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A Different Poststructuralism

Outline of a Theory of Practice. by Pierre Bourdieu; Richard Nice

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*Contemporary Sociology*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (May, 1996), pp. 302-305

Published by: [American Sociological Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2077436>

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Third, students of culture would also do well to take the notion of "deep play" (a theoretical idea, if ever there was one) more seriously. In "Deep Play," Geertz is not only exploring the meanings of the Balinese cockfight. He is also asking what makes some cultural performances, some cultural experiences deeper, more intense, more gripping than others. This is the beginning of an analysis of why some rituals, texts, or symbols generate more meaning than others do. Geertz explores how tension, uncertainty about the outcome, balanced opponents, and the ability to symbolize (and sublimate) significant social tensions make some cockfights deeper, more exciting, and more satisfying than others.

Barely breaking the surface of Geertz's essays, but there, nonetheless, lurks the question of whether and in what sense cultures are really "systems" after all. He recognizes that multiple kinds of realities can abide side by side. He also occasionally addresses great clashes of meanings, when people's cultural assumptions don't mesh, and when culture itself is a source of sometimes violent conflict. If cultural coherence is itself variable, Geertz's work provides a starting point for studying this variation.

Geertz's polemical stands—in favor of interpretation and against explanation, for description over theory, and against all general theory—are red herrings. They have distracted us from the depth and originality of his own theorizing. Sociology has not faced a crisis of confidence like that of

anthropology; and sociology has always had a stronger commitment to both theory and explanation. Perhaps, then, sociologists will be able uninhibitedly to assimilate and find real nourishment in the rich filling of Geertz's interpretation-sandwich.

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## A Different Poststructuralism

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Original review, *CS* 9:2 (March 1980), by Arthur W. Frank III:

**The contribution of Bourdieu's work is that in producing a better grounded structuralism, he accomplishes the practice of a more scientific Marxism . . . The European idiom of Bourdieu's writing should not distract North American sociologists from its extraordinary importance as a theory of method.**

*Outline of a Theory of Practice*, by **Pierre Bourdieu**. Trans. by Richard Nice. New York: Cambridge University Press [1972] 1977. 248 pp. \$19.95 paper. ISBN: 0-521-29164-X.

Pierre Bourdieu (1988) has described one central motivation behind his intellectual work as a determination to challenge misleading dichotomies. This determination is no-

where more manifest than in the work that first made him famous in English-language sociology, and which remains perhaps his most influential, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.<sup>1</sup> *Outline* attacks many problematic dichotomies, but has gained its enduring influence most of all from its challenge to the opposition of structure and action.

The idea of transcending this dichotomy was not a new one in sociological theory; recall the effort signaled by Talcott Parsons's first book, *The Structure of Social Action*. But Bourdieu's effort was both original and compelling. It caught, moreover, the rising demand for an integration of structure and action that followed the successive crises first of Parsons's own functionalism and then of a Marxism that had split into structuralist and voluntarist camps.

*Outline* did not achieve the instant fame of Bourdieu's *Distinction*, which burst on the Anglophone scene in a 1984 translation and helped to spark the renaissance of the sociology of culture, as well as a thriving subfield of cultural studies of stratification. Rather, partly because it is a more difficult book, *Outline* attracted readers gradually—but also found its way into the standard syllabi for graduate courses in contemporary sociological theory. It also had a substantial indirect influence, even before translation, as for example Bourdieu's work helped shape Anthony Giddens's intellectual framework and later readers picked up Bourdieu's ideas and terms—like structuration—from Giddens without always knowing their source. *Outline* spoke to a desire for theory that made sense of the stability of social organization without succumbing to the conservatism of much functionalism, and that made sense of human agency without relying on highly cognitive accounts of intentions. It also helped that, despite a good translation, the text was sufficiently oblique in style that it could be read—at least superficially—with approval by English-language theorists of starkly contrasting orientations.

Since the book was originally written some years earlier in French, this context of reception was not exactly its context of production. The dichotomy that rent the

French intellectual scene and that shaped Bourdieu's own initial orientation opposed the structuralisms of Lévi-Strauss and Althusser to the egocentric existentialism of Sartre.<sup>2</sup> If forced to choose, Bourdieu was clearly on Lévi-Strauss's side (though not that of Althusser), but in *Outline* he combined classic structuralist analyses of the Kabyle with a developing critique of structuralism's cognitivist neglect of practical knowledge, its more general objectivism, and its inability to turn that objectivist gaze on itself in order to provide an adequate account of its own scientific standpoint. For all of his influence in anthropology, and his general fame, Lévi-Strauss had not been widely read in American sociology. This made *Outline* both more difficult for many readers to assimilate and more valuable as a critical introduction to some of the achievements of structuralism (that is, of cultural structuralism, as distinct from various acultural accounts of social structure). Like Foucault's work of the same period (*The Order of Things*, and *Archaeology of Knowledge*), *Outline* offered both one of structuralism's high points and important movement beyond it.

Structuralist analyses were commonly static, and therefore commonly opposed to accounts of process.<sup>3</sup> In the Manichean opposition of structuralism to existentialism, individuals, action, and especially personal experience were ceded to the latter (and the latter thereby declared unscientific). As Althusser famously put it, individual persons were not of analytic significance in themselves, but rather were simply the "bearers" of structure. From early in his work in Algeria, Bourdieu found it critical to analyze both recurrent processes through which ways of life were enacted and more linear processes of historical change. Above all, Bourdieu sought to show how structures were reproduced through the very actions by which individuals sought to achieve their personal ends. *Outline* was his first major

<sup>2</sup> Though published in 1972, *Outline* was largely written before 1968 and is not the work in which to find Bourdieu's response to the events of that year or the late '60s intellectual conflicts more generally. For that, see *Homo Academicus*.

<sup>3</sup> Foucault's structuralist histories thus stress ruptures between statistically conceived epochs more than processes, whether of change or flux.

<sup>1</sup> Bourdieu in essence rewrote *Outline* in his later, but less widely read, *Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

theoretical statement of this approach, and this was a crucial basis of its early influence.

Partly because many English-language readers had previously been exposed to Bourdieu's early writings on the French educational system, *Outline* was at first read largely as a "reproduction theory." The power of Bourdieu's accounts of how individual actions were recuperated into the reproduction of structure (recalling Merton's classic evocation of the unintended consequences of purposive social action) was readily grasped. The other side of the coin was less fully appreciated. But Bourdieu equally made structure dependent on action, and in so doing provided an opening for studying how changing material conditions (e.g., the monetarization of the Kabyle economy) could change the way cultural processes played out in the realm of individual action.

In order to address action, Bourdieu drew on a largely Anglo-Saxon language of strategy and recovered with new meaning the old term "habitus." The language of strategy suggested to many American readers an affinity to rational choice theory (which Bourdieu has strenuously denied). This repelled at least as many who objected to what they saw as excessive economism and instrumentalism as it attracted others who saw the possibility of developing a culturally richer approach to strategic action. Whether filtered through rational-choice thinking or not, part of the impact of *Outline* has been to show, in the tradition of Marcel Mauss, how apparently nonstrategic or disinterested actions in fact can be understood as resulting from actors' interests, even when those actors are not consciously aware of this motivation. Bourdieu sought to demonstrate how the "strategy" inhered not simply in conscious intentions (a fallacy at once cognitivist and subjectivist) but in the situation and in the whole being of the actor as well.

This is where habitus comes in. Notoriously difficult to pin down, the term means basically the embodied sensibility that makes possible structured improvisation. Jazz musicians can play together without consciously following rules because they have developed physically embodied capacities to hear and respond appropriately to what is being produced by others, and to create themselves in ways that others can hear sensibly and to which others can respond. Or in Bourdi-

eu's metaphor, effective play of a game requires not just knowledge of rules but also a practical sense for the game. Bourdieu's account is one of the most fruitful to have been offered of this dimension of "tacit knowledge," all the more so because of his relation of this to bodily *hexis* (picking up the Aristotelian concept). Bourdieu showed culture as embodied, not just thought, and this alone would have ensured a considerable influence for *Outline*.

But the point was even more basic (and more sociological). Bourdieu emphasized that habitus was not just a capacity of the individual, but an achievement of the collectivity. It was the result of a ubiquitous "collective enterprise of inculcation." The reason why "strategies" could work without individuals being consciously strategic is that individuals became who they were and social institutions existed only on the strength of this inculcation of orientations to action, evaluation, and understanding. This was a matter not only of socialization, conceived in the neutral manner of much sociology, but also of power. Inculcation took place in families differentially endowed with cultural capital, for example, and thus blessed some children with advantages in performing various social roles. It was for this reason too that struggles over classification figured so importantly for Bourdieu. Bourdieu showed that the classificatory schemes basic to structuralist analysis were not simply objective, as a static account would imply, but were also the products of interested struggle among social actors (albeit seldom explicit). The most fundamental social changes had to appear not only as changes in formal structures but also as changes in habitual orientations to action. Bourdieu sought thus to overcome the separation of culture, social organization, and embodied individual being that was characteristic of most existing sociology. In this, his most important American forebear was Erving Goffman, with whom he spent time early in his career, and it is surprising that this connection did not achieve more recognition in the early reception of *Outline*.

*Outline* has been most influential among those who seek to analyze the interplay between cultural and social structure and social action. If others of Bourdieu's works have helped to create the sociology of culture as a subfield, *Outline* has played a

major role in bringing cultural analysis back into the center of sociological analysis in general. In encouraging the attempt to see both actors (and therefore actions) and institutions as shaped by cultural schemas (to borrow Sewell's recent term), it also opens up the possibility of analysis of the way in which those schemas are shaped in struggle. This is the larger task to which Bourdieu's account of "symbolic violence" speaks; it has already been put to use in a variety of more specific analytic contexts. *Outline* also foreshadowed Bourdieu's development of the concept of cultural capital, and more generally the theory of how different forms of accumulated resources may have different effects, and may be converted. In one related sense, however, *Outline* may have misled readers. Bourdieu's sociology is aimed largely at an account of power relations, and especially of the many ways in which power is culturally produced, reproduced, and manipulated. Partly because of the heavy emphasis on strategizing language, this is not as manifest in *Outline* as in some of the rest of Bourdieu's work.

The influence of *Outline* remains large, partly because it appears (along with the

overlapping *Logic of Practice*) as the most important of the relatively few general and synthetic statements Bourdieu has offered of his "theory" (a label he doesn't like). The rest of his publications range across a wide variety of empirical objects of analysis, from museums and literature to kinship, class, Algerian workers, and French higher education. *Outline* is not a cure for the common fragmented reading of Bourdieu, but it does go some way towards showing what is central to his perspective and situating many of his key concepts in relation to broader theory. In a sense it explicates and provides a rationale for what Brubaker (1992) has described as Bourdieu's sociological *habitus*, his characteristic mode of improvising in empirical analysis.

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## The Gendering of Social Theory: Sociology and Its Discontents

BARBARA LASLETT

*University of Minnesota*

Original review, CS 8:4 (January 1979), by Rose Laub Coser:

**This book will have consequences in sociological as well as in psychoanalytic theorizing at the same time as it may provide some of the underpinnings for a theory of feminism.**

Nancy Chodorow and I have known each other for more than 15 years as colleagues and as friends. Part of that friendship has developed out of our mutual intellectual interests in gender and family relations and in social theory. In our many conversations that have engaged those interests, there has been mutual critique

*The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, by Nancy J. Chodorow. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978. 253 pp. \$15.00 paper. ISBN: 0-520-03892-4.

as well as appreciation. This essay continues in the spirit of those conversations.

*The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (hereafter, *Mothering*), published in 1978 by the University of California Press, was a major intellectual event in the emerging field of feminist scholarship and in social theory. Its