Tradition, modernization and domination: Three perspectives of French rural studies Crystallized around a single survey

(RCP Châtillonnais, 1966-1975)

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We have collated archives of various sociological and ethnographic studies of a single geographical area, the Châtillonnais and Montbard districts (Burgundy, France): RCP Châtillonnais archives (1966–1970, research conducted simultaneously by the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires, Claude Levi-Strauss’ Laboratoire d’Anthropologie Sociale, François Furet’s Centre de Recherche Historique at the EHESS, and INRA sociologists); archives of Minot (the major structuralist investigation, 1968–1975); and archives of Montbard (Florence Weber’s investigation of the working class in a small industrial town, one of the most famous studies in ethnographic sociology in France). We use this material to outline the history of how the social sciences in France have perceived rural worlds, including the various observer–subject relations in the different theories brought to the field by ethnographers. While the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires was interested in traditional communities and in the relics of a lost civilization, structuralist ethnographers sought to apply the methods of exotic ethnology based on interviews and observations and to explore culturalist explanations. At the same time, INRA and CNRS sociologists were studying modernity in rural worlds over a period when public policies were looking to convert the peasantry into entrepreneurs. Since the 1980s, ethnographic sociologists close to Bourdieu have foregone concepts of community or culture and reintroduced political and social considerations, investigating the impossibility of social reproduction of the peasantry or the working class in rural worlds.
Introduction

Susan Rogers in a review paper dated the high point of rural studies in France to the mid 1970s: “French rural studies was [then] a lively and well-established domain defined by its object of study, cross disciplinary scope, and identifiable community of “ruralist” scholars” (Rogers, 1995: 383). She listed several reasons given by various workers for the ensuing decline in the 1980s: research in the domain was saturated,¹ the ‘rural world’ had lost its specific character (Cloarec, 1988; Jollivet & Mendras, 1979), and—who Rogers described as “a somewhat stronger position”— “a disaggregated series of discipline-specific projects” (ibid.: 386-387) had brought about an awareness of the illusory nature of any clear definition of the “rural world” (Lenclud 1988, Bonnain & Desaive 1988, Duby 1983, Goy 1986, etc.). Following this line of explanation, we seek here to outline this breakup by studying how, beforehand, the field of rural studies in France in the 1970s had crystallized around a single social science project. That project was one of the final Recherches Coopératives sur Programme (RCP) of the CNRS, a major funding system for collective and bureaucratic research for the scientific modernization of France in the 1960s (Burguière, 2005). It brought investigators from various institutions, disciplines and schools to the Châtillonnais of northern Burgundy in the late 1960s. Before returning to conduct a collective field survey—to revisit the subject (not a customary practice in French social sciences (Laferté, 2006a)—we feel it is essential to think about how our own investigative activity stands relative to each of the strands of thought that have preceded us, so as to gain insight into the work and the enormous wealth of data collected by our elders.

Our postulate, drawn from what might be termed a social history of the social sciences, is that each scientific period, each school of thought forms part of the fabric of a public institution. Such institutions must justify their existence politically, thus intersecting with broader universes of meaning and social worlds, opening up social usages that are specific to science. Now, probably because of what was long the privileged position of rural worlds in French ideology and France’s domestic economy, it seems to us that many research institutions (MNATP, INRA, Science Po, MPE, etc.) working on rural worlds have remained cheek by jowl with political power, making those worlds more recalcitrant to distanced social analysis. On the basis of this major collective survey, then, we seek to reveal the wide internal diversity of the world of rural studies with its intestine struggles, the mutual disregard of its protagonists and the estrangement among the scientific programs and movements, and we seek to show that this estrangement relates both to institutional positions inherited from a political history and to strictly scientific positions. The RCP-Châtillonnais survey (and its follow-up) involved such an array of scientific schools on rural worlds that, extending the analysis somewhat, we shall be led to cover a fairly broad range of social sciences having taken rural worlds as their subject matter. While the survey initially involved ethnologists of the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires (ATP), anthropologists and geographers of Claude Lévi-Strauss’ Laboratoire d’Anthropologie Sociale (LAS, Collège de France), INRA sociologists and economists, and EHESS historians (F. Furet, Serge Wolikow), the RCP excluded the CNRS workers (H. Mendras, M. Jollivet, P. Grémion) who were the mainstays of rural sociology and political science of the day, while critical sociologists grouped around Bourdieu ultimately abandoned it. In the end, just a single village monograph resulted in the publication of several books in the late 1970s (see appendices) which completely overhauled ethnology in France. Their corner stone of structural anthropology then served as a point of leverage and a line of demarcation for research into the working class world at Montbard, close to the Châtillonnais, by a young graduate from the École Normale Supérieure trained in anthropology and in Bourdusian sociology, a line of research that was critical of rural studies as instituted in the 1970s

¹ Études rurales, n° 92, 1983, « Avertissement de la rédaction ».
This investigator, Florence Weber, subsequently formalized her approach as ‘sociological ethnography’ (Beaud & Weber, 1997; Weber, 2001) and gained wide acceptance. Having been trained by her, and with the benefit of “generational change” which does away with conflicting interpersonal relations, we can therefore revisit the study area with a newly formed team of young investigators.2

I. Ethnology of France: a traditional and literary perspective on rural France

The RCP Châtillonnais survey was directed by Georges-Henri Rivière, the founding director of the Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires (MNATP). Although more than 40 field workers were involved, the survey produced very few publications and the only major works were derived from the monograph of the village of Minot undertaken by four women researchers of the Laboratoire d’Anthropologie Sociale (LAS) (see appendices). Behind this divide between the scientific success of the four researchers at Minot and the editorial and scientific failure of 40 researchers was a power game in ethnology with the MNATP on one side caught up in a museographic model inherited from the inter-war period and discredited by the usage made of it under the Vichy regime, and on the other side an all-conquering scientific model, Levi-Strauss’s structural anthropology, derived from exotic anthropology.

A. Telling of France: folklore, a science in the service of republican ideology

The setting up of the MNATP in 1937 is often seen as the founding moment of ethnology in France (Chiva, 1987; Cuisennier, 1986). It was mainly through the positive history of the Annales that folklore was projected as a social science, a branch of sociology for Marc Bloch, on the proviso that its method was recharacterized so as to relinquish the amateurism of folklore studies once and for all. The creation of the ATP laboratory museum stemmed from the conjunction of three worlds: regionalists and local scholars; professional scientific republican academics; and the republican ideology promoted by both conservative and reformist governments of the 3rd Republic (Laferté, 2006b, chapter 8).

The subject matter of amateur folklore in the process of scientific recharacterization was primarily peasant practices and beliefs, costumes, customs, music or rituals, perceived from a scientific standpoint as the signs of specific, popular and regional cultures and from a national and regionalist standpoint as the remnants of the primal features of the Nation, as the expression of the French “soul” prior to the Industrial Revolution. These separate scientific and ideological objectives were able to come together because of the polysemie of the term folklore, covering these disparate projects with one blanket term. It was therefore a combination of circumstances around folklore that constituted the founding deed of the ethnology of France.

The MNATP, then known as the “laboratory museum”, covered both objectives: the museum activity sought to put France on show, to exhibit its ancient status and the specific characters of the French regions, which were so many small lands that formed the wealth, antiquity and grandeur of the great homeland; and the laboratory activity dealt in field work designed to collect subject matter for the museum but also to advance ethnographic knowledge. The laboratory was run by two young researchers, André Varagnac and Marcel Maget, who were close to the Annales (Lucien Febvre, Marc Bloch) and to the second Durkheimian school (Marcel Mauss, Maurice Halbwacks, Célestin Bouglé). It implemented the project of recharacterizing folklore scientifically by introducing a systematic use of bibliography and by developing a rigorous methodology as a break with the naturalistic local monograph: the use of cartography borrowed from linguists, geographers and historians—an essential instrument for grasping the range of cultural practices rather than concluding they were regional or

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2 Researchers: Laferté Gilles, Lépicier Denis, Mischi Julian et Renahy Nicolas (INRA CESAE), Bessière Céline (ENS - CMH), Brinbaum Yaël, Ubbiali Georges et Wolikow Serge (Université de Bourgogne), Pierru Emmanuel (CNRS - CRAPS - Lille); Post-graduates: Bruneau Ivan (CSU - Paris), Chandivert Arnaud (Université de Montpellier), Girard Violaine et Hobeika Alexandre (ENS - CMH), Marmont Thibault (Université de Bourgogne), Vignon Sébastien (Université de Picardie).
national in extent (Laferté, 2006)—, of the logbook borrowed from British social anthropology (Christophe, 2000; Weber, 2006), of questionnaires sent to a network of local informants (school teachers, scholars, town-hall clerks (Muller & Weber, 2003)), and—but this remained wishful thinking—of statistics borrowed from Durkheimians. All the data collected were then kept in model archives, a genuine conservatory of popular practices. Besides the customs and costumes cited above, the program renovated the subject matter of ethnology by considering “Fires, Sheaths, Locomotion and Rural Transport, Introduction of Mechanization into Rural Life, Evolution of the Village Smithy, Popular Diet, etc.”. In those days of scientific renewal, folklore was then extended to the study of working class practices and cultures.

But the Occupation, Vichy and Maréchal Pétain’s National Revolution policy spelled the end of these makeshift alliances. Regionalism and the return to the land soon became the ideological spearheads of Vichy’s conservative revolution (Faure, 1989). The Musée teams were torn by a duty of allegiance to the regime in power, exemplified by several compromising declarations by Georges-Henri Rivière, by the reshaping of the scientific programs on peasant worlds alone, and by the pursuit of the research activities. Without going into the details of this painful and still incompletely known period4, the internal strains eventually broke up the MNATP team and the alliances underpinning the Musée. André Varagnac was the first to leave and founded archeocivilization, a scientific step backward, evolutionist in outlook, viewing rural worlds as a stage preceding modern civilization, which cost him the support of Lucien Febvre and of academic circles as a whole. Marcel Maget then took over the museum laboratory, but came into direct conflict with Georges-Henri Rivière, who was developing his museography on an international scale at the same time, marking a clear divide between the Musée’s museographic and scientific activities.5 Maget then abandoned the idea of folklore (which was too closely tied to regionalism, then a reactionary ideology) and that of popular arts and traditions (Rivière’s invention and a term which had become too closely associated with artistic avant-gardes and with middle-class taste for it to be “of the people”) for the idea of metropolitan ethnography. For this ethnography, he developed village monography through inter-knowledge surveys, breaking with the great collective surveys (Maget, 1955). The uncooperative atmosphere at the MNATP and the conflict between the museographic project and the scientific one eventually led to the departures of Marcel Maget and his deputy Isaac Chiva. Maget took up a chair of social psychology at Dijon in the mid 1950s while Chiva joined Claude Levi-Strauss at the recently formed Laboratoire d’Anthropologie Sociale, to become his right-hand man as assistant director.

In the late 1950s, the Musée des ATP and its laboratory, then the only institutional place for constituting the ethnology of France, were in a way lacking any major scientific direction, and were guided primarily by the museographic project of collecting material. This scientific vacuum was filled by a project to conserve traditions, giving priority to the collection of material so as not to lose the scant traces of a hypothetical peasant civilization. It was in this light that the RCP Plozévet and then the RCP Aubrac were undertaken. The Aubrac project was the archetype of this ATP model of the time. Its main scientific achievement was the collection of 987 new objects from 1963 to 1966 and the production of a work of more than six volumes that is completely unexploited today being no more than a catalogue describing peasant practices devoid of any theoretical perspective. As with the

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3 Séance du 15 décembre 1936, Comité d’organisation du Congrès International de Folklore, Archives du Musée des ATP.

4 The Musée sheltered both a resistance network and notorious collaborationists; the political uses of folklore under the Vichy regime in which Varagnac and others were directly involved led to Varagnac and Rivière being tried for collaboration. Both men were finally cleared. The records of this dark period for the MNATP are only now being opened.

5 “I stayed seven years, nearly eight years, with the Arts et Traditions Populaires, from ’51 to ’58, but within the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires, and you have no written records of this, there was a divide. There was the museum, headed by Georges-Henri Rivière and staffed by people from the Musées de France and already by people from the CNRS even at that time, and then there was the Centre d’Ethnologie Française run by Marcel Maget and which had a tiny team. And I was with Maget. And there was no communication between the two.” Isaac Chiva (EHESS): Testimony of the assistant director of the Laboratoire d’Anthropologie Sociale, Les archives de la RCP du Châtillonnais : états des lieux, témoignages, 12 novembre 2003, MSH Dijon et GARAE.
folklorists of the inter-war years, accumulation passed for science. As emphasized by Jean Raisky, one of the ATP investigators, that was exactly the scientific frame of mind, guided by the museographic model, in which the RCP Châtillonnais was undertaken: “the museum gallery was my field-work guide” (Raisky, 2003). The material studied was all the traditions threatened with extinction, with the ATP collecting endangered peasant civilization. This collecting rationale continued until much later: in 1983 the chairperson of the Société d’Ethnologie Française, Claudie Marcel Dubois, then a researcher with the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires, stated in conclusion to a conference that “We should hurry to study popular cultures because their specific features will soon be effaced by standardization and by the unification of behavior and habits” (Dubois 1983, p. 104). The word culture seems reminiscent of the pre-war term folklore (Laferté, 2006 chap. 8). These notions of culture and community which had been abundantly used in ethnology until then encapsulated a material, ruralist, unequivocal, fixist perception of cultural phenomena and implied the social groups that conveyed them were coherent. The Châtillonnais, from the ATP standpoint, proved too poor an area to collect what had thus far been the canonical material of ethnology: “tradition” (ancient customs, costumes, dialect, etc.) had supposedly died out there by the late 19th century.

B. Imposing a structural anthropology of what is close: structuralism in France

By contrast with this downgraded scientific model of the conservatory of peasant traditions there developed an ambitious social anthropology around Claude Levi-Strauss. Within the LAS, in view of Isac Chiva’s knowledge of European peasant societies, the anthropology of peasant societies group was created under him in 1962 (Debroux 2004). This group was particularly active in the mid 1960s through the journal Études Rurales, which was created in 1962 and managed by the LAS with Chiva first as general secretary and then co-editor in 1971. The group took on more importance in rural studies in the 1970s, embodying the ethnology of an innovative France compared with the waning ATP model and then compared with the new descriptive rural sociology led by Henri Mendras. The Minot survey may be described as the result of a laboratory strategy masterminded by Isac Chiva and supported by Levi-Strauss. Baulking at the museal and folkloristic conception of ethnology of the ATP, they wanted to extend the creation of structural anthropology to the ethnology of France. Initially Lévi-Strauss had not believed in this RCP type of very big bureaucratic, collective survey, hence the lack of involvement in the previous survey of Plozévet (Burguière 2005). His growing weight in French intellectual spheres won him a place and decision-making power on the board of the DGRST, the body that financed research at the time and in particular the RCPs. This was the model of public finance of research of the day, where each of the big bosses of French research represented their lab to have their say in the share-out of public subsidies. Being heavily committed, Levi-Strauss chose the Châtillonnais for the field study, as a clean break with the Aubrac study: a

7 Studies of traditional tales (Marie-Louise Teneze), traditional craftsmanship (André Desvallées and Mariel Bruhnes Delamarre), traditional calendar in the Châtillonnais, feast days of Sainte-Catherine / Saint-Eloi / Saint-Nicolas (Claude Gaignebet), traditional dance (Francine Lancelot), ethnomusicology (Jean Raisky and Claudie Marcel Dubois), bone-setters, healers, magicians (Marcelle Bouteiller), etc.
8 A study is required of the foundation of Études rurales, an interdisciplinary journal edited by Fernand Braudel with Georges Duby and Daniel Faucher as co-editors. Several points remain problematic. First the absence of sociology in the journal, particularly from Mendras’ group. Then the presence of history (especially Braudel and Duby) alongside ethnography, while it was impossible to bring the two disciplines together in the Châtillonnais study. The damage of the Plozévet study probably needs to be included in this interdisciplinary wreckage. Was the presence of historians not simply because they were the only ones with familiar academic names while rural sociologists were non-existent and ethnologists barely legitimated?
9 Minot’s enquiry didn’t disturb the hierarchy of the LAS for all that. Thus, Marc Abélès (1999) tell: “When I entered LAS as a young doctoral student, I found that the most prestigious researchers – Clastres, Godelier, and Izard – were all working on more exotic sites. Minot was left to the women, and work there was treated more as a curiosity than as something truly serious. The situation began to change at the end of the 1970s...”
comparatively modernized agricultural region to avoid the classic pitfalls for the ATP. In keeping with the ethnological tradition of the time when working on “rural communities” (Chiva 1992), Chiva, adopting the methodology initiated by Maget, required his researchers to draw up a village monograph.

Box 1. Cooperative research and laboratory logic
Françoise Zonabend, one of the four researchers in the Minot survey, describes in an interview of 3 October 2005 her distance with the ATP and the focus of questioning specific to the LAS:
— “Look, I never frequented the ATP other than informally, like that, at the library, I didn’t work at the ATP so I don’t know what their research methods were.
— And you never encountered them in the RCP field work?
— Never.
— But you did have a few collective meetings?
— Yes, we had a few collective meetings, with Georges-Henri Rivière and then… But the secretariat disintegrated very, very quickly. In fact, the RCP was meant to last three years. The first year was the big survey with Cuisenier’s questionnaires and Wolikow’s surveys, things like that. The second year was to be the report on those surveys. And the third year more pointillist studies, including Minot. And then after that it should have been over. And so it lasted perhaps another year or two more and then after there was no more RCP budget, it was the budget from here [LAS] that supplied the funding for the Minot monograph.
— The surprising thing is why the connection wasn’t made with Cuisenier, Grignon… which could have been made, they were in a sense close… sociologists were much closer to your…?
— True, but I think we remained much closer to the social anthropology laboratory side and there was no institutional connection between the ATP and the social anthropology laboratory, so it was… there was a cut-off there, each to his own field. Cuisenier though… was it because he had problems with people? Perhaps, I’ve no idea. It’s true there wasn’t much interest in it.”

The main innovations in the Minot collective survey concerned the evolution of subject matter first of all. The work at Minot was directed at the main subject of structural anthropology, kinship. The challenge was to fit together two methodological principles, the first using the respondents’ memories through interviews and direct surveys as in exotic anthropology, in a society without writing, and the second consulting the written sources available in western societies, parish and administrative registers and census returns. From the interplay between oral sources, favoring the lines of descent that are valued by the family, and written sources, indicating all of the people actually part of the family, Françoise Zonabend was able to deduce the selection process of family memory (Zonabend 1980, appendices). The more remote parts of the memorial “family” form part of the preferential potential spouses in what the investigators termed “in-law sequences”. Structural anthropology was out to show that the same subject matter and methodologies could be developed for western rural worlds as for exotic societies.

Another new interest of ethnology of France concerned study of the agrarian system (Pingaud 1978, appendices). By studying land records Marie-Claude Pingaud tracked 100 years of property changes from the end of the opposition between Messieurs and the community with the dividing-up of land at the turn of the century through to the influence of land consolidation and the mechanization of farming. Another new topic was the importance of the cultural structuring of social space opposing gens du bois (initially woodcutters and then more generally manual workers and small businessmen) and gens du finage (farmers).

Moreover, studies of trivial symbolic forms such as slaughtering the pig, the study of the “washerwoman” (woman who helped with cleansing babies and laying out the dead), training of young girls with a seamstress or a cook, and the ritual of the chamber pot for newly weds… by Yvonne Verdier altered the way rituals were perceived, both because the subject matter of ethnology shifted towards trivial, non-official rituals but also because it was no longer a question of collecting

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10 This new craze for the study of kinship went beyond structural anthropology as it was more generally specific to anthropology of the time (Jack Goody, Peter Laslett, Georges Augustins, Pierre Lamaison, Jean Yver, ...), and contributed particularly to the renewal of sociology of the family in France in the 1980s–1990s.
them but of interpreting them (Verdier 1979, appendices). Each of these rituals was supposedly punctuated like the whole cycle of existence by “changes in the female body, changes which are socially supervised and symbolically staged by the activities of three elderly women” (Guérreau 1982 p. 346 appendices). The structural and linguistic study of the rituals, where the author relates a number of texts, practices and deeds, gives the feeling of there being structure in the rituals and of a universalist upwelling of material collected at Minot. Far from looking for some lost cultural features, the structural analysis starts out with popular rituals in a search for the universal structures of rituals, of the sexes and of humanity. For many researchers this universalist aim of bringing together cultural features of societies that are worlds apart stemmed from an anachronism (Guérreau 1982 appendices), or was even pure literary speculation (Mendras 1995). This change in themes was apparent in the methodology itself as the researchers gradually abandoned the filing system, the indexing of a society, the practice of conservation, and concern for exhaustive description, preferring instead the field notebook, the interview and public records (mostly births, deaths and marriages and the land registry). The practice of the interview was largely criticized when they made it an instrument of oral history (Guérreau 1982 appendices).

To conclude on this perception of rural worlds by the ethnology of France from the 1930s to 1980s, and whatever the different approaches identified, be it the museographic model of the ATP or the structural model of the LAS, what dominated was still a traditionalist perception of the countryside as a backward world, very largely an a-historical world, or at least one that was unaffected by the major social changes of the time, captured by the expressions “peasant communities” or “rural communities” (Chiva 1992). In the lineage of Robert Redfield’s work on Mexican peasant societies, the most debated question was that of peasant specificity characterized by those worlds being cut off from society as a whole. Rural worlds were supposedly a set of remote and isolated entities and ethnologists were still in search of those communities doomed to extinction by the advance of modernity (Weber 1981, Guérreau 1982 in the appendices) as if these societies had been kept apart from the macro-social changes of the 19th century such as the railroads, the structuring of villages by the authorities (town halls, teachers, social welfare, trade unionism, etc.) or by the republicanization of the countryside.

II. Rural sociology: a modernizing and institutionalist perspective and its critical reaction

The complete absence of any rural sociology in the RCP Châtillonnais seems quite aberrant nowadays. Neither Henri Mendras, nor Marcel Jollivet, nor any members of their Groupe de Sociologie Rurale (GSR) founded in 1960 within the Centre d’Études Sociologiques (CES) were involved in the RCP. Similarly, although Claude Grignon (then a member of Pierre Bourdieu’s Centre de Sociologie Européenne – CSE – and a researcher with the INRA’s new Département d’Économie et Sociologie Rurales) was involved on paper at least in the early stages of the RCP, his involvement was short-lived and did not lead to any publications.

It seems essential to question these absences today because the works of the GSR and the CSE set the tone for the sociological view of rural worlds in the 1970s. Did the perceptions of ethnologists

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11 The CES, founded in 1945 by Georges Gurvitch, was French sociology’s first institution. It led the way in institutionalizing the discipline until the 1960s and the appearance of competing/complementary centers at Science Po, the École Pratique des Hautes Études then at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, and then in the universities once the sociology degree had been created in 1958. Clustered with the CNRS and then moved to Nanterre University after 1968, the GRS (the Groupe de Sociologie Rurale then becoming the Groupe de Recherches Sociologiques, GRS) was in its heyday in the 1970s (many individual and collective publications, creation of a post-graduate diploma in rural sociology in 1975). After being abandoned by a number of its researchers in the 1980s, it has since been integrated into the activities of the LADYSS (Laboratoire Dynamiques Sociales et Recomposition des Espaces, Nanterre), which is home to geographers and sociologists.
and sociologists never cross? A priori, it can be hypothesized that the relationship between the disciplines was then structured by the divide, an essential one at the time, between tradition and modernity. The ethnologists collected peasant traditions, the sociologists studied the modernization of farming. This is the divide that structured Mendras’ writings, which reached a broad audience with the publication of La fin des paysans in 1967. But upstream of this high profile of the GRS and its leading light, it was the form of institutionalization of rural studies that explained the implicit division of scientific work between ethnology and sociology. Ethnology, we have seen, had to break away from the folkloristic and museographic approach of the ATP and imported the legitimacy of the work of Lévi-Strauss by analysing rural France using the classical subject matter of structuralism (kinship, rituals and symbols). Mendras, turning from the moribund Durkheimian sociology of the immediate post-war period (Chapoulie 1991), which was imported and highly empirical, applied US sociology (Grignon, Weber, 1993). He then encountered Marxist sociologists (Marcel Jollivet, Placide Rambaud, etc.) and joined forces with them within the GRS.

A. Reconstructing the social sciences in France: accompanying agricultural modernization

La fin des paysans provided a panorama of the social sciences which, for its author, was meaningful in terms of the study of the agricultural world. In his long introduction, Mendras cited mostly the work of economists and agronomists of the day. While the economists measured and analysed agricultural output and its scale changes, the agronomists, like legal scholars, were in charge of adapting working methods and legislation to change. La fin des paysans was a book with an agenda then: the peasant issue was raised on a worldwide scale; “on the threshold of industrial civilization”, “the food shortage is becoming worrying” (Mendras, 1992: 9). In this context, the role Mendras set himself as a sociologist was to draw up the most effective and functional pathways to finalize agricultural modernization and to draw up scenarios for likely futures. In his scientific biography published in 1995, Mendras described what he saw as the state of mind of the generation of sociologists trained in the immediate post-war period:

“We felt the whole world was embarking upon a far-reaching transformation, that the model was across the Atlantic and that we needed to understand modernity. This tension between tradition and modernity was the common motivating force behind all our research at the time (…). We were looking for a New Man.” (Mendras, 1995: 64).

And so it was in the United States that Mendras sought the theoretical underpinnings to transform the “moribund peasant” into a “new man” (ibid.: 141 and 64). Completing his education with a period across the Atlantic, he came across rural sociology and produced a monograph on a Mormon village of Utah (Mendras, 1953), and discovered Robert Redfield, from whom he learned to theorize about rural communities as “part societies” (Redfield, 1956). He thus acquired the theoretical baggage to think through the divide between tradition and modernity and describe the characteristics of the agricultural entrepreneur.
### Collective / society

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Traditional peasant society”</th>
<th>“The agricultural entrepreneur”</th>
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<tr>
<td>Peasantry = autonomous, “wild” society / global society (“each collectivity was a social whole”, “relative demographic, economic and cultural autarky”)</td>
<td>“No relative autonomy / to encompassing society”</td>
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### History of the West

<table>
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<tr>
<th>“Slowly changing society”</th>
<th>“Rapid change”</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Static equilibrium, or almost”</td>
<td>“Dynamic equilibrium, made of continual disequilibria”</td>
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### Social relations


### Social change / technical progress

| “In such firmly structured collectivities, everything contributes to the stability of the whole and change can only be introduced very slowly, in a roundabout way, denying itself (…) Any innovation, whether technical, economic or demographic, comes from the outside. The individual encounters “no new situations, no decisions to make”.” | Technical progress is the cause of upheaval. Relation of cause and effect on peasant societies. “In the last 15 years [since 1950] a new generation of young farmers has new-found faith in the economic future and the nobility of working the land” “extending, getting equipped, getting organized” Role of agronomists, of the state in modernizing the countryside. |


In such an optic, village monography is meaningless unless it is comparative. Linking up with Marxist sociologists, Mendras founded the GRS on this project of comparative measurement of adaptation to the modern world: beyond the ambition to found the “agricultural entrepreneur” or to update the “village class struggle” (Jollivet, 1974), all sides came together behind the project of bringing the peasantry into the modern world.

As can be seen, the agenda of the rural sociologists differed very markedly, then, from that of the anthropologists who engaged in the RCP. It is understandable any dialogue between them should have been difficult, particularly as their respective tutelary figures belonged to closed academic worlds: on the strength of the international legitimacy of his work, Lévi-Strauss was appointed as professor at the Collège de France, the stronghold of academic excellence; Mendras, with a chair at Sciences po, acquired much of his scientific legitimacy in the area of political consultancy, in the wake of the applied sociology of Jean Stoetzel.13 But their failure to come together can also be explained by the different timing in the formation of the research groups. One the one side, the collective research on Minot was just one LAS activity among others and the LAS used the RCP (thanks especially to the authority of Lévi-Strauss and of Chiva both within research financing bodies, the DGRST, which funded the RCP, and also in academic circles, particularly the ATP museum), to extend its competences to the French cultural domain. On the other side, the GRS team was already acknowledged within rural studies and itself engaged in a sizeable research operation, the production of 12 village monographs (also financed by the DGRST, this time thanks to the network of modernizing sociologists influenced by Stoetzel), intended to measure how “rural societies” adapted to “society as a whole” (Mendras, 1971; Jollivet, 1974).14 To secure its development, Mendras’ team

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12 In 1976 Mendras “refined” his theory, superimposing it on Redfield’s and positing the “peasant” condition as an intermediate step between “savage” and “farmer” (Mendras, 1976: 11–12).

13 The distance between the two men can be perceived through Mendras’ recollection of the Lévi-Strauss of the 1960s (Mendras, 1995: 103) “Lévi Strauss entered the Collège de France and became a sort of Emperor of China, remote from our world but wielding considerable power and influence.”

14 The isolated village monograph, as carried out by the “Minot ladies” was meaningless for Mendras if not wound up with collective questioning and if not leading to general conclusions. His opinion on the Minot research was unequivocal: “By contrast with the Aubrac study, the end product was not a corpus of several volumes but a series of individual books, published by different publishers and with no overall picture being drawn out from reading these books, each of which focused on the pet issues of its author who sought to write a personal work, more or less successfully depending on their individual talent” (1995: 234).
avoided working with the ethnologists, from whom it felt distant in terms of theory, developing a different view of the profession, that of official advisors for the modernization of farming. The subject matter of this form of sociology was essentially farming as a profession and a business and the dissemination of farming techniques.

It was only several years after the launch of the *RCP Châtillonnais* that an attempt was made to bring together these different spheres of rural studies. In 1974 the *Association des Ruralistes Français* (ARF) was set up at the instigation of Chiva. Mendras was appointed first chairperson of the association, while *EHESP* rural sociologists and MNATP ethnologists were represented (Debroux, 2004). The real challenge for this creation was to initiate a dialogue between sociologists and ethnologists. The definition then given of ruralists created a very clear hierarchy in the social sciences: “Ruralists should be understood as primarily the ethnologists and sociologists who must give the association its predominant direction; however, it goes without saying that the historians and geographers specialized in the study of rural societies are included in the definition, as are rural economists who place economic analysis in its social context”. In view of the impact of history as a discipline in French academic circles, the fate reserved for the subject is surprising, particularly given the considerable role it had played in the birth of professional ethnology of France of the ATP museum and then the more symbolic part it played in the birth of the journal *Etudes Rurales* in 1962. What of the heirs of the *Annales* school? While an analysis of the institutional relationships among historians, sociologists and anthropologists (particularly within the *EHESP*) is still to be carried out (Revel, Wachtel 1996) from a conceptual viewpoint alone, the reduction in the historical dimension of social events is a criticism leveled at *ATP* ethnologists (Fevbre, 1933), structuralist anthropologists (Weber, 1981; Guereau, 1982; Bourdieu, 1985; Bensa, 1996) and rural sociologists alike. And this is so while it was historians of the *Annales* who bore the inheritance of Durkheimian sociology. But in the sociology of the 1960s polarized by Marxism, Durkheim could not easily be read separately from Marx, whereas the translations of Weber tended to oppose the French and German founders of sociology. This at least was the source of disagreement over theory between Jollivet and Mendras within the *GRS*. Jollivet was a Marxist who used the holistic Durkehim for the process of change underway in French farming (Bossuet, 2004). Mendras referred to the Weber of *Economy and Society* and his ideal-types to examine the transformation of the peasant value system, without using Durkheim’s work.16

**B. Crisis in reproducing the peasantry**

It was with plentiful quotations from Durkheim (or his pupils: Halbwachs, Simiand) that Patrick Champagne published a 1975 swingeing criticism of the village monograph as practiced by the rural sociologists of the time (Champagne, 1975). This paper appeared in issue no. 3 of the new journal *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* founded by Pierre Bourdieu in 1975. Applying the Bourdieusian notions of field and social space, Champagne mostly criticized the approach consisting, through “spatial realism” and recovery of the legal and administrative categories, in reifying a residential group in “totality” under different names: “village community”, “local collectivity”, etc. Champagne’s criticism, while targeted, was not isolated. It was part of the assertion of a rigorous

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15 Stéphane Baciocchi, based on a study of the reception of Weber’s conference on science in France and the United States, shows that Julien Freund’s translation of *Le Savant et le politique* with a preface by Aron and summarized in a small number of notions like that of “axiological neutrality” was used in France’s elite administration colleges and universities from the 1960s as “a favorite weapon for disqualifying any overly extreme political commitment” (Baciocchi, 1995). The case of this translation indicates more generally the marked influence of political ideologies of the day in the types of readings of Weber. Cf. also Kalinowski, 2005.

16 Mendras (1995: 45) admits that during his period of “initiation” in Chicago, he was “very surprised at the importance given to Durkheim in the teaching. I could understand why my French teachers had not spoken about him and why my American teachers thought I was steeped in him. The philosopher of society who appeared old-hat in Paris remained in Chicago the founder of all empirical and rigorous social science”. That said, to the best of our knowledge, Mendras never referred further to the works of the “philosopher of society” in his works on rural sociology.
research method formalized by Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron in *Le Métier de sociologue* in 1968, applying the criteria of “*scientifique*”, “*empirique*” and “*radicalement critique*” sociology that were put in place at the *Centre de Sociologie Européenne* (CSE) when Bourdieu took it over from Aron in 1968 (Grignon, 2002: 193–194). The group around Bourdieu was then a young, intellectually anticonformist undertaking, engaging in political contestation, refusal of the established order, and which claimed to be effective because it put itself across as being scientifically beyond reproach, working on a wealth of ethnographic data and statistics: empiricism that released it from any strict Marxist affiliation. This sociology was built up against the “sociology of professor and journalist” practiced by Aron, Stoetzel and Friedmann, sociology inherited from the CES which carried the GRS. Bourdieu’s sociology stood against any sociology that was close to the sources of political power, which was perceived as being unable to break with official discourse and common sense (*ibid.*). From this point of view, rural sociology as practiced was just “*applied sociology*”, nothing more. Through their works on agricultural worlds, Bourdieu and his co-workers did not seek to compete with the GRS, but quite simply to strip it of any credit. A strong social opposition was evident between the “*sens de la République*” and the heirs. The group of young male researchers at the CSE (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, Passeron, Grignon, etc.) had mostly been socially promoted through school and the republic (working- and middle-class children from the provinces who made their own ways through success at school, boarding school, preparatory classes, École Normale Supérieure, agrégation: Bourdieu, 2004, Grignon, 2004) and who presented themselves as being the children of themselves, of their output, at school and then at university. By contrast, the LAS ethnologists were mostly young Parisian women, heiresses or married to heirs, who developed a cultivated, literary, high-society relationship with science; a landowner’s son, Mendras was the typical conservative bourgeois figure.

Thus Champagne’s work was wholly within the lineage of Bourdieu’s works on the Béarn (Bourdieu, 1962, 1972 and 1989, reprinted in Bourdieu, 2002) or Grignon’s work on agricultural and technical education (Grignon, 1971, 1975a, 1975b): it was not a matter of replacing one analysis by another in the field of rural sociology but of describing overall the mechanisms of social domination by positioning the peasantry, as an “*objet de classe*” (Bourdieu, 1977) within the “*système complet de relations établies entre les paysans et tous les autres groupes sociaux*” (Champagne, 1975: 67). Behind the peasantry, the subject matter was the more general social structure. This approach in terms of social domination blows apart the very foundations of rural studies, the specificity of a field, of an area of research, the construction of the subject of rural sociology inherited from Redfield through the notion of *part societies* which as a corollary promoted a local monographic method. Peasant society was in no way a specific social world, that was more or less independent of urban society, but on the contrary was completely dependent, under the social constraint of the rapid social changes taking place and the urban vision which is imposed on it. Peasant society was thenceforth perceived as a dominated world. Scientifically there was no longer an urban/rural divide, nor a local/national one, as rural cannot be understood without urban,17 without the general social structure. There was no longer rural sociology but a sociology of social domination.

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17 Patrick Champagne’s 1977 paper on the village festival is exemplary in this perspective as all of the festive activity of the village is tuned to urban practices.
Box 2. Bourdieu: rural studies in the production of the object class

“Of all dominated groups, the peasant class, probably because it has never given itself or has never been given the counter-discourse capable of making it the subject of its own truth, is the prime example of the object class, forced to form its own subjectivity from its objectivation (and very close in that to the victims of racism). Of these members of a class dispossessed of the power to define its own identity, one cannot even say they are what they are because the most usual word to refer to them [peasant] can operate, even to their ears, like an insult” (Bourdieu 2002 [1977]: 255–256). Bourdieu continued in 1977 against classical rural sociology accompanying public policies of modernization: “Faced with an objectivation telling them what they are or what they have to be [modern entrepreneurial farmers] they have no alternative but to take as their own the definition that is imposed on them or to define themselves by reaction to it” (ibid). Against the ethnological view: “Folklorization, which puts the peasantry in the museum and converts the last peasants into caretakers of nature changed into landscapes for city dwellers, is the necessary accompaniment to dispossession and expulsion. It is the laws of differential profit, the fundamental form of distinction profit, that confine peasants to their reservations, where they will be free to dance and sing their bourrées and gavottes, for the greater satisfaction of ethnologists and urban tourists, as long as their existence is economically and symbolically profitable” (op. cit.:257).

The swelling blast of this sociology that was critical of domination borne by politicized sociologists may explain why Grignon broke off his research in the Châtillonnais, never using it thereafter: after two years’ collective research as a young INRA recruit “May 1968 caught [him] out in the Châtillonnais” (Grignon, 2002: 204), which he soon left for good to go to Paris. He was then caught up in the renewal of positionings brought about by May 1968,18 completed his PhD being no longer registered with Aron, joined the CSE (which had become “Bourdieu’s centre more than ever” Ibid., 205) and joined in preparing the journal Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales. Around Pierre Bourdieu, there were more important things to do scientifically then than to complete the RCP.

This posture of decompartmentalization of rural studies may be surprising on the part of researchers recruited to the recently formed Département d’Economie et de Sociologie Rurales of the INRA, an applied research institute where agronomists were then predominant. Grignon was recruited in 1965, Champagne in 1971, in a context where sociologists were in a tiny minority and were there to “serve” (Barthez, 2006) questioning arising from agronomy or rural economics. But it was probably this isolation within the institution that meant these researchers committed themselves so fully to the CSE where the scientific character of sociology was a constituent principle and where research into the agricultural world was meaningful only when included in a sociology of social domination. From this inclusion flowed the attention to times of crisis, the failure of the peasantry to reproduce itself, by centering the analysis accurately on specific subjects, such as the times of transmission, or in the case in point, of failed transmission, whether economic (estate, craft, holding, etc.) or symbolic (marriage, the unmarriable).19 To comprehend this crisis in its social representations, the researchers gave precedence to an ethnographic method. It was indeed sociology that caught classical rural sociology wrong-footed since critical sociologists responded to agricultural modernization by the crisis of reproduction of the peasantry. Rural worlds appear in this perspective to be out-of-step, dispossessed, ill-adapted and with no future. Hence the interest in revisiting the Châtillonnais today.

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18 Other than Grignon, many researchers involved in the RCP probably put a stop to their research because of the institutional upheavals following the intellectual foment of May 1968. At any rate this is what can be concluded from consulting the RCP archives: field logs, administrative orders, general and administrative correspondence, or minutes of meetings mostly stopped in spring and summer 1968.

19 The subtitle of Bal des célibataires (The Bachelors’ Ball) is Crise de la société paysanne en Béarn (Crisis in Béarn peasant society); the collection of papers by P. Champagne on peasants was published by Le Seuil in 2002 as L’héritage refusé. La crise de la reproduction sociale de la paysannerie française 1950–2000.
Tradition, modernization and domination: going beyond these three views to understand social changes in contemporary rural worlds

From rural communities as a reservoir of traditions to rural society as the ground for agricultural modernization, we come to the 1970s and 1980s with the major criticism of Bourdieusian sociology which leads to the depiction of a dominated rural world. Tradition, modernization and domination, these are the three main perspectives taken on rural worlds in France since the post-war period.

There has been a marked downturn in rural studies since the 1980s, largely for the reasons set out above, because of the end of rural specificity and because of a scientific confrontation which has turned out largely to the advantage of the last school. Over the last 20 years or so there has been a break-up of works and themes and more generally research has run dry against a backdrop of an incapacity to recruit young researchers in the 1980s and 1990s.

As the heirs of this academic history and refusing to be part of some kind of academic sub-discipline of rural sociology, we would like to revisit these fields with several other young researchers from various areas which have been particularly innovative over a decade or so (political sociology, economic sociology, sociological ethnography of popular worlds). Having been recently recruited to the INRA as a result of a voluntarist policy of the institution, we would like to seize this academic open ground to go beyond these views which fail to explain how there are still peasants although they were supposed not to reproduce socially, why and how other social universes (tradesmen, manual workers, liberal professions, urban executives, etc.) still live there, why farmers remain in many instances a long way from the modernized agricultural entrepreneur, why agricultural holdings are still not like other businesses (as they are still marked by their productive activity being truly embedded in family life), why there has been an explosion in the staging of traditions in French rural worlds (especially) over the last 20 years... The French countryside seems to be neither a reservoir of eternal traditions, nor the land of entrepreneurs like others, nor a world that is doomed in the near future.

To try to answer this challenge, we would like to go beyond former views, speaking neither of rural communities, nor of rural societies, nor of dominated societies but of “rural worlds”, a term which, as we see it, tears down a number of outdated sterile divides:

– the rural/agricultural divide: while the rural/agricultural divide has made headway over several years now, the continued presence of other occupational circles than the agricultural world in rural worlds has come in for little analysis, and has still not really led to an in situ analysis of relations and interdependence between separate occupational circles. This social diversity probably bears less of the meaning attributed politically and publicly to rural worlds than that of a functional perception of farming as food provider, but it none the less corresponds to an inescapable social reality.

– the rural/urban divide, since, like the Bourdieusians, we are convinced of the complete interdependence of social worlds, urban worlds and rural worlds, political worlds and agricultural worlds, of other economic worlds on rural worlds... At the same time, rejecting a strict analysis in terms of domination and so of social field, we prefer to take the concepts of Elias (1981), speaking of interdependence of social worlds;

– the local/national divide: this interdependence of social worlds means one must observe local, national, European and even world stages, scales of observation that have come in for little study, except for public policy on agriculture;

– the modernity/tradition divide, the counterpart of all the 1970s social sciences also collapses, categorizing the groups described neither under the term “community” (tradition) nor “society” (modernity) but preferring the term “world”. This term world allows us to understand all the activities as processes, changes that are more or less institutionalized, as determined by the balance of power. It is in this way one can understand how reference to tradition is nowadays produced by fully modernized entrepreneurs, in line with a real marketing process of tradition. It is in this sense too that we need to review how it has been possible to pass on estates within families, to see what adaptive

strategies these peasants have developed (Bessière, 2006). It is in this context too that one must grasp why rural areas are increasingly attractive to urbanites and industrialists alike. The divides between tradition and modernity, ethnology and sociology and also within sociology between sociology accompanying modernization and sociology that is critical of modernization seem nowadays dated, at last to understand social changes in rural worlds since seventeen’s.
ANNEXES

A1. Researchers and manly objects from Châtillonnais, Minot, Montbard enquires

**Chercheurs impliqués**

**RCP Châtillonnais**  
Responsables scientifiques : Georges Henri Rivière, Jean Cuisenier, Isac Chiva, François Furet
Équipe ATP : Robert Creswell, Philippe Lemaire de Marne, André Desvalières, M. Pichonnet-Andréal, Claude Marcel-Dubois, Marie-Louise Tenèze, Mariel Jean Brunhes Delamarre, Mahmoud Rouholamini, Jacques Vignet-Zuns, Nicolas Onno Kielsta, Jacques Gutwirth, Henri Raulin, Claude Royer, Marcelle Boutellel, Denise Glück, Jean Raissy…
Équipe CSE : Jean Cuisenier, Christine Delphy, Françoise Loux, M. Pigelet, M. Le More, Mme Pospicil…
Équipe CRH : S. Wolikow, Antoinette Chamoux, Cécile Dauphin
Faculté des lettres de Toulouse : Georges Calvet
Équipe INRA : Claude Grigon, Mlle Darqué, Pierre Mathal, Philippe Evrand, Claude Servolin
Équipe LAS : Nicole Belmont, T. Jolas, M.-C. Pingaud, Y. Verdier, F. Zonabend
Auxquels s’ajoutent nombre de contractuels…

**Dates**
1966-1968

**Principaux objets**

Enquête de tronc commun : recueil de statistiques et passation d’un questionnaire socio-démographique, Histoire démographique et socio-professionnelle, économie régionale

Ethnologie\(^{21}\) : technique agronomique, habitat, tsiganes et voyageurs, vie domestique (matériels et objets), alimentation et cuisine, ateliers artisanaux archaïques, thérapeutiques, folklore, sources orales et diffusion actuelle du conte traditionnel, rôle technique social et culturel du fait musical, rôle technique social et culturel du fait chorégraphique

**Minot**  
1967-1975
Parenté et mémoire
Espace territoire (les finages et les structures agraires)
Traditions villageoises
Figures féminines populaires

**Montbard**  
1978-1983
Sociologie des classes populaires, le travail à côté de l’usine

**A2. Carte :** Etendue et proximité géographique des enquêtes Châtillonnais, Minot, Montbard

\(^{21}\) Les thèmes sont celles directement reprises des sources, le vocabulaire scientifique indigène de la période.
A3. Tableaux récapitulatifs des publications à partir de la RCP du Châtillonnais

A3.1. Number of publications by categories

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A3.3. Publications by researchers’ institutions

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A4. Publications from RCP Châtillonnais and Minot

1966

1967


1968

1969

1970

1971
*Statuaire d'art populaire du Châtillonnais*, Musée de Dijon, Palais des Etats de Bourgogne, 1971, Dijon, 72 p.

1972


22 Vérifier si ce texte est bien issu d’une recherche sur le Châtillonnais. A priori non, non comptabilisé dans les tableaux récapitulatifs des publications du Châtillonnais.
23 Ces deux auteurs travaillent sur le Châtillonnais mais je n’ai pas vu leur nom dans les archives. Non comptabilisé dans les tableaux récapitulatifs des publications du Châtillonnais.
24 idem
1973
1974
1976
Chiva Isaac et Pingaud Marie-Claude, « Pouvoirs et monde rural ». *Études rurales*, 63-64. 1976, Pouvoir et patrimoine au village (Vérifier qu’il s’agit bien d’un article RCP.
Verdier Yvonne « La femme qui aide la laveuse », *L’Homme*, n°2-3, 1976, pp. 103-127
Pingaud Marie-Claude, « Chronologie et formes du pouvoir à Minot (Côte-d’Or) depuis 1789 », *Etudes Rurales*, 63-64, 1976, p. 191-203
1977
1978
1979
1980
1981
1982
1990

A5. Filmographie
Lajoux Jean-Dominique, Les travaux et les jours. Fêtes calendaires du Châtillonnais. Réalisé dans le cadre de la RCP Châtillonnais dans les départements de la Côte d’Or et de la Haute-Marne au cours de l’année 1967., Film 16 mn, noir et blanc, un film du CNRS.

25 idem
A6. Comptes-rendus sur Minot
Segalen Martine, « Comptes-rendus », Ethnologie Française, n°4, 1979, p. 405-406. (sur l’ouvrage de Marie Claude Pingaud)

A7. Comptes-rendus sur la RCP

A8. Hommages
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—, 2006b, La Bourgogne et ses vins : image d'origine contrôlée, postface de R. Boyer, Belin.
Mendras Henri, 1953, Etudes de sociologie rurale, Novis et Virgin, A. Colin.
—, 1976, Sociétés paysannes, A. Colin.