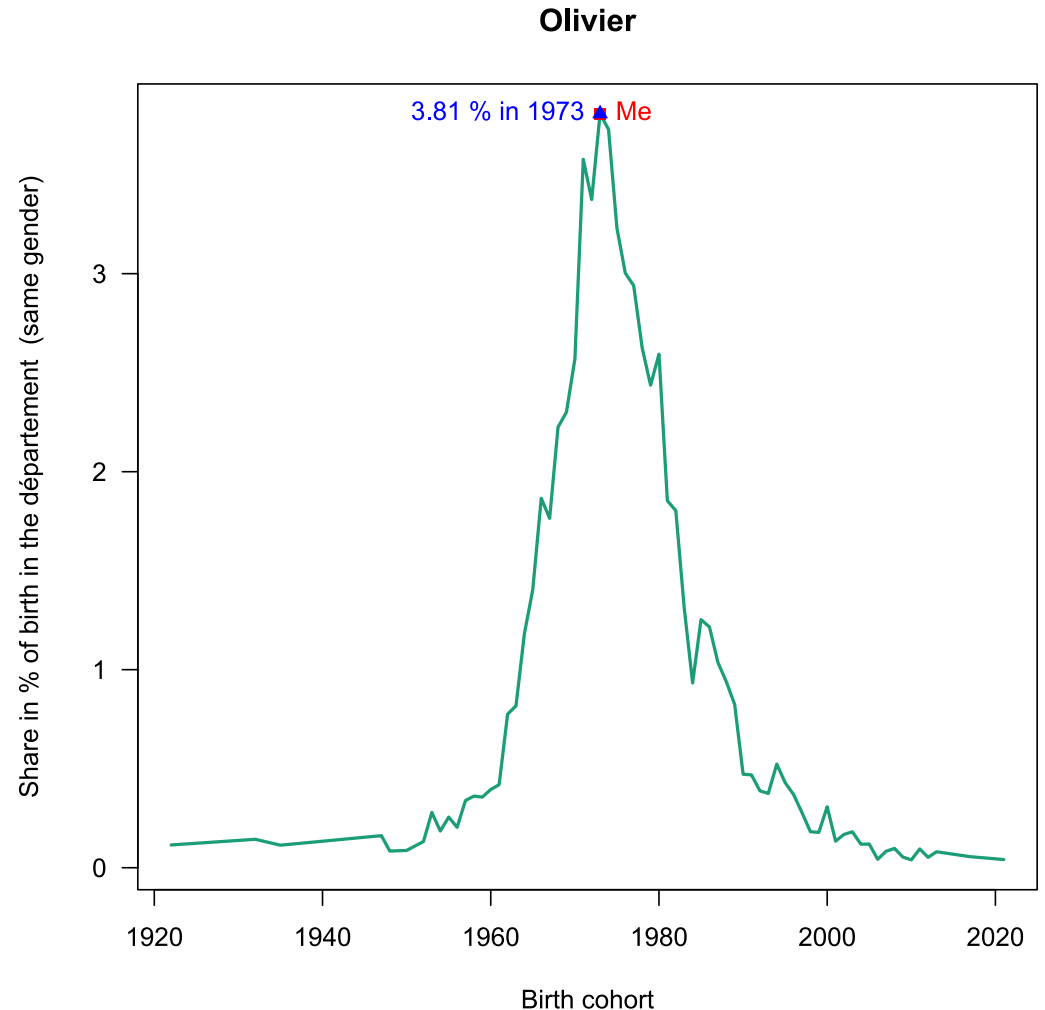
# Trends in Olivier

- Almost at the peak of the fashion
- My parents a little outdated?



# Local trends (31)

- At the peak of the local distribution
- 10<sup>th</sup> grade: 5 Olivier in my class



Source: Fichier des prénoms (Insee)

# Are first names a good topic for sociology?

- Cons

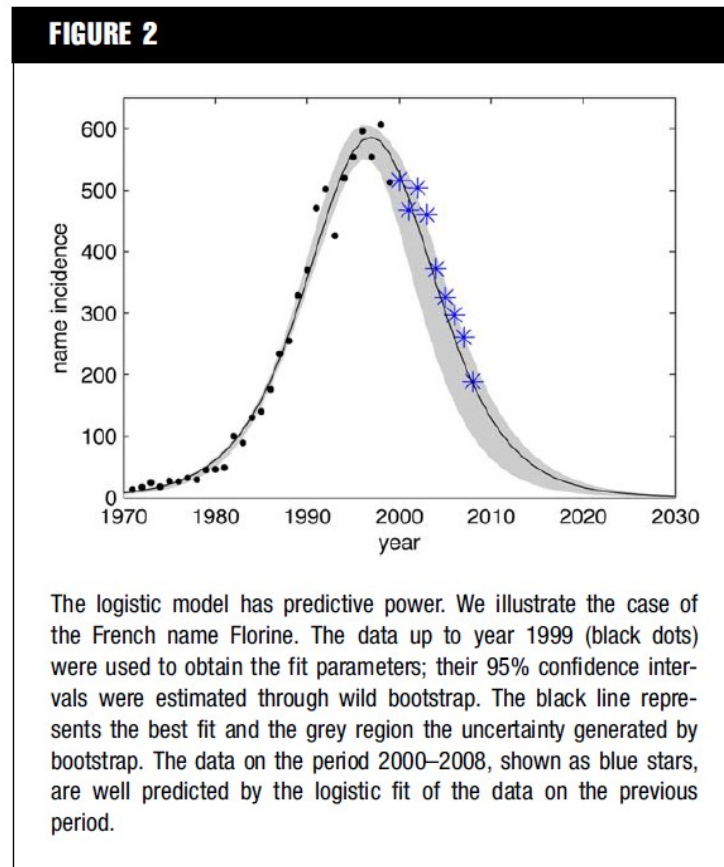
- Individual rather than collective
- Personal aesthetic taste
- Fashion
- Not socially significant?

- Pros

- All the arguments against
- Individual and collective tied
- Aesthetic taste has a collective dimension
- Fashion is a social process
  - Pure fashion: First names are free!
- Naming a key anthropological decision: An operation of singularization (Boltanski 2004; 2013)

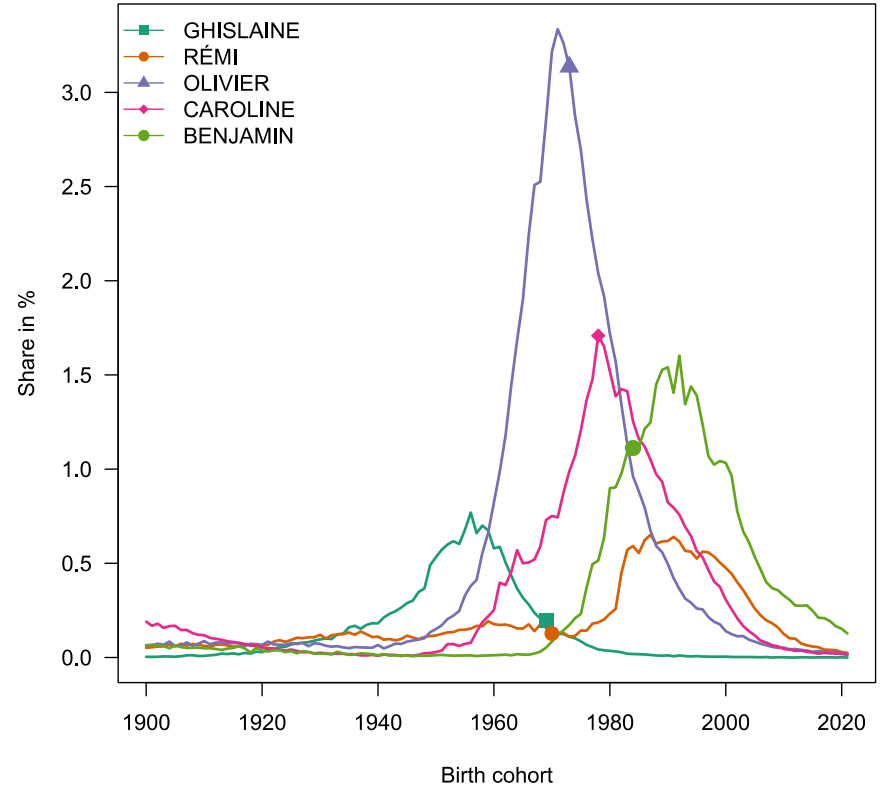
# First names spread like fashion markets and virus

- First name behave like fashion market models and virus prediction (Coulmont, Supervie, and Breban 2016)
  - “Logistic” Mathematical formula based on
    - Imitation
    - Carrying capacity
  - Models well like a virus
    - Degree of contagion
    - Degree of Immunity



# A collective influence?

- Similar choices at the same time
  - Collective influence of society on naming?
    - But within family choices can differ from trend
  - Or influence more indirect: shaping connotations and meaning



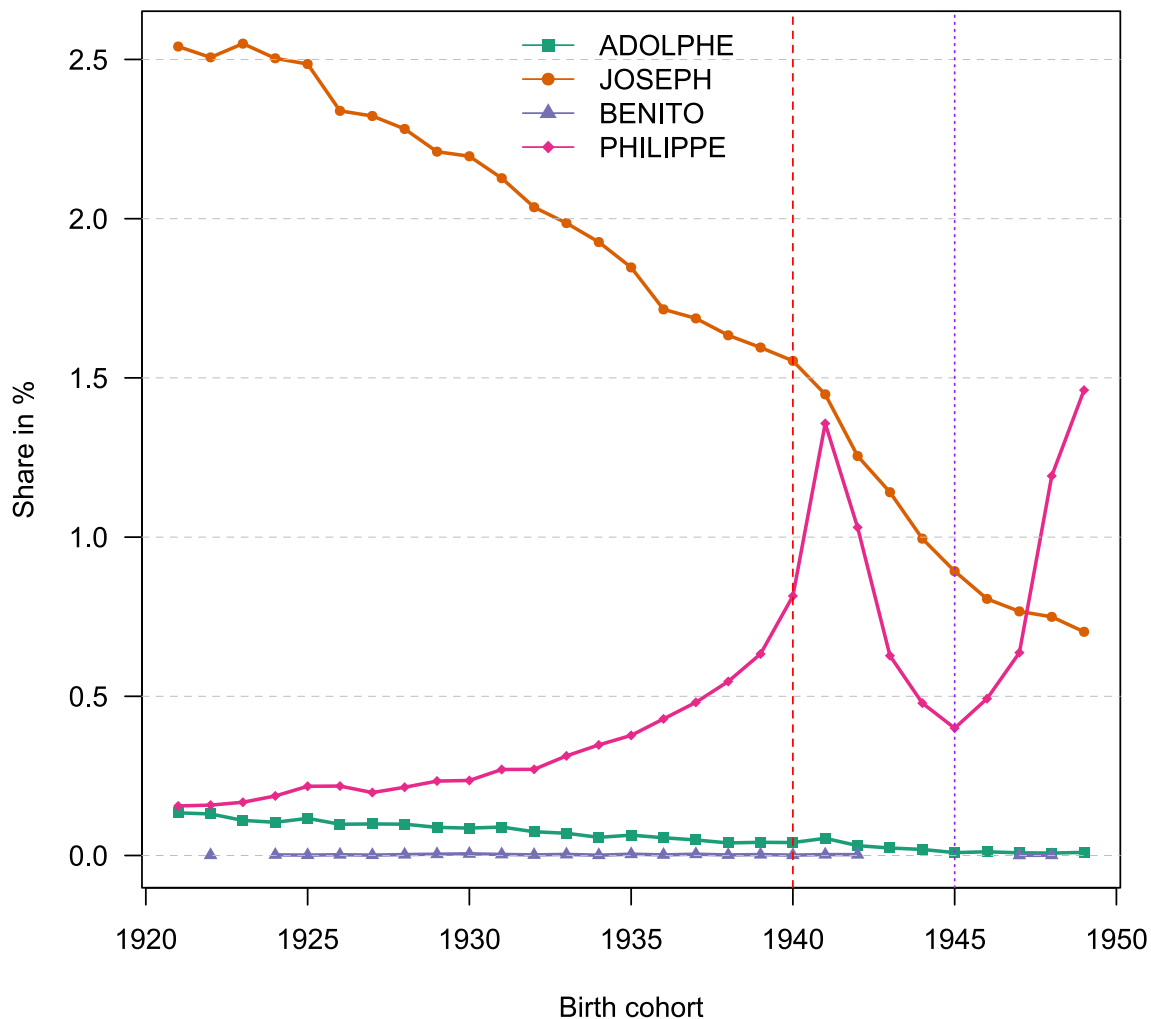
# Social connotations

Which social connotations shape first name choices?



# Political meaning

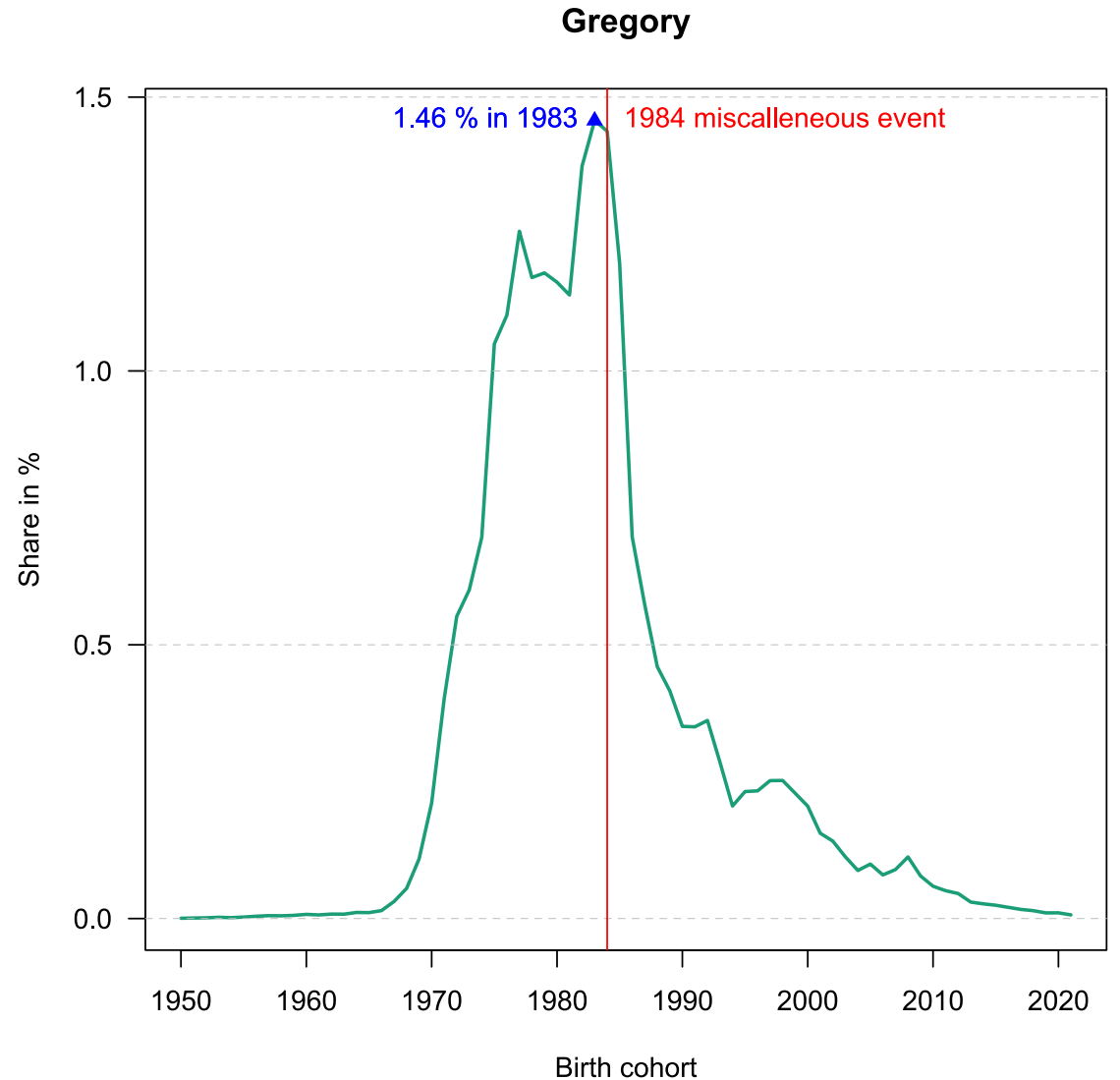
- Adolphe very rare <1930
  - Disappeared after 1945
  - Strong political connotations
- Philippe on the rise in 30s
  - Temporary decline in popularity between 1941 & 1949
  - Partial political association
- Joseph very frequent & on the decline
  - No association with Staline's (un)popularity
- Benito super uncommon



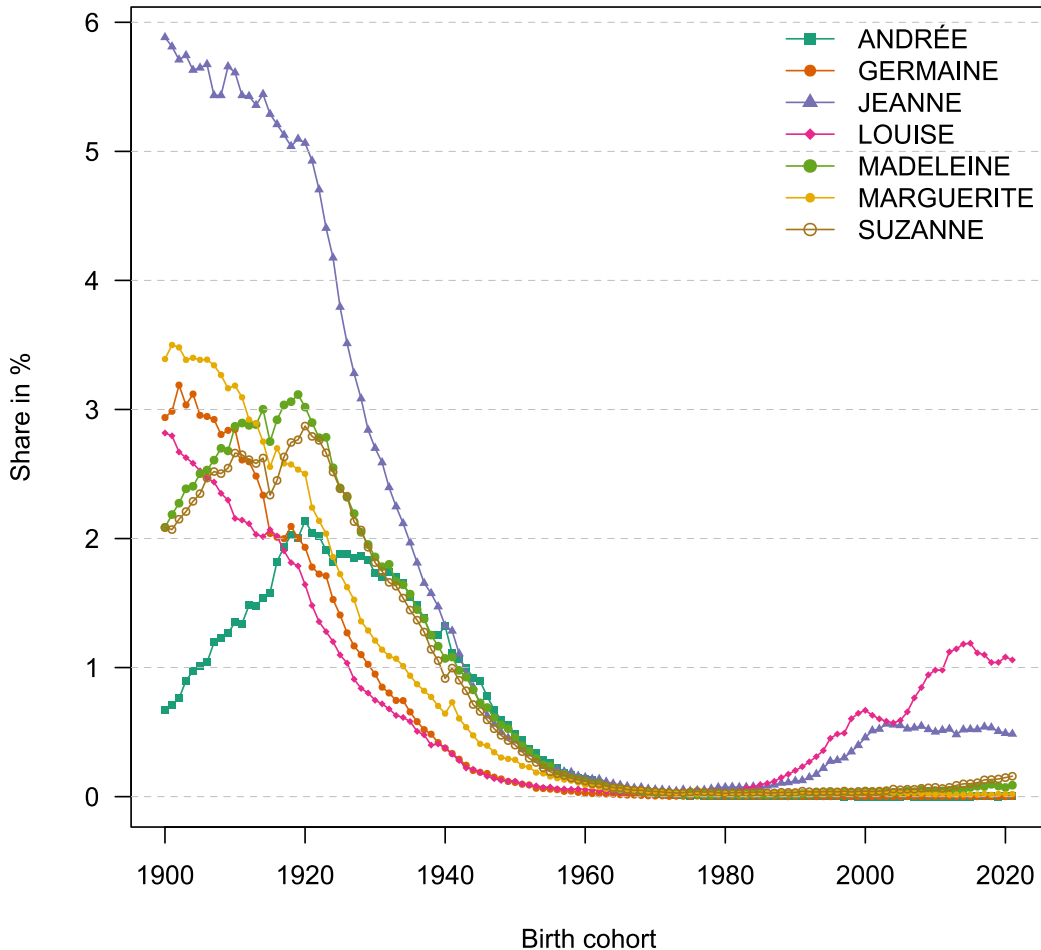
Source: Fichier des prénoms (Insee)

# Miscellaneous

- 16 October 1984:  
“Affaire du petit  
Grégory”



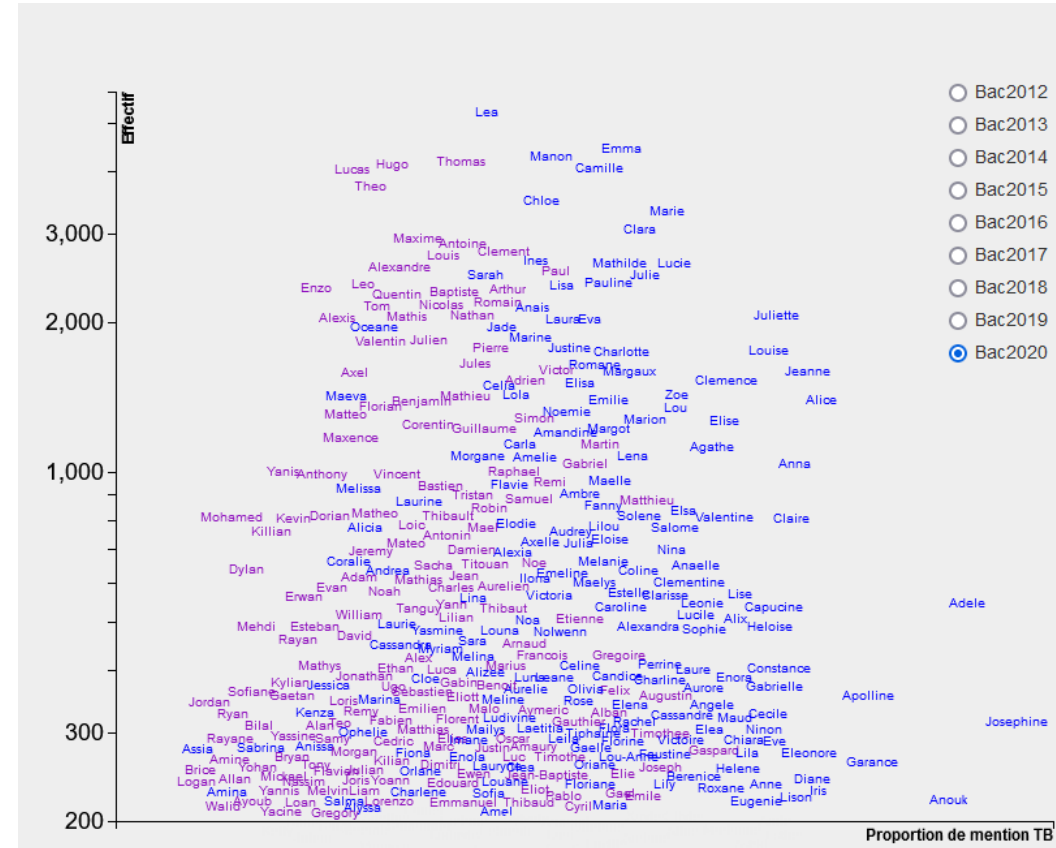
# Outdated? The return of old first names



- Return of some old popular first names
  - Louise, Jeanne, Suzanne
  - Jules, Émile, Paul, etc.
- Time necessary for old people to disappear
  - Avoid giving “old age” connotation to a new born
  - Sonority evolution

# First names and education

- B. Coulmont (2022)
  - Tie between first names and baccalauréat highest honors mention (TB)  
<https://coulmont.com/bac/nuage.html>
- Some tied to higher proportions of TB
  - Joséphine, Alice, Anna, Matthieu
- Others to lower proportions
  - Mohamed, Killian, Assia
- Based on first names, expectation of TB mention
  - This class: 16.90% [15.19,18.59]<sub>90%</sub>
  - France: 15.16% [15.16,15.16]<sub>90%</sub>



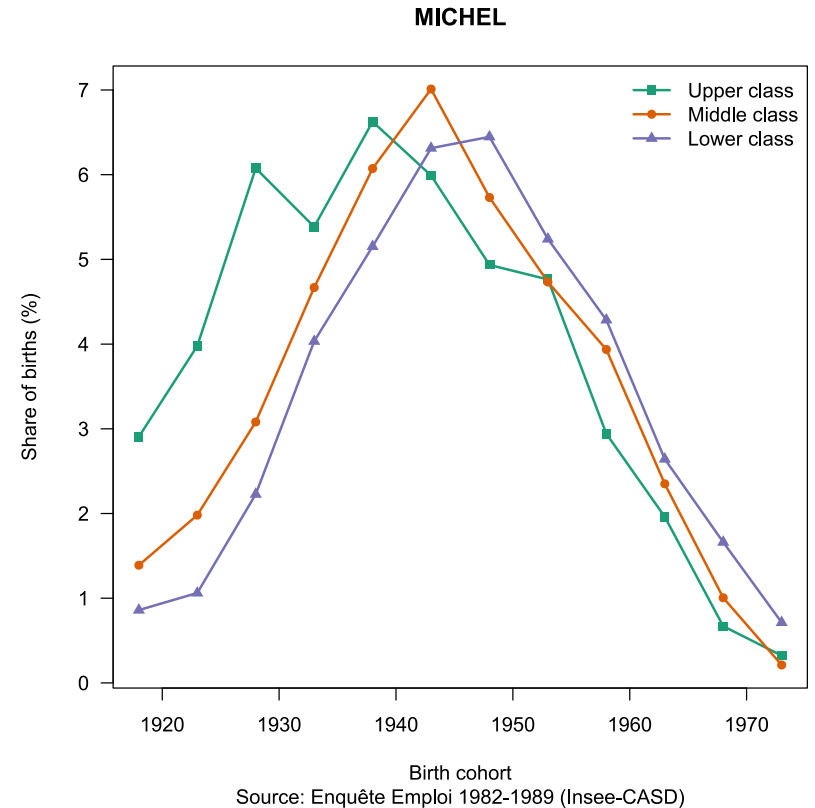
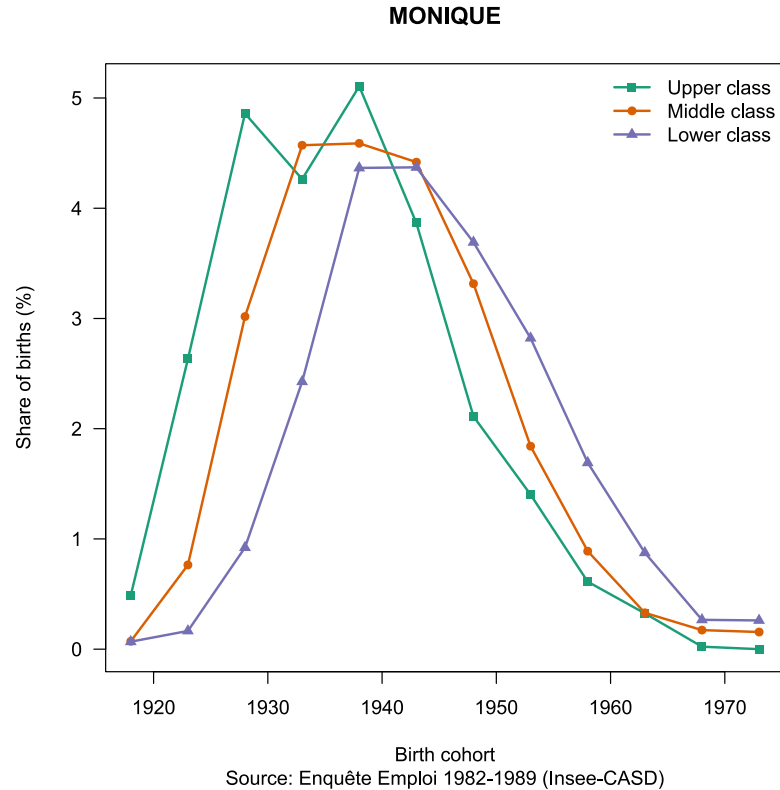
- WHY?

1. What's sociology?

12/71

# Class: the diachronic Top-down diffusion

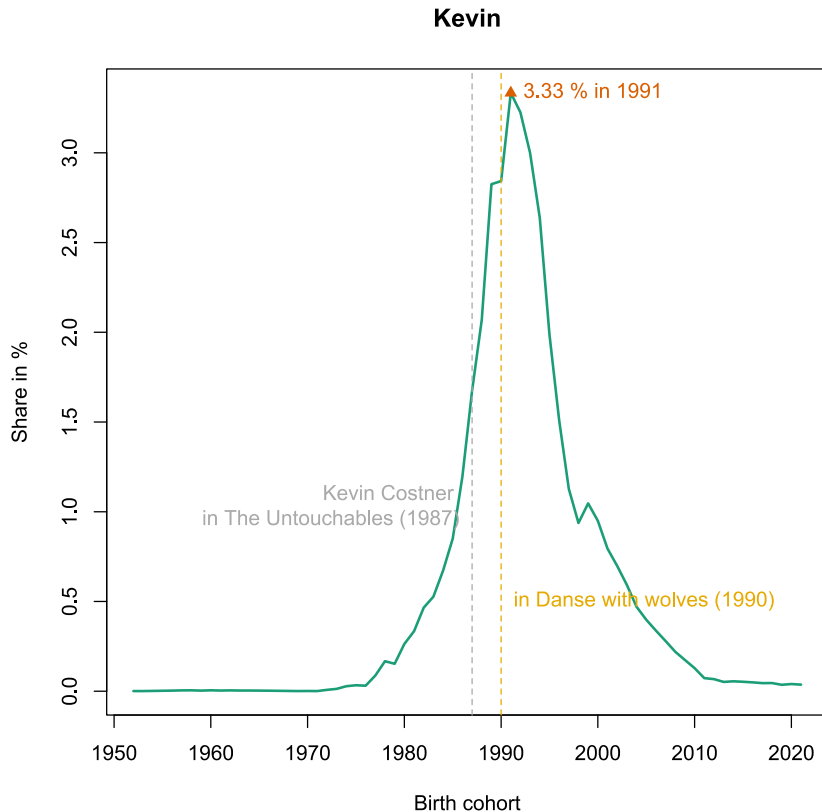
## Bottom-up imitation



1. What's sociology?

13/71

# We need to talk about Kevin



© Photo: Lynn, 2011. *We need to talk about Kevin.*

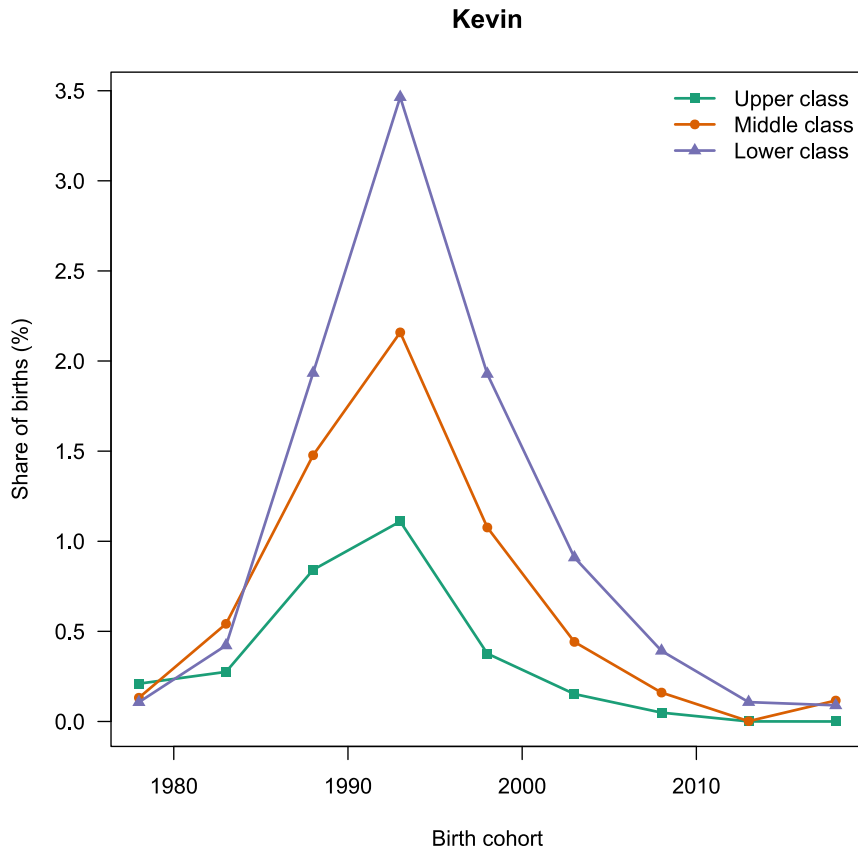
# Why so much french bad jokes on Kevin?

KEVIN EST SUR INTERNET. IL A VU QUELQUE CHOSE QUI L'A OFFENSÉ MAIS L'A IGNORÉ MAIS A CONTINUÉ SA VIE NORMALE.

BRAVO KÉVIN.



# Class: synchronic distinction

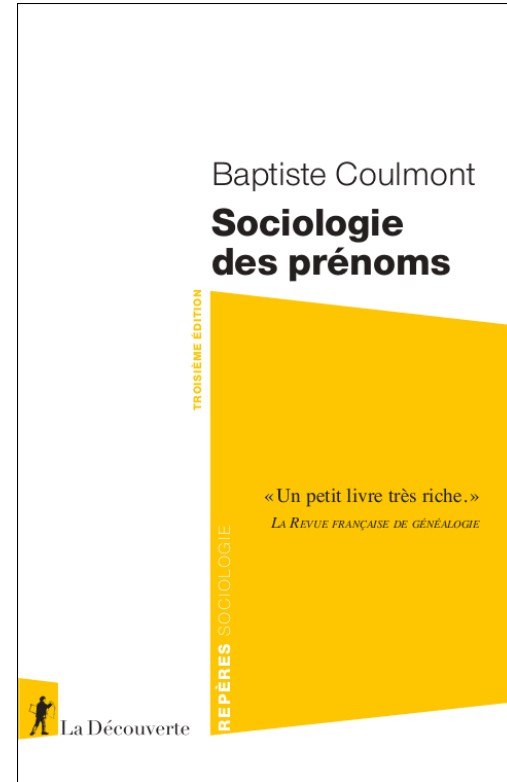
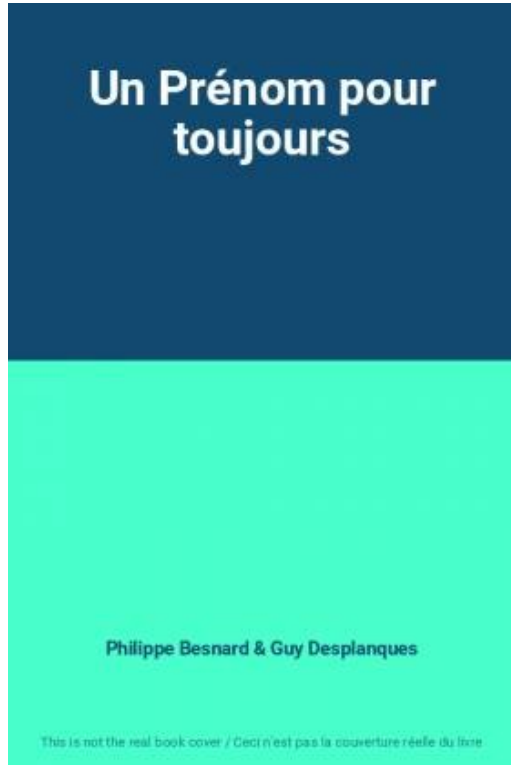


Source: Enquête Emploi 1994-2020 (Insee-CASD)

- In France, anglo-american first names fashionable among working class
- No temporal diffusion from top to bottom
- Distinction logic

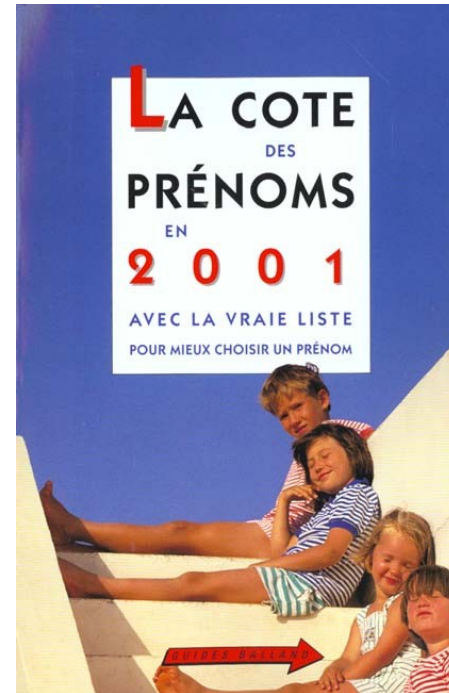


# First names, an object for sociology



# Take-away on first names

- Singularization and sense making
- Age/cohort dynamic
  - Don't give an oldie's name to a baby
- Fashion dynamic
  - Logistic law
- Class Distinction logic
  - Imitation
  - Demarcation
- Social science Performativity



# First take away on what's sociology

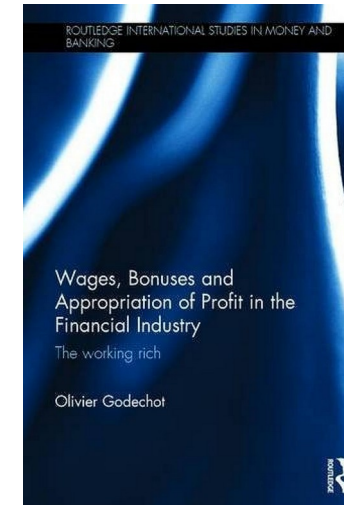
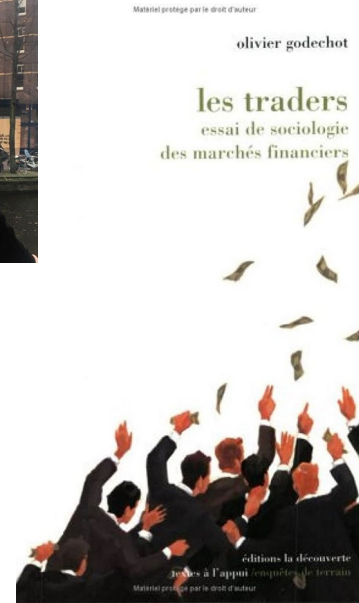
- A study of a social fact
- At the intersection of the collective and the individual spheres
- Mobilizing our understanding capacity  
*[Compréhension]*
  - *Putting yourself in the heads of parents*
- With rigorous methods
- And a reflexive touch
  - studying the universe in which you are embedded



Photo: Stairs of the positivist church, Rio

# Back to self-presentation

- Olivier Godechot
- Field of research
  - Finance
  - Labor markets
  - Academic recruitment
  - Work satisfaction
  - Inequality/segregation



olivier godechot

working rich

salaires, bonus  
et appropriation du profit  
dans l'industrie financière

Christian Baudelot  
Michel Gollac

avec  
Céline Bessière  
Isabelle Coutant  
Olivier Godechot  
Delphine Serre  
Frédéric Viguière

1. What's sociology?

# Conférence de méthodes

- Meryl Merran

- PhD: Fonction éducative de l'entreprise. Le rôle des entreprises dans la formation des jeunes les moins diplômés



- Antoine Leymarie

- PhD: Les transformations des secteurs privés du diagnostic médical : biologie médicale, radiologie, anatomopathologie



# Organization of the course

- 1. What's sociology ?
- I. Norms, values, deviance
  - 2. Integration and social regulation 1. The Durkheimian contribution
  - 3. Integration and social regulation 2. From culture to interaction
- II. Social class and inequalities
  - 4. Social class and inequality (1) : Classical approaches
  - 5. Social class and inequality (2): Contemporary approaches
- 6. Education
- 7. Space
- III. Social institutions
  - 8. Family
  - 9. Religion
  - 10. Exchange, economy and work
  - 11. Capitalism
  - 12. The State

# Requirement: read!

- Reading for the *Conférence de Méthodes*
  - Each week a 20/40-pages article or chapter to prepare
- Reading for the *Cours Magistral*
  - Last hour lively discussion
  - Compulsory reading
  - One question of the exam will be devoted to it

# Cours Magistral Compulsory Reading

- L2. Hoffman, Mark A., and Peter S. Bearman. 2015. “Bringing Anomie Back In: Exceptional Events and Excess Suicide.” *Sociological Science* 2: 186-210.
- L3. Goffman, Erving. 1968 [1961]. “L’univers des reclus”, *Asiles*, Paris : Minuit p. 55-78.
- L5. Ernaux, Annie. [1974]. *Les Armoires Vides*, Paris: Folio, p. 91-114
- L6. Bourdieu, Pierre [ed.]. 1999 [1993]. Entretiens extraits de *La misère du monde*, Paris: Seuil.
- L7. Questionnaire et dictionnaire des variables de l’enquête Emploi 2019
- L8. Pinçon, Michel et Monique Pinçon-Charlot. 1989. “Les rallyes, ou la mise en ordre du hasard des rencontres amoureuses”. *Dans les beaux quartiers*. Paris: Seuil, p. 147-192.
- L10. Godechot, Olivier. 2006. “Hold-up en finance. Les conditions de possibilité des bonus élevés dans l’industrie financière”, *Revue française de sociologie*, 47(2): 341-371.
- L12. Polillo, Simone, and Mauro F. Guillén. 2005. “Globalization pressures and the state: The worldwide spread of central bank independence.” *American journal of sociology* 110(6): 1764-1802.



# Handbooks

- Not compulsory but could be useful
- Numerous handbooks, including some available on line
  - Carr, Deborah, Anthony Giddens, Mitchell Duneier, et al. 2018. *Introduction to sociology*. New York : WW Norton & Company.
  - Conerly et al., *Introduction to sociology*,  
<https://openstax.org/details/books/introduction-sociology-3e>
  - In French, many Repères in sociology La Découverte on various topics.  
<https://www.cairn.info/collection-reperes.htm>

# Exams

- Mid term exam
  - Date 7/10/2023
  - Questions based on the course
  - Documents to comment
- Final exam
  - Date to be defined between 15 & 21/12/2023
  - Questions based on the course
  - Documents to comment

# Grades

- Grade for Introduction to sociology
  - Final exam 1/3
  - Continuous Assessment [*Contrôle continu*] 2/3
    - Mid term exam 1/3 [2/9 of total]
    - Method conference 2/3 [4/9 of total]
      - Fieldwork 1/2
      - Oral presentation and participation 1/2

# Back to our initial question: What's sociology?

*CAVEAT: I see myself mostly as a social scientist. I don't really know what is sociology! (That's why I decided to teach it)!*

- 1. Teaser. First names as an object for sociology
- 2. Genealogies of sociology
- 3. Definitions and objects of sociology
- 4. The scientificity of sociology
- 5. The plurality of sociology
  - 5.1. Conceptions of action
  - 5.2. Methods of empirical proof
  - 5.3. Epistemologies
- 6. The blurring of disciplinary frontiers in social sciences in early 21st century
  - What's specific about sociology?

## 2. Genealogies of sociology

Sociology appears as an academic discipline in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century

- US:
  - 1892: First Department of sociology (Chicago)
  - 1895: *American Journal of Sociology*
  - 1905: *American Sociological Association*
- France
  - 1887: Durkheim *chaire de pédagogie et sciences sociales* in Bordeaux
  - 1898: *L'année sociologique*
  - 1902: Durkheim Chaire de science de l'éducation de la Sorbonne
  - 1913: *Chaire de Sciences de l'Education et Sociologie* at the university of Paris for Durkheim
- Germany
  - 1919: sociology department University of Munich by Max Weber

# Institutionalization as a key moment

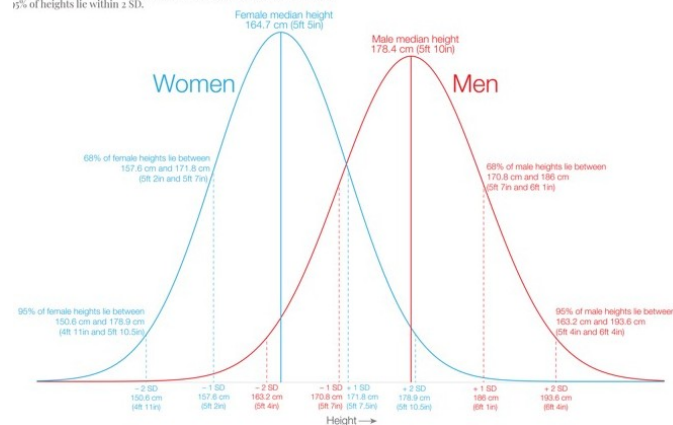
- Before institutionalization
  - Free circulating neologism
  - Abbé Sieyès 1780. // Kant's Anthropology
- With institutionalization
  - => Justify legitimacy, object, courses, students, jobs, students, budget
  - Sociology has to be defined against other social science disciplines
    - Psychology, Economics, Philosophy, Law, Geography, History, etc.
    - Some institutionalizing at the same time
  - Coming & inspired from other disciplines: **Physics**, Law, **Economics**, **Philosophy**,  
Medicine

# Transferring methods from physics to the study of society

- Adolphe(!) Quételet (1796-1874)
  - Astronomer, Mathematician
    - Before 1809/12 Laplace-Gauss law → astronomy: distribution of measurement errors, mean: true value
  - 1835. *Sur l'homme et le développement de ses facultés, ou Essai de physique sociale*
    - Human phenomena follow Gaussian laws.
    - → *L'homme moyen*. Average man, Statistical Essence of man behind diversity
    - Statistics as the key tool of **Social Physics**
    - Cons: Very descriptive and little theory of relations



8% of heights lie within 1 standard deviation (SD) of the median height:  
9% of heights lie within 2 SD.



1. What's sociology?

31/71

# Transferring laws of physics to the study of society

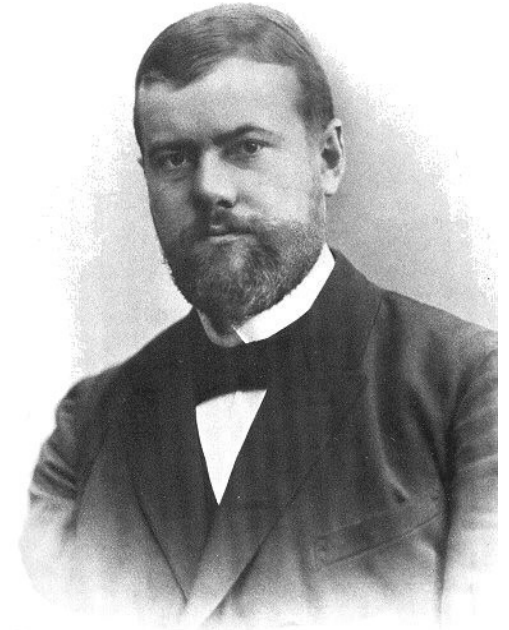
- Auguste Comte (1798-1857)
  - *Polytechnicien*, Mathematician
  - *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830-1842). Epistemology. The importance for science to be backed by positive facts
- Law of three stages [*Loi des trois états*]
  - A revisit of global of history of humanity with the concept of *law*.
    - Theological / Metaphysical / Positivist
  - Limits: speculative and little empirical support
- Switch from “social physics” to “sociology” (~1839)





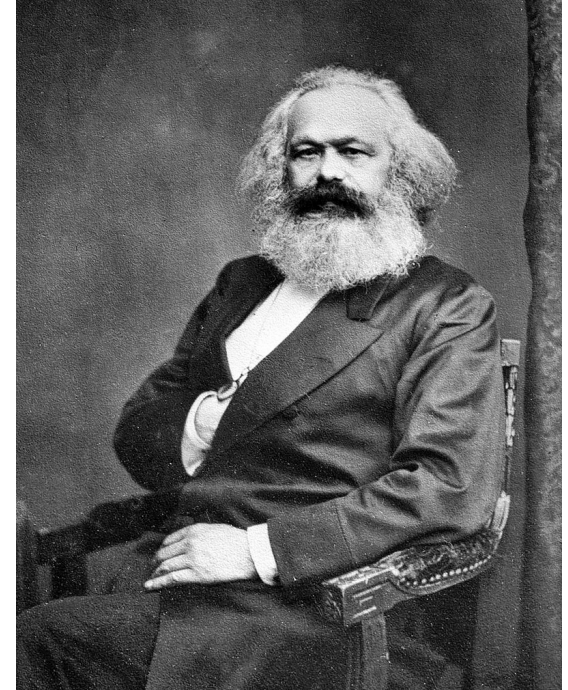
# Alternative economics

- Economics institutionalized earlier
  - Rational behavior at the core of the paradigm (especially marginal turn)
  - 19<sup>th</sup> century fierce debate in Germany between marginalist and historical school
- Max Weber (1864-1920)
  - PhD & Habilitation in Law:
    - *Development of the Principle of Joint Liability (...) in Italian cities* (1889), *Roman Agrarian History and Its Significance for Public and Private Law* (1891).
  - 1894: Professor of economics
  - *Historical school* economist with a law background integrating progressively social elements (religion) to explain the big issue: capitalism
  - Posture similar to other German economists: Sombart, Schumpeter



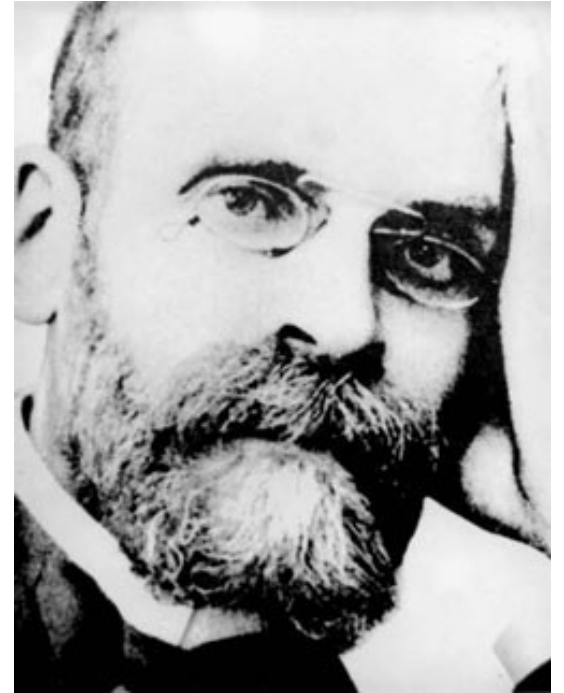
# Stepping out of philosophy

- Karl Marx (1818-1882)
  - Training in philosophy in Berlin among young hegelians
  - 1841: PhD *Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature*
  - Vibrant and politically mobilized community
- “Philosophers have explained the world; it is necessary to change the world.” (*Theses on Feuerbach*, 1845)
  - Dialectic and Historical Materialism as new “sciences”
  - Imperative to study economics to understand capitalism
  - Main scientific contribution in economics ... But progressive downgrading in sociology ?



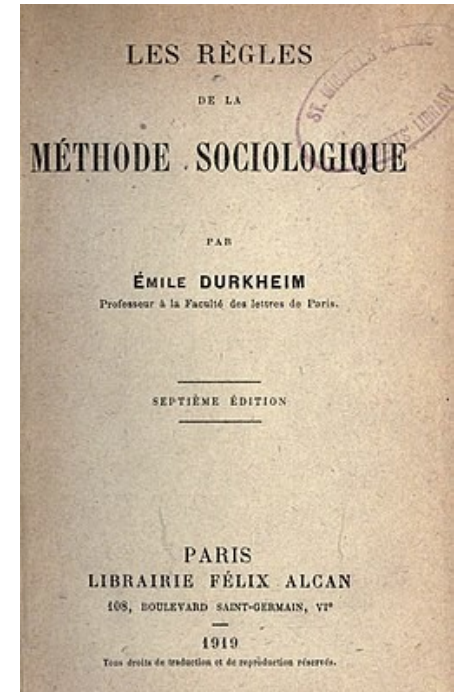
# Stepping out of philosophy (2)

- Durkheim (1858-1917)
  - *Normalien, agrégé* in philosophy (1882)
  - PhD & Latin thesis (1892)
    - De la division du travail social*
    - La contribution de Montesquieu à la constitution de la science sociale*
- A shift in neokantian philosophy
  - Morality doctrine → science of morality



# Founding sociology

- 1895. *Rules of sociological method* [Les règles de la méthode sociologique]
  - Defining sociology against
    - Psychology, Philosophy
    - Conceptual sociology (Comte)
    - Other “mundane” approaches of sociology (Tarde, Spencer)



# An object: Social facts

- “The first and most basic rule is to consider social facts as things” (p. 60)
  - Social facts
    - “they consist of manners of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him.”
  - A strong objectivation principle
    - Facts rather than values.
    - Against subjective, moral, normative, ideological, philosophical stances
- *“La première règle et la plus fondamentale est de considérer les faits sociaux comme des choses” (p.15)*
    - *“des manières d'agir de penser, de sentir, extérieures à l'individu, et qui sont douées d'un pouvoir de coercition en vertu duquel elles s'imposent à lui” (p.5)*

# How to objectify social facts?

- Get rid of preconceptions [*prénotions*]
  - “The first of these corollaries is: One must systematically discard all preconceptions”
- Defining
  - “The subject matter of research must only include a group of phenomena defined beforehand by certain common external characteristics and all phenomena which correspond to this definition must be so included”
- *“Le premier de ces corollaires est que Il faut écarter systématiquement toutes les prénotions” (p.31)*
- *“Ne jamais prendre pour objet de recherches qu'un groupe de phénomènes préalablement définis par certains caractères extérieurs qui leur sont communs et comprendre dans la même recherche tous ceux qui répondent à cette définition”*

# How to explain social facts?

- Explain social facts with other social facts
  - “The determining cause of a social fact must be sought among antecedent social facts and not among the states of the individual consciousness”
  - *“La cause déterminante d'un fait social doit être cherchée parmi les faits sociaux antécédents, et non parmi les états de la conscience individuelle” (p. 109)*

# Observational covariations as the main method

“This is to compare the cases where they are both simultaneously present or absent, so as to discover whether the variations they display in these different combinations of circumstances provide evidence that one depends upon the other. When the phenomena can be artificially produced at will by the observer, the method is that of experimentation proper. When, on the other hand, the production of facts is something beyond our power to command, and we can only bring them together as they have been spontaneously produced, the method used is one of indirect experimentation, or the comparative method.”

*“Nous n'avons qu'un moyen de démontrer qu'un phénomène est cause d'un autre, c'est de comparer les cas où ils sont simultanément présents ou absents et de chercher si les variations qu'ils présentent dans ces différentes combinaisons de circonstances témoignent que l'un dépend de l'autre. Quand ils peuvent être artificiellement produits au gré de l'observateur, la méthode est l'expérimentation proprement dite. Quand, au contraire, la production des faits n'est pas à notre disposition et que nous ne pouvons que les rapprocher tels qu'ils se sont spontanément produits, la méthode que l'on emploie est celle de l'expérimentation indirecte ou méthode comparative.” (p. 124)*



# Defining sociology

“In fact, without doing violence to the meaning of the word, one may term an *institution* all the beliefs and modes of behaviour instituted by the collectivity; sociology can then be defined as the science of institutions, their genesis and their functioning.” (p. 49)

“On peut en effet, sans dénaturer le sens de cette expression, appeler *institution*, toutes les croyances et tous les modes de conduite institués par la collectivité ; la sociologie peut alors être définie : la science des institutions, de leur genèse et de leur fonctionnement” (2ème Préface)



# Durkheim & sociology def.

- Take away
  - Objectivity: Consider social facts as things
  - Types of explanation: Social facts explain social facts
  - Empirical method: Covariation
- Limits
  - A dogmatic disqualification of mental stage/ subjectivity
  - Questionable functionalism
  - Holism

# The weberian antidote?



- Emphasis on human agency & sense making
  - “Sociology (...) is a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences.”
- Social action: action in relation with others
  - “Action is "social" insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course”

(Weber 1978 [1922])

– *“Nous appelons sociologie une science qui se propose de comprendre par interprétation l’activité sociale et par là expliquer causalement son déroulement et ses effets.”*

# Common middle ground definitions

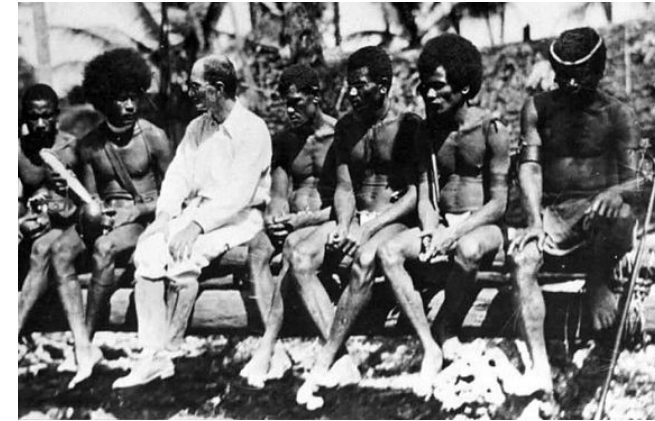
- “The sociologist [...] is someone concerned with understanding society in a disciplined way. The nature of this discipline is scientific” (Berger, 1963)
- And controversial ones
  - “redefining sociology not as the “science of the social”, but as the tracing of associations” (Latour, 2007).
  - from the Latin root socius (partner)
  - associations between heterogeneous elements: human/non humans etc.

# Sociology is a science

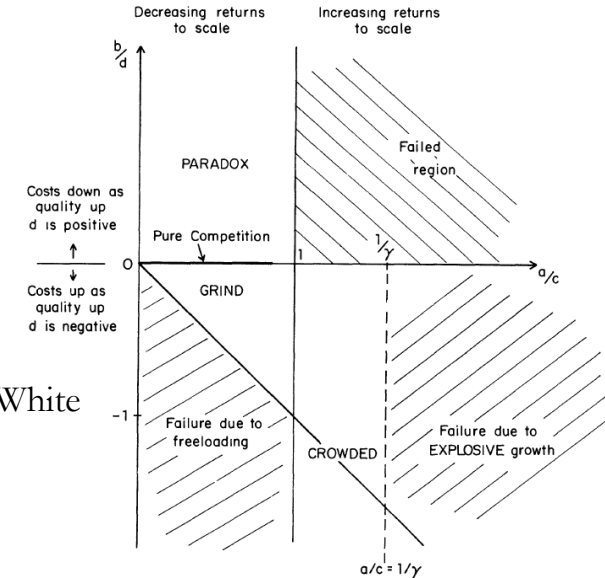
- Combining
  - Induction and deduction
  - Theory and empirical analysis
  - Interpretation and testing
  - Qualitative and quantitative data
- Just as all sciences

# Scientific scheme

- 1. Building theories/hypotheses
  - Random apple/idea
  - Inductive approach
    - Exploratory data analysis
    - Secondary Literature
  - Logic
    - Natural language reasoning
    - Formal models
- Your theory:
  - Social fact A  $\Rightarrow$  Social fact B



$$d \left( \frac{c-a}{b+d} \right) A y^{(bc+ad)/b} > \frac{da}{b} k, \quad (6)$$



Photos: M. Gotlib/ B. Malinowski /H. White

*1. What's sociology?*

# Scientific scheme (2)

- 2. Testing theory
  - T:  $A \Rightarrow B$
  - Design where T's implication are confirmed or infirmed
  - Empirical Data analysis
  - T supported or infirmed

	Top 1% share		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
GDP per capita	0.16*** (0.05)	0.14*** (0.05)	0.17*** (0.05)
Union rate	0.27*** (0.05)	0.24*** (0.05)	0.31*** (0.05)
Importation rate	0.05 (0.07)	0.07 (0.07)	0.08 (0.07)
Volume of stocks traded/GDP	0.23** (0.10)	0.57*** (0.09)	0.21* (0.10)
Volume of stocks traded/GDP × Years in (2001–2003 and 2008–2013)		–0.69*** (0.13)	
Cumulative sum of drops in volume of stocks traded/GDP			–0.13 (0.08)
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes

# Application

You think that parents avoid giving names that sound old to babies.

Think of a research design to test this hypothesis.



# Axiological neutrality

- Axiological neutrality
  - Notion introduced by Weber (1920)
  - Sociology as a «value-free» endeavor
  - Not judging or trying to fix society. But explaining it.
  - Complementary to Durkheim's advice of discarding preconceptions
- What does it mean?
  - Set aside your personal values when analyzing society.
  - Reflexivity and conscientization. Don't forget about your values, be conscious of their biasing potential.
  - Separation of positive and normative analysis

# Sociological pluralism

- Welcoming harbor for scholars from various origins
- Diversity in paradigms
- Diversity in methods
- Diversity in epistemologies



# Conceptions of social actions

- Classical polar oppositions
  - Holism à la Durkheim
  - Rational action theory

“economics is all about how people make choices [and] sociology is about why they don't have any choices to make”  
(Duesenberry 1960: 233)
- And in between
  - Bounded rationality
  - Interactions and micro influence
  - Habitus à la Bourdieu
  - Actions guided by beliefs & norms

# Diversity within an author

- Types of action according to Max Weber (1978 [1922])
  - Traditional
  - Affectual
  - Value-rational
  - Instrumentally rational



Photo: Scott, Ridley. 2000. *Gladiator*

# From micro to macro-actors

- Problem of macro-actors
  - Groups, class, state, religion, school, etc
  - How do they act?
  - What is their agency?
- In a holistic approach, macro aggregates exist; external to individuals
- In an individualistic approach, macro actors are always an aggregation of individual behaviors

# Take away on conception of actions

- Strong underlying philosophical divergence
- Difference in objects
  - For some objects, a macro holistic perspective enables to make good predictions
  - On others, an rational action approach is better
  - Both are not based on “realistic” assumptions
- Let’s be pragmatic and instrumentalist
  - Hypothesis realism is not the criteria of good science.
  - But the capacity to test successfully predictions.
  - “It is as if” / “Tout se passe comme si”.

# Diversity of methods

- Big divide: quantitative versus qualitative
  - A byproduct of specialization in methods
  - Mix-methods, as an ideal difficult to fulfill
- Qualitative methods
  - Observation
  - Interviews
  - Text analysis (archives, documents, etc.)
- Quantitative methods
  - Questionnaires / Surveys
  - Administrative/business /internet data
  - Experiments
  - Formal modeling
    - Mathematical models
    - Simulations

# Beyond divergence: similarities

- The scientist produces data
  - Interviews
  - Survey
  - Experiments
- The scientist builds on existing (non-scientific) data
  - Observation
  - Administrative data
  - Text analysis (archives)



# Diverse epistemologies

- From very hypothetico-deductive epistemologies
  - Induction moment is little important
  - Emphasis on testing scientific predictions with “Causal methods”
  - => experimentalism
  - Epistemology à la Popper (2005 [1959])

# Diverse epistemologies 2

- To very interpretivist ones
  - Changing our understanding rather making predictions
    - A could be seen as A' rather than  $A \Rightarrow B$
  - The role of descriptions for sense making
  - Skeptical towards determinism
  - Epistemology à la Dilthey

# In between

- Qualitative work more on the inductive side
  - Even if causal
  - Difficult to split qualitative between facts for building theory and facts for confirming it
- Quantitative work more on the deductive side

# So do we really know what is sociology?

- Explaining social facts with other social facts, thanks to scientific method
- Putting aside your ideology
- Open-mindedness in terms of methods, conceptions of micro behavior and links between micro and macro behavior

# What about other social sciences?

- Economics, political science, geography, history, linguistics, anthropology...
- Also explain social facts
- With a scientific method

# Traditional borders in social sciences

- Traditional division
  - Economics → monetary phenomena (prices, income, wages)
  - History → ancient time
  - Political science → politics
  - Sociology → the social
- But what's the social?

# Pax Parsonia

- Parsons (1902-1979)
- Ambition of sociology
  - Sociology covers everything
  - But recognizes legitimacy of economics on the subdomain of monetary phenomena
- Sociology in practice,
  - studies the residual domains not covered by other more ancient disciplines: education, crime, family, poverty, etc.

# The blurring of the frontiers

- Economic imperialism
- Economic sociology
- Political sociology
- Political economy
- Etc.



# Difference between disciplines on a same object

- Economics: theory ++, modeling +++, description -, quanti ++, quali --, methods diversity -
- Political science: theory +, modeling +, description +, quanti +, quali -/+ , methods diversity -/+
- Sociology : theory +, modeling -, description +, quanti +, quali +, methods diversity +
- History: theory -, modeling ---, description ++, quanti -, quali ++, methods diversity -/+

# Let's be sociologists!

- And not just theoretical and normative
- To see what is sociology, look at what sociologists are and what they do
  - Sociologists are social scientists
    - With a PhD in sociology
    - Working in a sociology department
    - Publishing in sociological outlets
    - Citing sociological pantheon
  - So, sociology does not relate to a specific scientific object or approach?
  - Just an institutional construct?

# No clear frontiers, but an *air de famille*

- Methodological ecumenism and paradigmatic diversity
- Emphasis on backgrounds, hierarchy and inequalities
- Core classical themes, sometimes shared with other disciplines
- Maybe a core/periphery model more to approach sociology

# What is sociology?

- It's either *the* or *a* social science.
- If it's *the* social science, sociology's object and methods are clear. Studying and explaining the *social*
- But if it is *a* social science among *many* with the same goal
  - A historical and institutional construct
  - With some non-exclusive typical domains, methods of specialization
  - And a shared pantheon
  - Welcoming harbor

# What is sociology?

- As a historical construct, it comes with variation in time and space
- It could change in the future. It could disappear
- But the rest of the *intro2soc* course will help you to discover what sociology is today
- Perhaps, you will get to like it, if it fits your mindset:
  - Understand the world you are in & yourself

# A sociologist at work

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