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

Review by: C. Scott Littleton

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a question of which kinds of social phenomena should be distinguished and which lumped together for the purpose of advancing the understanding of ceremony, ritual and formality in social life" (p. 20).

The book contains four parts. The first, "Theoretical and Definitional Studies," includes, in addition to the two papers by Goody and the editors just mentioned, a paper by V. Turner, "Variations on a Theme of Liminality," and one, by T. Turner, that is a reformulation of Van Gennep's model of "rites de passage." Part 2, "Traditional Settings," contains papers by J. Middleton on ambiguity in Lugbara rites, B. Kapferer on Sinhalese healing rituals, and E. Hunt on the ritual dramatization of Indian and Mestizo relationships in Oaxaca. Part 3, "Group Assemblies," contains two papers that examine the dynamics of political assemblies—S. F. Moore's on the Chagga of Kilimanjaro and one by E. Vogt and S. Abel on national politics in Mexico—and two papers on rituals in old-age homes, by E. Colson and B. Myerhoff. The last section, "Mass Occasions," contains a paper by Max and Mary Gluckman that aims at delimiting the category of ritual and challenging some of V. Turner's conclusions in *The Ritual Process* regarding the comparability of certain forms, the very issue taken up by Turner in his own paper. Two other papers make up this final section: one by R. Da Matta on national celebrations in Brazil, the other by F. Manning on games and carnivals in the Caribbean.

A problem with some of the papers is that theoretical issues become blurred rather than illuminated by ethnographic contexts, but, together, they offer a host of ideas and suggestions for continuing the study of ritual in a productive way.

**Outline of a Theory of Practice.** *Pierre Bourdieu*. Richard Nice, trans. Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology, 16. London: Cambridge University Press, 1977. viii + 248 pp. \$18.95 (cloth), \$5.95 (paper).

C. Scott Littleton  
Occidental College

In the first chapter of this densely written but nevertheless extremely important book, Bourdieu challenges one of the more deeply embedded assumptions of contemporary social anthropology, especially French social anthropology of

the sort espoused by Lévi-Strauss and his cohorts: that objective social reality is to be found in the formal rules and structural principles that govern social acts, not in the acts themselves. This assumption, which is rooted in de Saussure's celebrated distinction between *langue* and *parole*, has long precluded the development of a truly scientific methodology, Bourdieu asserts, a methodology capable of accounting for *all* the observable nuances of behavior.

Drawing judiciously upon his fieldwork among the Kabyle, a Berber-speaking Algerian tribe, the author makes a convincing case for the necessity of developing a theory of *practice* wherein the dynamic flow of interpersonal relations might be effectively analyzed. As a first step in the development of such a theory, Bourdieu suggests the concept of *habitus*: ". . . the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations" (p. 78), or, in other words, if I understand him correctly, the central tendencies that give rise to and guide the infinitely varied ways in which people respond to one another in a social setting.

Bourdieu asserts that this concept must be carefully distinguished from what he calls "the occasionalist illusion" (p. 81), or the position advanced by ethnomethodologists (Garfinkel *et al.*) and other phenomenologists that social reality is created *ad hoc* in the context of social interaction. Rather, the habitus is independent of any specific social situation and can thus be seen as a class phenomenon that serves to systematize the behavior of persons sharing a common set of experiences. It exists within, not outside of, the historical process, and as class or group alignments change in response to changed external circumstances, the habitus changes accordingly. Thus, the concept in question is a thoroughly materialist one that reflects the author's essentially Marxist orientation. This is underscored in the last chapter, in which he applies the concept of habitus in an analysis of power relations and the ways in which groups and persons achieve dominance.

So far, so good. But when all is said and done, one cannot help but wonder how far Bourdieu has really strayed from the Lévi-Straussian party line. For, in the final analysis, the idea that the habitus is a "generative principle" is suspiciously similar to de Saussure's idea of *langue*, to say nothing of the contemporary structuralist notion that rules are the ultimate reality.

The book is, as I said, densely written and at

certain points downright turgid, a fact that, unfortunately, will limit its readership to those with the stamina to wade through phrases such as ". . . structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (p. 72). However, the reward is well worth the effort, for, despite its denseness and turgidity (if the "Foreword" is any indication, this is not the fault of the translator) and despite my suspicion that Bourdieu hasn't quite escaped from the *cul-de-sac* he decries, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* is certainly a major contribution not only to social anthropology but to the social sciences *per se*. It deserves to be read and reread by anyone seriously concerned with the relationship between theory and method.

**Dialectic of Civil Society.** Lawrence Krader. Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1976. xiii + 279 pp. Dfl. 59.00 (cloth).

Louise Sweet  
University of Manitoba

This is a difficult book. Perhaps it is better comprehended after close study of at least Marx and Engels and with some clear understanding of "the dialectic." Much of the book is written in what seems to me to be a rather archaic style: the thesis, the antithesis, the synthesis format, or the "negation" process. Moreover, the reader must tolerate a very arid level of abstraction, particularly in the first long essay, "On the Dialectic of Civil Society." Nevertheless, Krader's book is worth the effort in these days of vapid and superficial narrative.

The first essay is the most difficult. There is no real movement in it, no extended argument, but rather pages of almost aphoristic and certainly pedantic characterizations of "civil" society or "class society" (from antiquity to the present Capitalist and Socialist societies). Moreover, digests and analyses of numerous writers from Aristotle to Althusser are integrated with approval or summarily "negated."

The second part deals with "Agrarian Communism" and the controversy on whether the forms of land tenure in primitive and early periods of civil societies were communalist or individualist. Krader pursues this controversy as though it had not long since been laid to rest. Nevertheless, his arcane surgery on Weber, Durkheim, Maine, Morgan, and many forgotten names is not quite like anything in the usual textbook.

The third essay deals with the "Early History of the Labor Theory of Value," tracing its development from the 16th century and summarizing the analyses or discourses of theorist after theorist—Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, etc., in point fashion.

The fourth essay, "On Value," works through the problem of distinguishing use value and exchange value. Here, the "dialectic" form of statement and cryptic expression obscure rather than clarify a distinction and its significance that is quite clear in Marx's *Capital* and earlier papers.

The final essay, "On the Dialectic of Anthropology," should interest anthropologists especially. Here, Krader alleges that anthropology, because it has no "praxis," no commitment to practical undertakings, is above all an academic discipline and cannot be a science at all. To speak of "Marxist Anthropology" is either redundant or ridiculous. He proceeds to problems common in anthropology; there are the usual swipes at ahistoricism of functional, empiricist, postivist anthropology, but, curiously, apart from the merest citations of Childe, Herskovits, Kroeber, and a few more, not one anthropologist that is digested, summarized, or negated in the book is of more recent vintage than Tylor and Morgan. A difficult book; a crabbed and cryptic echoing of Marx throughout—for Krader is the most complete scholar of Marx in Anthropology—but if the reader persists doggedly through, the final impression is one of experiencing a hard and thorough exercise in the dialectic that will not be forgotten.

**Historical Explanation: Re-enactment and Practical Inference.** Rex Martin. Contemporary Philosophy. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977. 267 pp. \$15.00 (cloth).

Charles A. Bishop  
State University of New York, Oswego

This book is a "philosophical history of the philosophy of history" since the 1940s, and its aim is to illuminate the structure of historical enquiry and explanation. Although Martin believes history to be a social science, his arguments are directed primarily at philosophical historians.

Martin is both a follower and a critic of the historian R. G. Collingwood, from whom he derives the concept of reenactment. This he in-