

**Michael Gemperle****“The intellectual use of a « classic »: « Max Weber » in service of the universal?”**

The idea, that international standards exist, seems to be taken for granted within the social sciences as within other spheres (particularly in economy and in politics). Certain authors, which are accounted as “classics”, would constitute “theory” par excellence, possess a universal (and timeless) value and form a benchmark, that allows to draw comparisons between the research that is inspired by their works. Thus, the exegesis, the discussion and the critic of the thesis of a foreign author would constitute a way to overcome the limits of the national space. However, these interpretations are very dependant on it. The controversies caused by “classical” works inform just as much about the state of a discipline in a given country as on international processes.

The contemporary diffusion and reception of Max Weber’s work makes it possible to understand certain transformations that affect French sociology for the last fifteen years. During this period “Weber”, being presented as a “misjudged” or “misunderstood” author, became a necessary reference. This “rediscovery” went along with the advancement of a sociological work that is detached from fieldwork and empirical investigation. The reference to the German author confers a form of symbolic capital, even when it is not accompanied by updating or further developing the concepts. While the strong empirical tradition of French sociology persisted, the epistemology and the history of sociological thought have achieved a legitimation that they did not possess before. The development of the Weberian studies takes part in this change. This contribution aims in a first step at presenting the different spaces of reception of Weber’s work and their peculiar logics. In a second step we reconstruct the relationship between these spaces and try to situate them in the social sciences. Starting out from the “case Weber” we discuss finally the limited contribution of debates about “authors” to the construction of a international space that directs at universalising “national achievements”.