Following the Book.

Towards a Pragmatic Sociology of the Book

Abstract

This article offers an outline of a pragmatic sociology of the book. Whilst ubiquitous, books have received relatively little attention from sociologists. I propose to remedy this situation by drawing upon the ideas of G.H. Mead, namely his neo-Hegelian theory of the subject-object relationship. Mead's chief insight is that objects such as books are first social and only then physical entities. They have agency not because of their thing-ness, so to speak, but because of their sociality. After reviewing the existing literature on the book, I discuss Mead's most relevant contributions. In the proposal for a pragmatic sociology of the book that follows, I combine pragmatism's focus upon the materiality of meaning-production with genealogy's concern with power and violence. I conclude with an illustration of the approach: the simultaneous decanonization of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* among sociologists today and its canonization in political science.

Author's name and address: Filipe Carreira da Silva, Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon, Av. Prof. Aníbal de Bettencourt, 9, 1600-189 Lisboa, Portugal

INTRODUCTION

In 1604 what would eventually become one of the classics of world literature was printed by Juan de Cuesta in his workshop in Madrid. As the first edition of *Don Quixote* sold out, several other editions rapidly followed. Cervantes' novel was reprinted no less than nine times in its first decade of existence alone. Featuring the iconic characters of Quixote himself, his squire Sancho Panza, the horse Rocinante, and his beloved Dolcinea, the countless reprints and translations of intervening centuries have seen this great tale attain and consolidate its position in the literary canon. It was already as an uncontested literary classic that *Don Quixote* found its way into the hands of a little boy by the name of Jorge, in early twentieth century Buenos Aires. Perhaps as a result of contact with the book, this boy grew to become one of the greatest novelists of the twentieth century. Jorge Luis Borges' childhood copy of *Don Quixote*, one of the books of his life, was the Garnier edition with its distinctive illustrations: 'red binding and the titles in gold lettering' (Borges 1999:26). When confronted with another edition of the same book, Borges recalls: 'I had the feeling that it was not the real *Don Quixote*. Later, a friend obtained for me the Garnier edition with the same illustrations, the same footnotes and the same errata'. 'For me', Borges concludes: 'all these things were part of the book; for me, it was the real *Don Quixote*'[1].

Borges' childhood memories, a sort of feeling consciousness, provide a particularly fitting illustration of this paper's central aim, which is to present the outline of a pragmatic approach to books as sociological objects. Of course, writing about the book at a time when some fear sociology books are being killed off by an audit culture that prioritizes the writing of journal articles may look like an odd

choice.[2] However, confronted with the available evidence, fears over the death of the book seem somewhat exaggerated.[3] Yet the sociological examination of the death and life of the book, in an epoch when its content is supported by a myriad forms, has never been more relevant.

I propose to inquire into the dialectic between content and form from a pragmatic perspective. By a 'pragmatic' approach, I mean one which affirms that no text exists outside of the materialities that propose it to its readers or listeners, as opposed to a Platonist perspective which postulates that a work transcends all of its possible material incarnations.[4] Within sociology, pragmatism has experienced a spectacular revival in recent years. What had been for many years a more or less obscure philosophical school, whose naturalistic neo-Hegelian origins and general orientation to inter-subjective meaning-making processes (*maxime* linguistic communication) increased its appeal among philosophical circles, has enjoyed a spectacular revival in the work of a new generation of social thinkers interested in questioning the humanistic premises of modern social thought.[5] At the heart of this debate is the question of how the social sciences deal with the human and non-human. Do we have good reason to grant human beings a privileged epistemological position, the traditional humanistic perspective, or should we approach people and things symmetrically, as post- or anti-humanists suggest?[6] My answer is neither. I am interested in exploring the social lives of things in order to better understand how people operate, for I believe that meaning is produced in a process of mutual constitution between people and the world around them, including physical objects. This insight, which can be traced back to classical American pragmatism, sets my approach apart from traditional humanism, as well as from most current post-humanist proposals. Traditional humanism, developed around notions of 'man' or 'the

human condition', is hopelessly metaphysical. Insofar as it aims to replace the humanist emphasis upon the person with a symmetrical relation between persons and things, post-humanism incurs two basic errors. First, by granting the same epistemological privilege to things that humanists grant humans, post-humanists fail to see the obvious, that it is humans who make sense of the social lives of things. Put simply, there is no point of view of things apart from our point of view of the point of view of things (see e.g. Hodder 2012:10). Second, post-humanists risk perpetuating the antinomies of humanist thought. Rather than a flat symmetry between human and non-human entities, one should be aiming at a better understanding of the dialectical process of mutual constitution between human and non-human entities. The ways in which we make sense of a book are inescapably entangled with its material forms. It is here, in the materiality of meaning-production, that one is to find the symmetry, or rather, the dialectic, between people and things.

However, books are special things. One characteristic that makes books special is that, despite their ubiquity, our understanding of them as sociological objects remains limited. We sociologists tend to take books for granted. Much more attention is given to the individuals who wrote them, to the ideas included in them, or the institutional factors that shape their production and dissemination, than to books themselves as objects, or, if you prefer, as things. The thing we call a 'book' has a well-documented history. But what books do, the ways in which they shape and drive interaction, is still very little understood. A book is not written by the author whose name appears on its cover. A book is not written at all. Books, as Roger Stoddard observes, are manufactured by: 'scribes and other artisans, by mechanics and other engineers, and by printing presses and other machines' (cited in Chartier 1994:9). Books are the product of the collective work of this specialized ensemble of writers,

printers, and publishers. Independently of their paper or electronic form, books provide one type of physical support that offers a text for reading. No 'work' exists independently of the forms in which it reaches its reader. As a result, books have agency. First of all, the book's format shapes the way a text is appropriated by a given public. For instance, seemingly unimportant formal changes have been shown to have a dramatic impact upon the book's audience (e.g. McKenzie 1999). Moreover, books perform new readabilities and new publics. A good example is the colportage editions of already published texts rendered into new forms in order to reach a more popular readership (e.g. Chartier 1995:22). Once we turn from the book's message or the intention behind it, or the external factors shaping it, these are but a few examples of the book as a means to read, that is, of the materiality of the text. To separate this from the textuality of the book, however, would signify turning a blind eye to the materiality of meaning-production that I wish to explore in this paper. My argument applies to books generally, i.e. I argue that the meaning of any given book emerges from the dialectic between content, context, and form – which includes any form of media, from print editions (hardbound, paperback, pocket-size or large folios) to digital forms.[7] Any variation in the form of the book, like any variation in its content or in any of the relevant contexts, is likely to have an effect on the meaning of the book. A book is a thing *and* a text, an object *and* a discourse. This dialectic is activated every time the book encounters a new reader. Every instance of reading and interpretation changes both reader and book – hence the order of discourse of which the book is but one inscription. This is how, from a pragmatic perspective, institutions arise and develop. Scientific disciplines, for example, are shaped in no small degree by the accumulated effects of the circulation of books among communities of interpreters. In short, to paraphrase Chartier, there is no 'order of discourse' without

an 'order of books'.[8] It is in this precise sense that I talk about the materiality of meaning-production. The 'order of books' is an instance of the materiality of the 'order of discourse', a materiality that is integral to its existence and subsistence as an 'order of discourse'.

This insight structures the paper as follows. In Section 1 I review the literature on book history, material culture studies, and the sociology of texts. In Section 2 I discuss the dialectical relationship between material form and meaning-production by reference to the work of G.H. Mead. In Section 3 I explore the implications of merging form and meaning. The conclusion offers an illustration of the approach: I show how the puzzle of the simultaneous decanonization of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* in sociology and its canonization in political science can be resolved by looking at struggles over the control of meaning of successive material incarnations of the book.

SECTION 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of the materiality of meaning-production, namely the dialectic between the book and the text, has been studied from various perspectives in the past. In this section I review these approaches vis-à-vis my own pragmatic perspective. The first approach has been developed by historians interested in the history of the book. Book history, in French *histoire du livre*, has a long and distinguished history, a history with at least two distinct paths of development. In England and the United States, there is the 'descriptive' or 'analytical bibliography' developed in the mid-twentieth century around the goal of rigorously studying the materiality of print with a view to identifying the least corrupted version of the text, that closest to the author's original

intentions. This included analysing differences in type, paper, ink, and so on (e.g. McKerrow 1927; Greg 1950; Bowers 1950). In France, however, a different model was pursued. The aim of traditional *historiens du livre* such as Lucien Febvre includes not only describing the material form of books, but also providing detailed quantitative descriptions of the printing, commercial, and readership aspects of their history (e.g. Febvre and Martin 1950). For the best part of the twentieth century, the history of books: 'was thus a history with neither readers nor authors' (Chartier 1994:26).

Things began to change in the late 1960s. The primarily descriptive approaches to the book that had dominated the field began to be challenged and were eventually replaced by post-positivist approaches (Finkelstein and McCleery 2005). In the Anglo-Saxon context, this is illustrated by Robert Darnton's book history, in particular, the idea of a 'communications circuit' uniting authors, publishers, editors, printers, and readers around the production and commercialization of printed texts (Darnton 1982:67; see also Grafton 1997). In France, Barthes and Foucault's celebrated thesis of the 'death of the author' performed a key role in shifting the focus from authorial intention to the endlessly creative ways readers appropriate texts (Barthes 1968; Foucault 1977). This gestalt switch from producers to consumers eventually led to the development of the post-positivist *histoire du livre* of the 1980s and 1990s, which, rather than assuming a creatively omnipotent reader, analyses readership as a social practice (Chartier 1989b:48).

The publication of books is now increasingly understood as a collective process involving a large number of agents located between the genius of the author and the capacity of the reader, whose activity is animated by the tension between the materiality of the text and the textuality of the book. A more critical line of empirical

inquiry has focused upon the exercise and criticism of power in book production. Taking its inspiration from the critical sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, especially his analysis of the intellectual field, a growing number of book historians have turned their attention to the order of authority behind the publication of books (e.g. Chartier 1995:21).

The pragmatic approach to books adopted here has affinities with this goal of unmasking taken-for-granted power relations, especially when this concerns disciplinary forms of power. The fact remains, however, that historians of the book are primarily interested in documenting, describing, and: 'bringing into the same history everyone who contributes, each one in his or her own place and role, to the production, dissemination, and interpretation of discourse' (Chartier 1995:1). Providing a social-theoretical explanation of a book's peregrinations in the world, including its effects, remains a secondary goal. For that, one needs to move beyond history towards anthropology, where 'material culture' studies have been responsible for a re-examination of the social life of things since the early 1980s.[9]

Anthropology's turn to things was partly motivated by a rediscovery of Hegel's analysis of the subject-object relation in *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*. In a Hegelian fashion, physical objects, or things, are understood to make us in the same process as we make them. We become persons through the production, exchange, and return of things; this is how culture comes about. But material things are not only produced. Their exchange, as the Malinowski-Mauss theory of culture explains, provides the basis for most social relationships. This basis is debt, that is, the debt those who receive things incur vis-à-vis those who give those things. There is hardly a more solid bond upon which to build a social relationship than the moral obligation not to remain in debt, of returning the gift. The upshot of this theory of gift is that, as

Daniel Miller, leader of the UCL school of material culture studies, explains: 'we do not start from what societies do with things, it is the circulation of things that creates society. Or better still, what we call society and stuff are actually artificial separations out of the same process' (2010:67).

Once we apply this neo-Hegelian insight to the circulation of books, we realize that the question is not what we do with them. Rather, the issue is the ways in which making, growing up with, and taking the book-as-thing for granted makes us part of a new type of society. Producing and consuming books manufactures a new version of us. It is in this sense that the transition from the manuscript to the print book between the end of the Middle Ages and the eighteenth century has been associated with the rise of 'authorial self-consciousness' (Brown 1991:142), or what Foucault designated 'author-function' ([1969] 1991:108; see also Eisenstein 1979). The author, and subsequently copyright, are socio-juridical entities made possible by the creation of the print book. But the invention of the print book did not simply create the figure of the author. Around this new object gradually emerged an entirely new connection between authors and texts. This was a key development in making us part of a society that, for the first time, understands itself as a book-reading society. To explain this key historical innovation, however, we need to move beyond anthropology. Anthropologists, even theoretically sophisticated examples such as Miller, aim not to explain as much as they seek to describe as vividly as possible how culture comes about through the dialectical relationship between things and persons.

Miller's material culture studies, of course, are but the latest of a series of encounters with Hegel going back to the nineteenth century. In turn of the twentieth century Chicago, for instance, G.H. Mead subjected Hegel's subject-object relation in *The Phenomenology* to a thoroughly post-metaphysical and naturalistic re-

examination. The outcome of this re-examination, that is, Mead's social pragmatism (Silva 2006, 2007, 2008), is the main source of the pragmatic approach to books I advocate here.

Yet Mead's social pragmatism, with a few notable exceptions, has been largely absent from the spectacular 'pragmatist turn' that French social theory has undertaken since the 1990s (Madelrieux 2008). The main sources for recent explorations of the semiotics of materiality by French pragmatic sociology have been James and Dewey, as well as Durkheim, Mauss, and Tarde. A case in point is the self-proclaimed 'Jamesian, Deweyan, pragmatist' (2006:115) Bruno Latour and his Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) (1985). ANT, namely Latour's notion of immutable mobiles, has served as inspiration for Lindsay Prior's pragmatic sociology of documentation (2008), whose basic tenets are very close to my own in this paper. This pragmatic emphasis upon the agency of things questions the traditional sociological ascription of explanatory power to entities such as the state, culture, productive forces, or social groups. Rather, inscriptions are to be conceived of as immutable mobiles whose circulation and accumulation make those entities possible in the first place (Latour 2011:429). Hence sociologists should direct their attention to the history of the circulation of immutable mobiles, from the accumulation of records and ideograms that made the Chinese Empire possible, to the performation of today's market economy by marginalist economic formulae (Callon 2009:330). If French pragmatists suggest that we retrace the social biography of immutable mobiles across networks of socio-technical agencements, including important performation struggles (Callon 2009:332), in a parallel yet independent British development, D.F. McKenzie finds in pragmatism the resources to redefine bibliography. With McKenzie, bibliography ceases to be a Platonic quest for the essential text transcending all of its possible

material incarnations, and becomes a pragmatic inquiry into exactly those material incarnations (1969).[10]

For McKenzie, a text (from the Latin, *texere*, 'to weave') is a process of material construction through which a web of words is woven into a meaningful whole (1999:14). From this perspective, authorship is dispersed and collective rather than unified and singular. It includes all those involved in the process of material construction of a text and its meanings (1999: 26-27). Texts can take many forms, including that of a print book. Texts are therefore relatively independent of the documents, which at any particular moment give them form. No text yields a definitive meaning. As a language, the form and meaning of any given text derives from other texts. The multiple metamorphoses, the various physical forms of any given text, are to be conceived as its condition of survival, rather than an insurmountable obstacle between the reader and the absolute and immutable meaning of a text. In turn, McKenzie explains, these metamorphoses 'alone make possible, in their sequence, any account of cultural change', concluding that: 'from a bibliographical point of view, therefore, the ostensible contradiction between those two concepts of 'text', the closed and the open, simply dissolves' (1999: 61).

Finally, in its understanding that books are (also) a form of media, pragmatic sociology joins Friedrich Kittler's post-structuralist discourse analysis of texts as material communicative events in historically contingent networks connecting writers, typists, editors, and interpreters.[11] But unlike Kittler, who sees no problem in recovering Heidegger's account of the relationship between hand and typewriter (1999: 198-200), or Carl Schmitt's philosophical meditation on the Buribunks (a diary-typing machine) (1999: 231-242), I remain sceptical about the postmodernist tendency to avoid questions of power, inequality, and domination in the production of

knowledge. If anything, a pragmatic genealogy aims at exposing precisely those structurally unequal power struggles over the production and control of meaning that conservative thinking (in both its anti-modern or postmodernist versions) either endorse or ignore.

The pragmatic approach to the book I articulate here draws upon all four perspectives reviewed above. It involves a genealogical concern with disciplinary forms of power, a dialectical understanding of the subject-object relationship, a semiotic-iterative account of cultural change that takes materiality seriously, and a consideration for books as a form of media. Yet it differs from all of the above by using a problem-solving conception of agency. Drawing upon Mead's social pragmatism, I ask not what an author is, but, in characteristically pragmatic fashion, to what extent meaning-making practices (such as writing, translating, editing, teaching or commenting upon a book) are better understood as socio-technical entanglements.

SECTION 2. G.H. MEAD'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE STUDY OF THE BOOK

The relationship between pragmatism and books is, of course, an old affair. The opposition between pragmatism and Platonism has shaped debates among literary critics, cultural historians, and intellectuals for the best part of the twentieth century. One of the latest renditions of this opposition has been the neo-conservative lament for American intellectual decline in the 1980s. In *The Closing of the American Mind*, literary critic Allan Bloom points to the 'failure to read good books' (1987:64) as one reason for this decline. The reason for Bloom's lament was the gradual demise of the 'Great Books' tradition on American campuses, a Platonist pedagogical model the

origins of which can be traced back to pre-Depression America (Bird and Musial, 1973). A key figure in the creation and development of the Great Books tradition was Robert Maynard Hutchins, who devoted his tenure as President of the University of Chicago (1929-1951) to the advancement of this pedagogical model. Hutchins's conservative agenda was confronted with tremendous resistance by the University, however. One of the protagonists of the resistance was Mead who, first as member and then as chair of the philosophy department, was to play a central role in what became known as the 'Hutchins controversy' (Cook 1993:183-193).

The Hutchins controversy concerned the replacement of pragmatism by a conservative blend of Aristotelianism and Thomism as the main philosophical orientation of the department, as well as of the University generally. Concretely, it involved the appointment in 1930-1931 of like-minded philosophers Mortimer J. Adler, who was to play a vital role in the Great Books initiative, Richard McKeon, and Scott Buchanan, against the will of the more senior members of the philosophy department. The clash between Hutchins and Mead was inevitable. Mead's reservations concerning Hutchins's agenda were both ideological and philosophical. Ideologically, Mead opposed the elitist and culturally conservative character of the Great Books tradition. This way of conceiving of books – '[t]he best that has been thought and written' – in the words of Matthew Arnold (cited by Bird and Musial, 1973:160), involves introducing the best students in small group discussions to the eternal truths which are believed to inhabit certain texts. Few things could be further from the preferences of a radical democratic thinker such as Mead, who spent decades fighting for progressive causes such as the rights of women, immigrants, and manual workers, and whose pedagogical thinking favoured concrete problem-solving, rather than debating abstractions (Shalin 1989). Philosophically, Mead rejects the

essentialist thesis that books are no more than little parallelepipeds which act as vessels for certain 'eternal truths'. For a pragmatist such as Mead, of course, to sever the soul of a book from its body is to miss the point entirely. Unmoved by these reasons, Hutchins went ahead with the appointments. Incensed by the escalation of events, Mead eventually resigned and died shortly afterwards.

Mead's demise in April 1931 signalled both the end of an era, that of the Chicago school of pragmatism, and the beginning of another, that of symbolic interactionism. The book *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934) played a central role in establishing Mead as the main intellectual lodestone of this phenomenologically-oriented sociological perspective. The troubled history of this (creatively edited) book, however, has meant, among other things, that the Mead one finds here is hopelessly Platonic, with little to say about how the materiality of things is an integral part of the subject's process of social constitution. This helps to explain why at the Panizzi Lectures of 1985, McKenzie finds in the pragmaticism of Charles Sanders Peirce a crucial resource for the Platonism he wishes to dispense with (1999: 9-10), but is virtually silent as to Mead's contributions to the project of building a pragmatic 'sociology of texts' as an alternative to positivist approaches to the book. Fortunately, an alternative, more pragmatic portrait of Mead has recently emerged with the publication of an anthology of his writings in 2011. In previously unpublished texts such as 'On the Self and Teleological Behavior' or 'On Social Consciousness and Social Science', we see Mead following in the footsteps of Hegel's theory of objectification, yet resisting Marx's one-sided interpretation of it as fetishism, a suspicion that would persist throughout the twentieth century in the Frankfurtian strand of critical thinking from Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (1944) to Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964). Avoiding this

suspicion of material culture as materialism enables Mead to take the materiality of culture seriously without receding into the idealism of Platonic solutions.

Mead accomplishes this by his unique understanding of pragmatist philosophy. Mead's pragmatism is a social pragmatism, i.e. both a thoroughly inter-subjective process philosophy entirely compatible with the principles of the scientific experimental method (setting Mead apart from James and Dewey), and a progressive world-view at home with radical democracy (placing him closer to Dewey).

As a process philosophy, Mead's social pragmatism is at odds with dualistic modes of thinking from Platonism to modern Cartesian philosophy, with its characteristic ontological distinctions between mind and body, or between thought and action. According to such dualistic philosophies, things can be studied independently of the uses people give them and, conversely, ideas, beliefs, and practices can be studied separately from the environment in which they play out. By contrast, for Mead, human agents are fundamentally problem-solvers and thought's main function is to guide social action to the solution of practical problems that confront individuals in their dealings with the environment. A number of important and wide-ranging epistemological implications follow from this claim. Most important in the present context, however, is Mead's corollary that individuals, while responding to problematic situations, engage with the environment in a relationship of 'mutual determination'. It is such a 'mutual interrelationship of the individuals and their environments' (2011:27) that accounts for the characteristics that define objects. For Mead, then, persons and things, individuals and books do not live separate lives. Rather, they mutually determine one another. The implication of this philosophical insight for the sociological study of books is obvious. Pragmatic sociology needs to approach the lives of books and the lives of people as fundamentally entangled.

As a radical democratic world-view, pragmatism rejects elitist and culturally conservative solutions to social and political issues. Hence Mead's heartfelt reaction to Hutchins's agenda. Yet Mead's social theory lacks an adequate understanding of power relations as constitutive of the social bond. This is not to say, however, that he systematically neglected processes of material reproduction of societies as he did study at length the nature and consequences of warfare, citizenship, urbanization, and emigration. That is to say that, in all these processes, Mead studied conflict, violence, and coercion as failed human attempts at 'rational reconstruction', rather than as positive social phenomena in their own right (e.g. Silva 2008: 167-175). Hence Mead's ultimately horizontal, non-hierarchical conception of the social order, including the order of books.

This much is clear from Mead's conception of objects and human agency. For Mead, a book is an object insofar as one is able to act upon it (1938:430). But do we approach a book as we approach the memory of a book? Do we talk about books we have read as we talk about books we have not read? For Mead, such distinctions are not categorical, but matters of degree (2011:25). This is because Mead distinguishes between books as social objects and books as physical objects. A book is a physical object with certain properties and functions, such as weight, resistance, and so on. Yet in order to be a physical object, Mead argues, a book must first be a social object, i.e. a book must have a common meaning to participants in the social act. At first, human organisms interact socially with the surrounding environment and the objects of which it is composed. An organism's immediate response to an inanimate physical object is the same as that organism's response to another organism. For instance, I order a book from Amazon because I find it interesting or useful, or a combination of both. But once I have the book in my hands and read it, I abstract from that type of

immediate response because of what I come to know of it. I may still find it interesting or useful, but now I have reasons to think that way. There are, then, two different moments when we deal with physical objects. Our immediate response is social while our later reaction is abstract and rational. What explains the passage from one moment to the other is the human hand. In more than one sense, then, books as physical things are the product of the human hand.

SECTION 3. A PRAGMATIC SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE BOOK

For Mead, books have agency not because of their thing-ness, as suggested by contemporary materiality studies, but because of their sociality.[12] They have an impact on the world because they are first and foremost social objects; only then do they subsequently emerge as physical objects, as things. Books as things, no less than books as social objects, are thoroughly inter-subjective entities. They emerge as a result of people's engagement with the environment in a relationship of mutual determination. To stress the dialectics of the mutual determination between individuals and the environment is to emphasize the generative, creative nature of such mutuality. Mead writes that, from this dialectical relation, arises a: 'coordination in the structure of the organism of the individual which is also new – as new as the object' (2011:38). In other words, from the tension between individuals and objects arise *new individuals* and *new objects*. New individuals arise as the self readjusts to the emergence of a new object. Modern individuals, for example, emerged as new scientific, political, and social objects gradually came about. Illustrating this thesis using the Copernican revolution, the 'earlier objects were the earth at the center of the world', whereas the 'later objects were the sun at the center of a system of planets'

(2011:41), Mead argues that, from the standpoint of 'religion, politics, education, and art there was a new world and a new society that had not existed before' (2011:40-41).

The same reasoning, of course, applies to books. Consider a print copy of the King James Bible. This version of the Bible exists as a physical object with particular characteristics such as weight, resistance, colour, odour, and so on insofar as it becomes embodied in the responses of the individuals manipulating them. It is this 'embodiment of the object' in the responses of the individual that is: 'the essential factor in the emergence of the physical thing' (Mead 1932:125; see also Hodder 2012:38). As the Bible emerged in the world, first as a social object, then as a physical one, it became embodied in the responses of the individuals manipulating it. To a large extent, one becomes a Christian insofar as one embodies the Bible in one's conduct. Crucially, however, different versions of the Bible are embodied in one's conduct in different ways. This much had been noted long ago by John Locke, as D.F. McKenzie rightly recalls. Locke's argument in his 1707 *An Essay for the Understanding of St. Paul's Epistles on the Bible* is that controlling the form of the text means to control its interpretation and uses. More concretely, Locke believes that, if the Bible were to be published as a continuous text rather than as a succession of verses, it would prevent much hermeneutical confusion and self-serving misuse. However, the current (verse) form of the Bible can be said to: 'even indeed generate religious and civil dissension' (McKenzie 1999: 57). McKenzie uses Locke's argument to illustrate his thesis that 'form effects meaning', a thesis that has proved immensely influential among those interested in exploring the materiality of print culture, myself included.

McKenzie's pragmatic sociology of books can be criticized, however, on at

least two counts. The first has to do with the issue of power and it takes us beyond pragmatism and Mead towards genealogy. Genealogy, as practiced by Nietzsche and the late Foucault (1971, 1984), is the exact opposite of tracing a pedigree. Rather than using the past to seek or enhance the legitimacy of a present person, practice, or institution, to give a genealogy, aims at showing the 'overwhelming contingency' that characterizes history as the result of: 'violent forms of human action based on pervasive delusions' (Geuss 1999:5). Pragmatism, either in its Meadian form or in the version suggested by McKenzie, is not primarily oriented at exposing such delusions. Yet the only alternative to mythologizing the past, or reducing it to an ultimately meaningless succession of 'facts', is to give a genealogy of successive attempts by various individual and collective agents to take control of and reinterpret certain segments of reality, thereby imposing on those segments a certain meaning. In this sense, the appropriate historical account is a genealogy. To give a genealogy of these successive attempts at producing and controlling meaning, in turn, is to relocate the phenomenon of power away from the individual agent's sphere of intentional action, such as in Bertrand Russell's or Weber's accounts, and towards the materiality of the techniques and mechanisms through which power is exercised in a omnipresent, but never omnipotent, way (Geuss 2001:26-27). As such, this genealogical conception of power occupies a central position in my attempt at a sociological approach to the order of books created and maintained by 'disciplinary' forms of power which require a certain amount of co-operation to be acquired and exercised.

The second criticism to be levelled at McKenzie refers to his way of conceiving of the relation between form and meaning. For McKenzie, these analytical categories are in perennial tension with one another. This is certainly true most of the time. Yet in special circumstances, form and meaning relate to each other in a

fundamentally different way. An exciting suggestion in this regard can be found in Mead's analysis of the fusion of the acting self ('the 'I') and the self-as-object (the 'me'). Like other turn-of-the-century sociological accounts of war and religious experience, such as Simmel's account of war as a liberating existential experience, or Durkheim's understanding of 'collective effervescence', Mead teaches us to conceive of the possibility of merging analytical categories that were previously thought to be separate. If one applies this reasoning to the book, namely its material form and the text it supports, one moves beyond McKenzie's bibliography to face the possibility that, under certain exceptional circumstances, form and meaning can merge.

When form and meaning fuse, books acquire a whole new status. Still physical and social objects, their materiality is now social in an entirely new sense. The book embodies society's values. Form becomes meaning as the difference between material form and the text dissolves. And if meaning is the word of God, then form is God. Allah is embodied in the Koran, as God is embodied in the five books of the Torah. Hence the designation of Muslims and Jews, either by themselves or by others, as the People of the Book. This much has been amply documented in material culture studies, including print culture studies and book history. But my pragmatic approach to the book goes a step further.

Dewey once wrote that: 'a problem well put is half solved' (2008:112). The problem with books is that, if they have lives, then surely they can die too. Hence the problem with which I conclude this paper – what does it take for a book to die? What effect does a book's death have on our lives? Answering these questions will take us a step closer, I believe, to a fuller understanding of how the lives (and deaths) of things and persons are fundamentally entangled.

CONCLUSION

Very much as 'terroir' denotes the holistic combination of soil, geology, climate, and the local vinicultural practices that make each region's wine unique, what makes each book unique is a holistic combination of agency, form, and meaning. Agency is here conceived of as a problem-solving activity, in which subject and object are mutually constituted. Once bottled and shipped, wine bottles begin their journey into the world of consumption. Likewise, once printed and put on sale, books enjoin their readers into networks of meaning, solidarity, rivalry, and cooperation. Of course, one does not have to read a book to be able to talk about it. Texts always exceed the material form – the codex, the volume, or the computer – that supports them through speech, memory, and imagination. As social objects, but also as physical objects, books can indeed live long, fascinating lives with tremendous import for the lives of people who co-exist with them.

The death of a book entails its demise as a social object, not as a physical object. As long as it subsists as a social object, a book can always be resurrected in some other form. Yet a book will die once it ceases to be embodied in our conduct. Put simply, if one no longer thinks, talks, or acts towards it. Deeply aware of this, in the Chiltan Mount, in Pakistan, Muslims have long buried copies of the Koran, 'each one shrouded, like the dead, in white cloth' (Battles 2004:193).

Likewise, one of the most intriguing puzzles in the current historiography of academic disciplines involves the death of a book. Why is Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835-40) dead for sociologists today, while in neighboring political science it has never been more alive? As I show elsewhere (Silva 2015; see also Silva and Vieira 2011), I believe that unraveling this puzzle involves 'following the book'

since its origins in the 1830s up to the present day as the inscription device around which struggles over the definition and control of the meaning of the work revolved. This genealogy draws upon archival and secondary materials pertaining to both human and non-human agency, including, among others, the 'working manuscript' and notes handwritten by Tocqueville in the 1830s and all the editions in English. Existing approaches are unable to explain why *Democracy* (and Tocqueville) has been simultaneously *canonized* in political science and *de-canonized* in sociology (e.g. Mancini 2006; Abbott 2007), because they either assume that the impact of Tocqueville's ideas has been relatively stable or that the text of *Democracy* is constant, and that what requires explanation is the variance of factors external to it, from the author's intentions to changes in the collective understanding of the discipline. In reality, however, texts are never constant, and neither is their meaning and impact. They are constantly changing. Some of these changes are relatively minor, as with the typeface, while others are more substantial, as with certain abridged passages. As the material form of the text changes as a result of the cultural work of the collective efforts of editors, translators, and commentators, so does its meaning – as a result, 'many Tocquevilles' have arisen (Nisbet 1976-77). Yet, contrary to Nisbet's self-legitimating genealogy of a succession of Tocquevilles, closely mirroring the main grievances of the conservative movement in the United States since the New Deal, my pragmatic genealogy of *Democracy* exposes the discontinuous, and often contradictory, nature of the 'many Tocquevilles' that have arisen since the 1930s in Western social thought.

Concretely, the unraveling of the dialectic between form and meaning in *Democracy* reveals that, rather than an obvious and natural endpoint, for Tocqueville, equality of conditions (or democracy) is a distinctively *modern problematic* with

multiple and often ambivalent consequences. This is why Tocqueville decides to include, *pace* his gentleman's agreement with Beaumont, the chapter on the three races at the end of Part I of the work. In this light, far from being an afterthought as some suggest, this chapter emerges as absolutely central to the argument Tocqueville was trying to make. Furthermore, it explains why *Democracy*'s critical analysis of equality of conditions resonated so powerfully with postwar social scientists. Crucial in this regard were the new translations of the work (the 1945 Bradley and the 1966 Mayer-Lawrence editions), whose paperback format dramatically increased its readership and whose forewords and introductions powerfully framed *Democracy* as the *locus classicus* of the sociological study of race relations and socio-economic inequality in democratic societies (e.g. Drescher 1968). It was out of the fusion between this (paperback) format and this (progressively framed) content in the (postwar) context that 'Tocqueville, the sociological classic' emerges.

Finally, it sheds light upon the death of *Democracy* (and Tocqueville) as a sociological classic. Parallel to the postwar (progressive) construction of *Democracy*, there was another editorial strand of conservative character. From Commager's 1945 edition to the abridged, sanitized versions of the 1950s (Heffner 1956, Hacker 1964; see also Kuehnelt-Leddihn 1966), in all of which the three races chapter is deemed irrelevant and swiftly excised, one finds Tocqueville being materially constructed as the surest antidote to dangerous Marxist political solutions and epistemology. I believe that 'Tocqueville, the analyst of (in)equality' of the 1950s and 1960s has given way to today's 'Tocqueville, the neoconservative superhero' (Kramnick 2003: xliv), as this conservative editorial strand assumed control over the material production of the meaning of the work through a new wave of re-editions in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Chief among these is the first new translation, by America's

most influential neoconservative political philosopher Harvey Mansfield (with Debra Winthrop, 2000), to appear since the Mayer-Lawrence edition of 1966. Unsurprisingly, their discussion of the chapter on the three races not only ignores its centrality to Tocqueville's argument, but is also guided by a concept nowhere to be found in the text itself, but which figures in Leo Strauss as the cardinal moral virtue: the notion of 'pride', 'the chapter's unstated theme' (lviii).

It is in the cultural work of this collective of neoconservative political philosophers-cum-editors that part of the solution to the puzzle of the contrasting destinies of Tocqueville in sociology and political science resides. Virtually all recent editions of *Democracy* frame the text as a classic in political science or political theory, rather than sociology. More than the product of institutional factors or ingenious new interpretations of the work, it is out of the merging between the format of the 1990s wave of re-editions and their (conservatively framed) content in the context of the political consolidation of the American neoconservative movement that, as the *New York Times* described it, 'Tocqueville for the NeoCons' (14 January 2001) emerged. Much as Mansfield and other American neo-conservatives have been actively involved in keeping *Democracy* alive for political theorists, others, such as the Muslims of the Chiltan Mount, go to great lengths to ensure that certain, special books will not die. Uniting the cultural work of these Muslims and neo-conservatives is, of course, the shared pragmatic realization that texts can only survive with some sort of material support. If this is indeed the case, then sociologists have as much to say about the history of *Democracy in America* as the book's history has to say about we sociologists and our practice.

References

Abbott J (2007) Whither Tocqueville in American Sociology? *American Sociologist* 38: 60–77.

Barthes R [1968] (1986) 'The Death of the Author' and 'The Reality Effect.' In: *The Rustle of Language*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 49-55 and 141-148.

Bernstein R (2010) *The Pragmatic Turn*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bird O and Musial T (1973) Great Books Programs. In: *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science: Volume 10*, Kent A, Lancour H and Daily J E (eds). New York: CRC Press, 159-179.

Bland M (2008) *A Guide to Early Printed Books and Manuscripts*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Bloom A (1987) *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Boltanski L and Thévenot L [1991] (2006) *On Justification*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Borges J L (1998) 'El libro.' In: *Borges oral*. Madrid: Alianza, 9-23.

Borges J L with Norman Tomas de Giovanni (1999) *Autobiographia 1899-1970*. Buenos Aires: El Ateneo.

Bowers F (1950) Current Theories of Copy-Text, with an Illustration from Dryden. *Modern Philology* 68: 19-36.

Brown C (1991) Text, Image, and Authorial Self-Consciousness in Late Medieval Paris. In: *Printing the Written Word*. Hindman S (ed). Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 103-142

Chartier R [1992] (1994) *The Order of Books*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Chartier R (1995) *Forms and Meanings*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania

Press.

Cook G A (1993) *George Herbert Mead*. Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois

Press.

Darnton R (1982) What is the History of the Books? *Daedalus* 111(3): 65-83.

Drescher S (1968) *Dilemmas of Democracy: Tocqueville and Modernization*.

Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Dewey J (2008) *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*. Boydston J A (ed).

Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Eisenstein E (1979) *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 2 vols.. Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press.

Febvre L and Martin H-J [1958] (2010) *The Coming of the Book.* London: Verso.

Finkelstein D and McCleery A (2005) *An Introduction to Book History*. London:

Routledge.

Foucault M [1969] 1991 What Is an Author? In: *The Foucault Reader*. Rabinow P

(ed). London: Penguin, 101-120.

Foucault M [1969] (2008) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge.

Foucault M [1971] (1991) Nietzsche, Genealogy, History. In: *The Foucault Reader*.

Rabinow P (ed.). London: Penguin, 76-100.

Foucault M (1982) On the Genealogy of Ethics. In: *Michel Foucault*. Dreyfus H and

Rabinow P (eds). Chicago: Chicago University Press, 229-252.

Geuss R (1999) *Morality, Culture, and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press.

Geuss R (2001) *History and Illusion in Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press.

Gosden C (2005) What do objects want? *Journal of Archaeological Method and*

Theory 12(3): 193-211.

Grafton A (1997) *Commerce with the Classics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Greg WW (1950) The Rationale of Copy-Text. *Studies in Bibliography* 3: 19-36.

Hodder I (2012) *Entangled.* London: Wiley-Blackwell.

Kastan D (2001) *Shakespeare and the Book*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kittler F (1999) *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Kramnick I (2003) Introduction. *Democracy in America: And Two essays on America*. Kramnick I (ed). London: Penguin.

Latour B and Woolgar S (1979) *Laboratory Life*. London: Sage.

Latour B [1985] (2011) Visualization and Cognition. In: *Using Documents and Records in Social Research*, vol.2, Prior L (ed). London: Sage, 401-439.

Latour B (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Latour B (2006) Entretien avec Bruno Latour. *Tracés* 10: 113-129.

Madelrieux S (ed.). (2008) Pragmatismes. *Tracés* 15: 1-276.

Mancini M (2006) *Alexis de Tocqueville and American Intellectuals*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.

McGann J (1991) *The Textual Condition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

McKerrow R (1927) *An Introduction to Bibliography for Literary Students*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

McKenzie D F (1969) Printers of the Mind. *Studies in Bibliography* 22: 1–75.

McKenzie D F (1999) *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mead G H (1932) *The Philosophy of the Present*. Chicago: Open Court.

Mead G H (1938) *The Philosophy of the Act*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Mead G H (2001) *Essays in Social Psychology.* Deegan MJ (ed). New Brunswick: Transaction.

Mead G H (2011) *G.H. Mead: A Reader.* Edited by FC Silva. Abingdon: Routledge.

Miller D (2010) *Stuff*. Cambridge: Polity.

Olsen B (2003) Material culture after text. *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 36(3): 87-104.

Prior L (2008) Repositioning Documents in Social Research. *Sociology* 42: 821-836.

Prior L (2011) *Using Documents and Records in Social Research*. London: Sage.

Shalin D (1988) G. H. Mead, Socialism, and the Progressive Agenda. *American Journal of Sociology* 93(4): 913-951.

Silva, FC (2006) G.H. Mead in the History of Sociological Ideas. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 42(1): 19-39.

Silva, FC (2007) Re-examining Mead. G.H. Mead on the 'Material Reproduction of Society.' *Journal of Classical Sociology* 7(3): 291-313.

Silva, FC (2008) *Mead and Modernity*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Silva, FC and Mónica Brito Vieira. (2011) Books and Canon-Building in Sociology. The Case of *Mind, Self, and Society*. *Journal of Classical Sociology* 11(3): 356-377.

Silva, FC (2015) Who reads Tocqueville today? On the death of a sociological classic. Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=2555145 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2555145

Author's biography

Filipe Carreira da Silva is Research Fellow at the Institute of Social Sciences of the

University of Lisbon (since 2005). He is also Fellow of Selwyn College, Cambridge (since 2014). He was born in 1975 and educated in Sociology (PhD) at St. Edmund's College, Cambridge. He has hold visiting positions at Harvard, Chicago, Yale, and at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In 2010, his book *Mead and Modernity* was awarded the American Sociological Association Distinguished Book Award (History of Sociology).

Endnotes

[1] Yet see Borges (1998:10).

[2] I thank one of the anonymous reviewers to bring this issue to my attention.

[3] The annual statistical reports between 2009-10 and 2012-13 by the UK Publishers Association shows that losses in print revenues have been partly compensated by the gains made from e-books. Non-fiction books (including sociology ones) fit this general pattern, with the e-books purchases rising from 11% to 13% between 2012 and 2013. See http://www.pik.org.pl/upload/files/Global_Trends_in_Publishing_2014.pdf

[4] Here I follow David Kastan's opposition between the pragmatic viewpoint, epitomized by Jerome McGann, and the Platonist perspective, advocated by authors such as G. Thomas Tanselle (Kastan, 2001, pp.117-118).

[5] See, e.g., Latour (1993), Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), and Bernstein (2010).

[6] Post-humanists (or anti-humanists – I use the terms interchangeably) include Donna Haraway, Emily Martin, Marilyn Strathern, and Bruno Latour.

[7] I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for bringing this issue to my attention.

[8] Chartier is here distancing himself from Foucault's Platonism in works such as *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, where the basic analytical unit is not the book (or the *oeuvre*) but discursive formations (Foucault [1969] 2008:25).

[9] See Firth (1983), Appadurai (1986), Strathern (1988). On the agency of things, see Olsen (2003), Gosden (2005).

[10] For McKenzie, pragmatism is a materialist approach to texts as sociological and historical realities rather than as philosophical or ontological ones. As far as I was able to determine, McKenzie does not engage with American philosophical pragmatism in a systematic fashion. On McKenzie and pragmatism, see Bland (2008:9). On 'literary pragmatics', see McGann (1991).

---

[11] I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for bringing Kittler's work to my attention.

[12] Mead introduces the concept of sociality towards the end of his career with a view to systematizing his ideas. It would be anachronistic to suggest, however, that all Mead's earlier work can be read in the light of this principle. I am here using it strictly in the sense Mead uses it in *The Philosophy of the Present* (1932).