

INTRODUCTION

This is a book about books. It is also an argument about the physical form of the book as a primary site of struggle over its interpretation and legacy. Interpretation and appropriation exist in a reciprocal and dynamic relationship; the sense that is made of a text impacts the process of building on it and vice versa. Neither, however, is independent of the particular form the text takes. Hence the stakes are high in determining who comes to shape such a form and to what extent.

As a book about the politics of bookmaking, this is not your usual politics book. The book focuses not on books as vehicles of purportedly political arguments but on books as material forms mediating and constituting meaning—books as objects to which, and through which, things can be done to shape possible future uses. We will therefore concentrate here on the performativity of the medium, or how the objectification of the text in a particular artifact form has the potential to shape our experience of it, not only in terms of its physicality or sensorial qualities but also in terms of its meaning and iconicity, or what the book comes to stand for. In so doing, our analysis sees the form a text takes as having agentic qualities. But this is still, for the most part, a derivative type of agency, dependent on the agency of humans. This is here understood as the problem-solving capacity of the human actors involved in the production, circulation, and interpretation of texts—authors, publishers, editors, translators, interpreters, and theory builders—which can be more oriented toward the past, the future, or the present and involves the continual development of their reflective intelligence (see Emirbayer and Mische 1998, 970–71). Each chapter of the book will speak of the role of these agents in exploring the powerful melding of medium and meaning.

Of all the books we could have examined in this book, we selected a group of texts that at some point or another have been regarded as “classics” of social thought. Given their status as “classics,” much has been written about these works and at least as much has been constructed upon them. Their constituent parts—ideas, concepts, and arguments—and their logical structure have been taken apart and reconstructed on many occasions. Debates about their interpretation and legacy have been intense and are ongoing. We will not enter into these debates here, at least not directly. This book proposes to look at these works from a different perspective. It investigates the story behind the books themselves.

What can be gained from adopting this stance? The answer seems far from obvious. To many, focusing on the book as object misses the point of our engagement with these works, their ideas, and their enduring relevance and is therefore in need of further justification. For us, this can be justified in two ways. First, regarding the complex and close interplay between material form and meaning production, we suggest that texts are products of an embodied mind—a mind that makes sense of itself and the world through association with the body, notably in the very physical and sensuous act of writing. In this sense, discursive practices are always already material, and our understanding of theory as theorizing, as practice rather than outcome, can emerge only through examining their interplay. Writing, for one, is not a disembodied act. It is rather a physical act of craft, committing ideas and words to a physical medium, working them out through it. Their relationship to material form is one of mutual entailment rather than mere externality (Barad 2003, 822). Hence just as it would be wrong to reduce meaning to form, conceiving meaning apart from form would be equally disingenuous. Second, if texts are embodied forms, and if form affects and is even constitutive of meaning, then there is a very literal sense in which producing a book can be “meaning making.” It is, therefore, to be expected that the struggle over the meaning of a text, and the possibilities of creative development it opens up, will sometimes become a struggle over its particular and specific physical embodiments.

As the overall purpose of this book begins to emerge, the conclusion seems to follow that this is either a history of social thought, through the history of the books that made it, or an exercise in descriptive bibliography, looking at these books as objects and describing them painstakingly as such, with a view to producing a sociology of texts, one that shows how changing form affects meaning. We would say it is not fully either. History deals with processes over time and often takes on a linear or teleological quality. But this book does not offer a systematic diachronic analysis of the evolution of the

material form(s) taken by the classical texts of social theory, not even when this analysis is circumscribed to the Anglo-Saxon world.¹ In the majority of these chapters, the approach adopted is synchronic, and we will be dealing rather with snapshots or slices of history being deliberately singled out to allow for a more in-depth examination of the forces mediating media transmutations. These are the object of descriptive bibliography, which tends to ignore what we wish to bring to the fore—that is, the agents responsible for them, as well as the implications of their actions. These agents are the protagonists of the politics of the book. Books are mobile physical outlets certain agents use to project meaning. Sometimes this comes in the form of a disciplinary project; on other occasions, it has a more distinctively political character. Books are often battlegrounds where war is waged, their pages offering support for agents' maneuvering to show how certain claims are indefensible, for attacking or even demolishing opposing arguments, for making targeted criticisms, in short, to win an argument against adversaries. Our analysis of the book is genealogical insofar it is concerned with discussing certain key historical junctures at which agents—by commenting, reviewing, editing, introducing, or translating the book in question—fought one another over what it stands for.

BOOK MATTERS

Texts are embodied entities. The materiality of texts and, in particular, of books, as a specific material form of textual transmission, is integral to the analysis presented in this book. In a culture overwhelmingly focused on the mind and its products, materiality is easily marginalized. However, the physical embodiment of texts is integral to the process of objectification whereby thought comes to divide itself from itself to become more self-reflexive and more widely transmissible. The shared origin of text and textile in the Latin *texere* (from the Latin *textus*, a tissue, in turn derived from *texere*, to weave) is a powerful reminder of materiality as an emergent quality of texts. Taken literally, it speaks of the centrality of textiles to the material history of texts and their circulation. Paper was, after all, originally made from cotton rags gathered from hemp and flax clothing. Metaphorically, however, the meaning of the term *text* extended in ways that left its materiality behind. *Text* is now typically used to refer to the book or other written or printed work regarded in terms of ideational content rather than physical form. The rich vocabulary of cloth is still in use, of course. But rather than referring to any concrete material embodiment—textile or otherwise—it describes the labor

of composition—that is, writing, understood as the verbal activity of spinning the web of words that forms a text. However, in a text, such spinning is never mere mental play: it is always instantiated in specific media; it is a physical process. In other words, in a text, work and medium are intimately entwined. Words do not form a text *apart* from the particular material form in which they are incorporated but *through* it.

There are two main reasons the textual object itself is worthy of inquiry in a book about classics of social and political thought. First, given the complex interplay between form and content, the textual object can provide privileged access to thinking or theorizing as an activity rather than as a thing. Second, given how form impacts textual meaning, analyzing the textual object can open a door to multiple ways in which form can be deployed to construct meaning, thus providing parameters within which the book can be understood. And meaning can be made of layer upon layer of editorial signs.

It all begins with the choice of format. A work that is awarded the honor of a hardback prestige edition is often admitted to the pantheon of classics. Similarly, a work that is republished as a paperback once its hardback edition passes the commercial test is sanctioned for its popularity, its classic status, or both. A paperback edition conveys multiple meanings. The first is purely economic: in short, better price. The second concerns the relationship of the reader to the book, as an object that is lighter, more portable, easier and more intimate to use. Finally, the scholarly paperback published in a renowned series conveys editorial selectivity by scientific peers and, by that very fact, constitutes the work as a classic, addressed primarily at a knowledgeable university public. Mass production may not, therefore, necessarily rob the work of its aura. On the contrary, its paratextual meaning may be synonymous with canonization.²

That editorial practice regarding issues such as format, typography, design, binding, and layout can profoundly affect the ways texts might be read makes such a practice a likely battleground for those seeking to control texts, their identity, and their meaning. At its most extreme, such a battleground can become a field of vicious dispute. John Locke famously hinted at this when he reflected on the effects of the division into chapter and verse of the texts forming the Bible.³ The division of the Bible into a series of aphorisms, he explained, not only detracted from the overall coherence of God's Word. It made it fit for appropriation for sectarian purposes, with textual fragmentation paving the way for fragmentation of the commonwealth along religious and political lines. From the decoupage of the text to the evisceration of the reading public, Locke saw a disquieting continuity. There could hardly be a

more compelling reason to think that matter matters and take the materiality of the text seriously.

PARATEXTS

The struggle over the books of the sociological canon may be far less contentious, but not necessarily less intense. Paratexts are normally one of its epicenters. As the prefix, “para-,” indicates, the term *paratext* refers to a series of devices surrounding the main text that form the frame through which it comes to be viewed—that is, received and interpreted. Besides formatting and typography, paratexts include both things within the book (technically known as the peritext) such as title, author’s name, front and back covers, jacket blurbs, index, footnotes, table of contents, foreword, dedication, preface, introduction, frontispieces, and illustrations and things outside the book (technically known as the epitext) such as commentaries, interviews, and reviews. All these mediate the book to the reader, making it present to them. But here as elsewhere presentation is not a question of mere display through a transparent screen; it is, rather, a representation, involving construction.

Paratexts do things. They act on the text, constructing it as such or such by identifying it, contextualizing it, presenting its defining features and purposes to the target audience. They generate meaning beyond the borders of the text and shape the production of meaning by/from it. This gives them a paradoxical quality that is, again, already signaled by the prefix “para-,” signifying simultaneously proximity and distance, similarity and difference, interiority and exteriority, a boundary, or both sides of the boundary line at once divided and connected by it (J. Miller 1979, 219).

Gerard Genette captured the liminal quality of the paratext perfectly: “More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a threshold”—that is, “a zone between text and off-text, not only of transition but also of transaction” (1997, 1–2). Such a threshold—or in-between area, as it were—constitutes a kind of ownerless *res nullius*, which is up for grabs, free to be owned by anyone seeking to influence the text’s production of meaning or looking to drive it in particular directions.

Genette attributed this role primarily to the author, whom he saw invested in protecting the text’s integrity or correct interpretation. As such, Genette reserved a specific function to the paratext—that is, “to ensure for the text a destiny consistent with the author’s purpose”—and excluded from paratexts anything for which the author or their associates (namely, posthumous

editors, perpetuating the author's intentions) did not accept responsibility (1997, 407). Behind this understanding of the paratext lies a conception of the identity of the text as fundamentally fixed and immutable, and of the paratext as the instrument allowing the text to be adapted to new eras, ideally without betraying authorial meaning and intentions (9).⁴ However, as Genette admits, not all paratexts are crafted by the author or controlled by them, and not all editors and publishers who craft paratexts are primarily, or even committed at all, to the centrality of the author's viewpoint, to "the paratextual performance" that "sustains it, inspires it, anchors it" (408). Their intervention in what Philippe Lejeune describes as a pivotal "fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text" (1975, 45) may follow from a radically different conception of the text, the paratext, and their uses—and of what may enhance, impede, or ultimately block the text's reception. By looking into paratexts—from author-publisher correspondence to titles, prefaces, and introductions—we will primarily inquire about the performativity of these devices, or what they attempt to do to the text. We will also be taking meaning not as something simply inherent in the text but as emerging out of successive interventions in it, notably those having for their target liminal devices that enable "a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public" (McKenzie quoted in Genette 1997, 1).

THE POLITICS OF TRANSLATION

Translations are sometimes included in the broad category of paratexts.⁵ However, in this book, we grant them a more autonomous standing. By doing so, we recognize the centrality of language to meaning production. If paratexts are thresholds of textual interpretation, with translation we move decidedly into its midst.

It is true that translation is sometimes conceived of as a purely derivative activity, consisting in a search for word-for-word equivalents, with the purpose of preserving meaning unchanged from source-language text to target-language text. This is translation as ruled by an ideal of neutrality, guarding against any imposition of extraneous meaning or interpretation. Thus conceived, translation is easily relegated to the margins of the original text and hardly justifies independent analysis. However, translation is never, or even primarily, just a linguistic act. As Peter Ghosh rightly points out, translation is rather a "conceptual act" focusing on the transfer of concepts, their meaning

and point, between different, and often alien, contexts—linguistic, temporal, geographical, and cultural (2001, 59–63). As such, all translation presupposes a gap, and the bridging of this gap—if it is to produce intelligibility—will always require paraphrase or interpretation. This gap also accounts for the politics of translation, in the sense that, as Kari Palonen correctly observes, it creates a playroom, as it were, “for alternative translations as well as a built-in conflict between the users of the ‘original’ and those using a translation” (2003, 16).

The translation theorist André Lefevere explores the political dimension of translation further. The translator, he claims, thinks primarily in terms of two grids—the grid of concepts and the textual grid, which “in their interplay, may well determine how reality is constructed for the reader, not only of the translation, but also of the original” (1999, 75–76). Translation is, therefore, a form of rewriting, and this rewriting is responsible for the way in which the receptor culture constructs “images” and “representations” of both author and text. The study of these rewritings is critical, according to Lefevere, because they “play an analyzable part in the manipulation of words and concepts which, among other things, constitute power in a culture” (1985, 241). The contexts, modes, and purposes of such rewritings are multiple. However, Lefevere proposes that we analyze them by looking into “controlling factors,” which he articulates through the notion of “patronage.” Patronage refers here to “any power (person, institution) that can further or hinder the reading, writing or re-writing of literature” by acting not as a repressive force but as the main producer of knowledge and discourse (1992, 15). Decisions about particular translation choices and about what to translate are chief components of this power.

When dissecting the cultural power of translation, Lefevere focuses on two main aspects. The first refers to the ways in which translators deliberately manipulate texts to advance their own ideology or that from which the patronage springs. The second aspect refers to how translators pour texts into dominant discourses to secure their acceptance (1990, 88, 57). *Manipulation* is a term too normatively invested to be of analytical use to us here. It predetermines what it needs to establish. Translators are best understood as agents, whose agenda and perspective must be considered in determining what goes on in translation. If translation is always a transport or a transfer, translators—alongside authors, editors, and publishers who define the parameters within which translators work—are key gatekeepers of what gets presented to the target audience and how. Translating a text, and doing it in one way rather than another, can strongly impact its subsequent reception, use, or interpretative appropriation. It is, therefore, unsurprising that prominent

theorists and commentators become involved, either directly or indirectly, in translating works and even in formulating the criteria translation should follow. What is at stake in their work, and in the translation wars that often follow, is one of the driving questions behind certain chapters of this book.

THE RATIONALE AND STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

In each chapter, the reader will find a self-enclosed genealogy of a given book. We offer genealogies of six books: *Mind, Self, and Society*, by G. H. Mead; the *1844 Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, by Karl Marx; *The Souls of Black Folk*, by W. E. B. Du Bois; *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, by Max Weber; *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, by Émile Durkheim, and *Democracy in America*, by Alexis de Tocqueville. All these books are theoretical texts. Albeit not necessarily for the same reasons, or at the same time, all of them have also been regarded as sociological classics. Similar claims were, of course, made in other academic disciplines about each of them. So as to avoid offering six disparate histories, with little or no relation to each other, we focus on the reception of these works in postwar American sociology, arguably the most influential national sociological tradition of our time.

As theoretical texts, it is easy to take these books as containers for arguments or a tightly knit set of propositions. However, the focus of our analysis is not on what these texts say, on how they say it, or indeed on how they do things in and through saying it the way they do. Although this angle of analysis is not entirely absent, our interest lies primarily in the intertwining of *content* and *form* in theoretical writing, as perhaps in all writing, and in particular in the transformations that occur as such writing is organized and printed in a book form. This means we turn our attention to publishing and the forms of editorial composition that made these texts and their reception possible. This results in a change of protagonists when our study is compared with the common study of social or political “thought.”

The six genealogies we offer often, but not always, begin, still, with the figure of the author. They sometimes, but not often, seek to ascertain that author’s intentions. And they hardly ever probe the arguments that lie behind the text’s propositions. Our research has rather as its main characters a collective of agents—including publishers, editors, translators, and commentators—who we show to be engaged in a complex process of *bookmaking*, whereby texts are not simply reproduced from established originals but actively shaped by and through a series of decisions about the manner in which one might reproduce

and make sense of them. Because these agents do not act in a vacuum, to make sense of their action and of the effects (intended, unintended, or a combination of both) it produces, we need to work outside the normal confines of so-called intellectual history, to look more broadly into writing genres and their statuses; technologies of publication and their cultural meanings; patronage relationships; political structures and unfolding political events; intellectual and editorial networks; surprising affiliations and disaffiliations between editors and editors and commentators, within and across countries; and the long shadow cast by academes and professional institutions.

In many of our analyses, albeit to different degrees, the attempt to separate authorial composition and revision from editorial and compositorial interventions will prove infinitely more complex than perhaps anticipated. This is not solely explained by the weakness of earlier editorial practices, which often failed to show what the editor had done and what the documentary evidence was. To assume this much is to assume too much. It is to assume, for instance, the material fixity of the text and the unambiguity of the available textual “evidence.” It is also to assume that even in the face of ineradicable ambiguity, a book can be produced without privileging one particular “version” of the work over another. It is to take the eventual choice between “versions” as something that can never be “neutral” or non-value-laden. The truth, however, is that all these assumptions have little or no basis in reality. As we hope to show by exploring the forces, mechanisms, events, agents, and indeed the accidents that have helped *make* (and sometimes also *unmake*) the texts under analysis, the social life of texts, even of the “systematic” texts yielded by core social disciplines, is far more complex and unsettling than their present physical existence betrays. Even this is far from settled, however: just as a definite version of a text is a near impossibility, so it is equally impossible that a definite *edition* of the text and apparatus is ever produced. To think otherwise is to deny the constructedness of the book—any book.

The interplay between the construct (form) and content defines how we approach our six theoretical texts. We are, however, less interested in assessing the legitimacy of the constructions we anatomize, or in evaluating the quality of the editorial practices underpinning them (a judgment that would in many cases be anachronistic, as guided by modern scholarly and editorial criteria), than in what publishers, editors, and translators were *doing* (or, at least, *attempting to do*) in offering the reading public a new version of the text under consideration. In taking editorial action, broadly conceived, as *meaning-producing* action, we explore each of the six books as a material object as much as the text printed on its pages, especially where this has been

significantly recomposed. The assembling of the book is taken as a space of struggles within which agents confront each other, directly or indirectly, with different means and ends, according to their different position in a field of forces that can be disciplinary and/or more explicitly political.⁶ These struggles take a variety of forms: from struggles about the “true” meaning of the work; to struggles between scientific rigor and advocacy; through struggles within and between academic disciplines about who and what constitutes legitimate disciplinary knowledge and whether and how it should be recovered and inform new research; and the internal and external struggles *of* and *about* books intent on explaining the present and fashioning the future. Given the breadth and depth of the struggles at stake, it is often the case that the fight for the book starts and often takes on a particular intensity in the liminal devices that mediate the relation between text and reader. In the books we examine, this is especially true of the introductions.

Introductions are used to prime the reader, who will then venture forth to read the rest of the text with a set of expectations and preunderstandings guided, if not controlled, by the writer of the introduction. This is why our analysis pays special attention to such introductory texts as framing devices after which the text may be read that also seek to “reenact” the text by tuning it to resonate with contemporary audiences. Introductions are immensely valuable for us in that they allow us to chart the changing meanings that later readers have been instigated to make of a text from the immediacy of their own historical circumstances. Central to a study of the politics of the book, the writers who use of the book’s introduction to advance their own interpretation, if not their own interests or agendas, often in conflict with each other, are nonetheless but one set of agents of book production who are often ignored behind the towering figure of the author.

Many hands and minds go into the making of a book. Lead editors, we will see, may be effectively led by other, perhaps more important, figures (notably, commentators), just as they may double as the writers of the introductory materials that offer a window onto the text. Their interventions in the physical form of the book may be multiple and, as we shall also see in the analysis of our six books, of great consequence. Sometimes critical interventions happen already at the assembly stage and involve decisions as to what to include and in what order. Understanding the influence of assembly, and any constructed connections, on the production of meaning, we hope to show, is no less important than examining the ways in which paratexts construct and contest a text’s authority, identity, and meaning. In like manner, a new rendition, perhaps even a new translation, of a key concept may radically alter

the ways in which readers come to understand this concept's relationship to other concepts and the world, and the world itself. Reworkings of the text and its organization may range from the most subtle and sophisticated to the most crude. If the line between engaging with and exercising power over a text can be thin, and sometimes impossible to maintain, the transition from power to violence betrays itself more readily. This much is apparent in the acts of mutilation we will encounter, whereby passages or whole chapters deemed dispensable or simply inconvenient are simply excised from the body of the text, leaving other passages and chapters deprived of their relatedness backward and forward. Interventions need not be so drastic, however, to produce effects. As a matter of fact, here as elsewhere, subtlety can be more effective. Neither need interventions be restricted to interventions in the book. Sometimes, interventions are rather on the book. Some of the agents we examine will be seen to have written works of commentary themselves or developed programs of empirical social-scientific research inspired by the "classics" they edit, translate, or make. What such intellectual interventions share, however, is a definite orientation toward the ideas in these books.

In the books we examine, these ideas typically take the form of theories of society, politics, or both. It is therefore all too easy to reify these theories, to conceive them as free-floating entities, the meaning of which depends entirely on the reader's hermeneutic abilities. But since thinking exists by taking form, and survives over time by reforming itself, one would miss one of its most important aspects if one sidestepped the forms of its composition as well as the modes of its embodiment and circulation. For what a social or political theory is taken to mean and entail emerges out of the dialectic between form and content afforded by different media, notably the book as a physical object, one that is performed by concrete epistemic communities in specific historical conditions. Limited by these are, for instance, the technologies of publication as well as the parameters of editorial practice, with the "authoritative" form of the scholarly edition being redefined over time and paperback originals, ranging from the popular to the scholarly, progressively becoming the main form of a text's circulation. Some of the texts we will be examining will have known both forms, scholarly hardback/paperback and mass-market paperback editions, albeit not necessarily at the same time. Whether we follow one, the other, or both physical forms, and our choice of specific exemplars, will be determined by two main factors. The first is their availability and/or prominence in the period covered in the chapter. The second factor is the role played by the particular agent (author, editor, translator, commentator) we are exploring in the text's production and dissemination. As we focus less on

“theory” as an abstract, disembodied, purely cognitive affair than on theory conception, production, communication, reception, and reutilization as a set of materially embodied practices, the contexts that we deem relevant for the study of social and political thought will inevitably expand themselves. If, as we contend, form matters, the history of ideas cannot be told apart from the form they take—how these permutations of form came about; how and why they became the focus of disputes; and how they have helped shape academic disciplines and the world itself—these are the objects of study.

This means, in short, that we conceive of the human and nonhuman elements present in our dealings with theory books as including (1) the book, a plethora of materials ranging from paper handwritten or typed manuscript notes and galley proofs to the various editions and formats of the book and e-book as such where ideas are inscribed as text; (2) the author, a person to whom we grant authorial control to the effects of those ideas and that can be an individual person, an individual at the center of a collective, or a purely fictive persona; (3) the translator, an individual whose intellectual and emotional investment in the work often overflows translating the ideas and arguments in the book into full-blown commentary and editorial curatorship of the book; (4) the publishing house, a commercial enterprise where editors work with authors, translators, reviewers, and literary agents, as well as typographers and graphic designers, as to put the book into production and accompany its commercial life; and (5) the commentator, typically a scholar whose academic success partly depends on researching, writing, and teaching about the text/author in question in sites such as the book’s paratexts and epitexts, as well as lecture rooms, academic journals (including book reviews), scientific congresses, and periodical literary reviews. In each of our case studies that follow, we explore one or more of these aspects as we analyze the politics of that particular book. The combined result is less a revisit of the canon wars of the 1980s, which opposed the traditionalists’ nostalgic praise of the value of classic works to the multiculturalists’ strident pleas for inclusion of the long-silenced voices of the marginalized, than a clearer understanding of how form matters in the struggles over meaning that structure social and political theorizing.

We begin with Émile Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, a work that has received increased attention among sociologists since the 1990s. Pivotal here has been the commentary by Jeffrey C. Alexander, whose strong program in cultural sociology can be directly traced back to the “cultural” Durkheim of *Elementary Forms*. Our genealogy of the book—centered around the figure of the commentator, not the author—allows us to present

our approach vis-à-vis alternative genres in the history of social and political thought. In chapter 2 we discuss what counts as an author. We focus on *Mind, Self, and Society*, whose purported author—G. H. Mead—was not involved in its creation, nor did he ever express the wish to have it published. And yet it was through this fabricated amalgamation of texts of plural authorship that “Mead, the sociological classic” was constructed, in a skewed process of disciplinary canonization that has reduced Mead’s contributions to a problematic and unrepresentative fraction of his oeuvre. We then turn our attention to a book that, strictly speaking, is not a book—or, at least, was not originally conceived for publication, much less in a book form. Karl Marx’s *1844 Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* originated as notebooks. However, as the notebooks were assembled into *one* book—indeed into *the* book that was meant to offer the long-awaited key to Marx’s philosophical system—heterodox Marxist circles felt ready to use the greater power that comes with legitimacy. They had now what they needed to unleash a dialectics of dissent driven by the concept they made interchangeable with the *1844 Manuscripts*—that is, alienation. This was a dialectics intent on defeating, rather than simply convincing, opponents and on seeing the world’s political landscape radically transformed in its wake. Chapter 4 discusses Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*. Partly compiled of previously published pieces, this is a book the author had to rewrite himself, finding the right combination of tone, form, and metaphor to confer upon assorted materials the kind of continuous legibility expected of a book. One such metaphor is the idea of a double consciousness, which has come to stand for the “multicultural Du Bois” sociologists have been rediscovering since the 1990s. As we explain in this chapter, however, this is but the latest of various, often contradictory, meanings, that have been ascribed to the book, as successive editions appeared during the twentieth century, traversed academic disciplines, and helped negotiate political fault lines. In chapter 5 we move away from the figure of the author to consider the role of the translator-interpreter. The book under analysis is Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Its translation into English by the young Talcott Parsons in 1930 lies behind the sociological canonization of Weber in Anglo-Saxon academia. Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic* is a well-known case of creative tension between translation and reception: the Weber we have come to know in the English language, perhaps *the* sociologist regarding “disciplinary” questions about the formation and standing of sociology as a discipline vis-à-vis philosophy, religion, historiography, and politics,⁷ is also a Weber now known to be strongly “mediated” by Parsons’s own conceptual apparatus and categories. In our chapter, we look into the translation in an

oblique way. We take as our starting point the work Parsons was primarily engaged in as he immersed himself in the translation of Weber: his DPhil dissertation. This makes it possible to see more clearly the ways in which the translation of Weber's book served as a catalyst for Parsons's own getting to grips with Weber's sociological theory of capitalism and his employment of ideal types as part of a broader strategy of concept formation. Our final book is Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, a withering classic among sociologists but still a foundational text in neighboring political science. This allows us to explore the twin processes of canonization *and* decanonization. Traversing academic disciplines, one finds an influential but little-known group of new and repeat editors-translators-commentators from different ideological persuasions whose work in and on Tocqueville's book helped frame his arguments and the conditions for accessing them anew over the course of the twentieth century.

By bringing together in one volume the connected histories of these six books, we build on Roger Chartier's claim that there is no "order of discourse" without an "order of books" (1994, ix). Our aim is to promote an expanded understanding of the history of social and political scholarship by engaging in the history of the books in which it has been materially embodied and by which it has been materially shaped. In so doing, we move beyond the dominant conceptualization of the production and reception of scholarship as something dealing primarily, perhaps even singularly, in abstractions or "ideas" and of its proper history as a "history of ideas" unfolding in the ethereal and disembodied real of "great" thought. In particular, we operate within a distinctive approach to theory construction. This differs from other approaches to the history of ideas insofar as our object is not individual intentions or the contextual factors (say, institutional constraints or professional networks) within which ideas were created but the written media through which those ideas were circulated and their authors attained the recognition of their peers. We understand ideas, texts, and the discourses in which they participate as taking form and indeed as coming into existence, in the proper sense of the word, as they become physical realities and are inscribed in certain material forms—books, for example. It is to these forms, and the book form in particular, that we attend in what follows. This is no case of reification or fetishism of the object. We rather contend and hope to document vigorously that the collective process of construction and communication of the material bearings of texts is an integral part of the process of construction of their meaning.

Again, we resort to Chartier, who rightly observes that books are “objects whose forms . . . command the uses that can invest them and the appropriations to which they are susceptible” (1994, ix). In both their verbal and nonverbal dimensions, such forms are, more or less intentionally, constructed by a multiplicity of agents, whose diverse positions and diverse dispositions in the processes of cultural production and political struggle we reconstruct to make sense of the ways in which they configured the engagement with the text by successive generations of readers. These are normally agents acting alongside, above, or beyond the author and in whose power it is to mediate between readers and texts whose identities and whose meanings they are also always already enacting through their mediatory practices. In looking at their work and, in particular, at how their interventions in the book form have effected (or, at least, tried to effect) meaning, we will be confronting contemporary readers with the constructedness of their encounter with the text, any text. This constructedness, we intimate by our choice of books, is brought up to a new level when it aims at the production or reproduction of canonicity, of books meant to determine and radically change the ways in which we perceive, orient ourselves, and act in the world. In focusing on the material and social contexts in which social and political discourse takes form and sees itself being reconfigured, we show that a vital dimension of the history of the production, communication, and reception of texts is being inevitably missed when their material bearings—or, we should perhaps say, their material enactments—are taken as irrelevant “matter,” self-evident or stable over time. The medium is here no mere transparent carrier of content. It is rather the case that the act of giving a text its material form involves a set of practices that are generative of, not merely incidental to, that text’s meaning, status, and identity. For this reason alone—if not only for this reason—book matters deserve more than passing notice even among specialists in the history of “thought.”