Baudelot, Christian and Establet, Roger *Suicide: The Hidden Side of Modernity* Polity Press 2008 210 pp. $69.95 (hardback) $24.95 (paperback)

Baudelot and Establet build upon Durkheim’s classic work on suicide by constructing a contemporary analysis of what suicide rates tell us about both macro-level socio-economic trends as well as the dynamics of everyday life. Patterns and variations in suicide rates both within and between various groups, societies, and regions are used as measuring rods for discussing the maturation of the modern world and the emergence of late (or post) modernity. The image the authors construct follows Durkheim’s understanding of the effect of modernization on suicide rates, but reveals that the effects vary in direction over time and from group to group. This analysis supports the basic insight that suicide is not just a random, individual tragedy, but also a socially structured reality. Understanding how an individual’s place in society – their bonds with others and their connection to the wider social system, shapes and influences suicidal behaviour helps explain the patterns of suicide for groups and entire societies. The authors’ basic point, ‘Society does not shed any light on [individual] suicide, but suicide does shed some light on society’ (p. 8) emerges as the focus for the text.

The authors first explore the relationship between poverty and suicide. The classic Durkheim hypothesis, ‘poverty protects’ is turned on its head in an examination of ‘developed’ societies and the precarious conditions surrounding the poor which is, in this analysis, reflected in their typically higher rate of suicide compared to other classes. The ensuing discussion, centered on the effects of economic development, singles out the emergence in the mid to late twentieth century of an integrated, stable middle/upper class characterized by ‘creative individualism’. Manifested in the professional class with a focus on personal development, individual contributions to the group, and work as a source of happiness and self-esteem, creative individualism is associated with a decline in suicide rates and informs the authors’ contention that it is not modernity or ‘development’ that affects suicide rates, but social upheaval and disorder. The authors argue that individuals who occupy positions that allow for a sense of autonomy and place in society are less prone to suicidal behaviour. Those living on the margins are more likely to experience the negative effects of change.

Baudelot and Establet also examine the decline in the suicide rates in urban areas and amongst the elderly and juxtapose this with increasing rates of suicide in rural areas and amongst the young as further evidence of their thesis linking social integration and stability to lower rates of suicide. In their extrapolations from the varying rates of suicide across different groups during times of economic expansion and reversal, they argue for the
‘protective effect’ of economic development in the latter half of the twentieth century for those in a position to benefit from such changes.

The authors also explore the ongoing stability in the suicide rates for males and females (with subtle within group variations and stark differences between the Asian and Western societies discussed). This discussion is coupled with an analysis of the dramatic overall increases in the suicide rates for Asian societies and the former communist bloc societies. Baudelot and Establet interpret these patterns as further indicators of the importance of social stability and the variable effects of socio-economic development serving as prime variables in understanding suicide at both the personal and the social structural levels.

Two problems stand out across the wide-ranging accounts offered in this slim volume. First, is the need for more attention to the limitations of the official data sources on suicide – especially when statistical trends and variations are being compared across time, cultures, and between groups. Baudelot and Establet discount the problems by stressing ‘long-term’ trend analysis and the relative consistency of data over the years. However, a more focused examination of the social construction of suicide statistics would help. Secondly, although the pitfalls of confusing correlation with causation are noted (even explicitly stated) in a variety of contexts, the authors seem prone to include uncritically a wide array of ‘psychological factors’ (alcoholism, mental illness, etc.) as explanatory rather than correlative when discussing the dynamics of everyday life. These discussions of the ‘meaning’ of suicide and the associated assumptions made concerning the individual motivations for suicide need to be refined and critically examined.

Although the discussion sometimes rambles, and its tone is sometimes conversational, the authors are successful in using the admittedly rare phenomenon of suicide to explore the structure and dynamics of life in contemporary societies and reveal the some of the problems associated with marginalization in a (post)modern world. As they wind their way through their analysis, Baudelot and Establet’s book provides access to an eclectic collection of suicide research and makes an interesting addition to the social demography of suicide.

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Clarke, Peter B. The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion Oxford University Press 2009 1046 pp. £85 (hardback)

There are still those in other areas of the social sciences who have a painfully restricted view of what it is that sociologists of religion study. This substantial volume (over a thousand pages weighing in at a couple of kilograms) could do something to remedy the situation. General sociologists who have previously ignored religion could, by reading the book, soon realize that the subject is not quite as straightforward as they might have assumed. While ‘Do you believe in God?’ and ‘Do you attend church on a regular basis?’ might be necessary questions for the empirically minded sociologist of religion to ask, they are certainly not sufficient and can, by themselves, be more obfuscating than enlightening. Not only is it clearly apparent that the kinds of God or gods in which people believe differ vastly between cultures (and between individuals in the same culture), it is also clearly apparent that there are religions that do not posit the existence of ‘Supreme Beings’ (a fact that the British Charity Commissioners have only recently come to recognize at an official level). Many forms of Buddhism do not have a belief in god – though one can find plenty of bodhisattvas, whom some consider types of gods – but, even more confusingly, there are those such as the Raelians who describe themselves as belonging to an atheistic religion. Furthermore, there
are millions of people who would declare that they do not have to go to church to be a Christian. And when respondents are asked whether they would consider themselves to be religious, a significant proportion (13 per cent in Britain) who respond in the negative will, as Paul Heelas points out in the book, none the less respond in the affirmative to a question asking whether they consider themselves to be spiritual. As Eva M. Hamburg argues in a chapter in this volume, ‘unchurched spirituality’ is sorely in need of further research.

Obviously enough, sociologists of religion need to find out about the varieties of religious experience; they also need to find out about religious institutions, how these have functioned throughout history, and what is going on when people turn to non-institutional religion – although sociologists might suspect that the New Age movement and various versions of contemporary New Spiritualities that eschew religious organizations can be fairly rigidly institutionalized in the sociological sense of the word.

Some sections of the book examine phenomena that are, by and large, internal to religions (the role of the clergy, fundamentalism, conversion, socialization, sects in Islam, trance and possession), and which may, thereby, be dismissed by the non-specialist as being merely of interest for sociologists of religion. However, nearly all these chapters can be recognized as having some relevance to the general sociologist in that they describe social processes that are found both within, and independently of, religious life. But there are many other chapters that clearly highlight the importance of understanding religion in relation to the rest of society. One chapter of obvious significance for today’s world is that by Mark Juergensmeyer on religious violence. In this he contextualizes terrorist actions which, he argues, can be seen as both the politicization of religion and the ‘religionization’ of politics. James Richardson’s chapter on the relationship between religion and the law demonstrates how religion can act as the independent variable creating, negotiating and changing the law, as well as the dependent variable adversely or positively affected by the laws of society. Titus Helm uses social problems theory to illustrate how religion can, as a claims-making activity, both construct images of the rest of society as a problem and itself be constructed as a social problem by the rest of society – an approach that, he argues, operates as a prism through which many other central problems in sociology can be examined.

It is impossible to detail all the issues raised in the book, but let me skim the surface. To do this, I follow the editor’s arrangement of the fifty four chapters into ten parts, some of which would seem to be a bit Procrustean and several of which overlap with one another, but which together provide a remarkably comprehensive overview of the field. Starting with classical, rational choice and postmodern theories of religion we are taken, via methodology, to debates about conceptual and actual boundaries between religion and science, morality, art and trance. We are then invited to consider relationships between religion and other social institutions such as the state, the nation and the law, before moving on to examinations of such subjects as globalization, migration and religious diversity, before, having glanced at typologies of religious collectivities, we enter the secularization debate and consider the successes and failures of various institutions (such as the family and the media – and, today, the Internet) in transmitting religion from one generation to the next – and from one group or individual to another. The next part considers new and ‘alternative’ manifestations of religion, which, like esotericism, may not be new at all. We are then moved on to discuss social issues such as ecology, violence and health, with the final part consisting of a couple of chapters on the teaching of the sociology of religion. Each chapter has a substantial list of references and suggestions for further reading, and the index covers thirty-seven pages.

Altogether, there are around sixty contributors, amongst whom are both some of the best-known scholars in the field and others of whom this reviewer at least had never heard. As one might expect in an enterprise of this magnitude, the quality of the chapters is patchy; and, again as one might expect, many of the chapters contain the substance of theories and
research findings that their authors have already published elsewhere. It is not a hardback that many scholars will be able to afford, but both sociologists of religion and general sociologists should certainly try to persuade their institutions to purchase a copy. Even if they do not always agree with the authors, few will be unable to learn a great deal from its many pages.

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Eyerman, R. *The Assassination of Theo van Gogh: From Social Drama to Cultural Trauma* Duke University Press 2008 219 pp. $79.75 (hardback) $22.95 (paperback)

For 25 years, Ron Eyerman has been producing provocative, theoretically driven, ‘big picture’ empirical studies. From his early work on false consciousness to the writings on social movements that first brought him international attention, Eyerman’s theoretical project has been pointed and clear. Challenging structuralism, he has been working out how to put consciousness and meaning in its place.

For the last decade, Eyerman has been formulating this project in the language of cultural sociology. While still a Professor at Uppsala in the late 1990s, Eyerman played a key role in the international collaboration from which cultural trauma theory emerged, advancing his own perspective in *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Making of African-American Identity* (Cambridge UP, 2001). Since coming to Yale as Co-Director of the Center for Cultural Sociology, Eyerman has been instrumental to further developments in the cultural-sociological field. *The Assassination of Theo Van Gough* brings trauma theory together with new ideas connecting social meaning to social performances. Deeply researched, politically engaged, and theoretically highly innovative, this is Eyerman’s best book yet.

Mohammed Boyeri’s 2004 murder of Theo van Gogh produced an extraordinary and perhaps fateful upheaval in Dutch society, challenging its famous policy of ‘pillar’ based toleration, pushing policy from a (merely?) tolerant multiculturalism to more culturally demanding incorporation, causing conservative parties to be elected resisting immigrants and immigration. Eyerman believes sociology cannot observe this process from the outside: ‘Protagonists in a social drama construct their own stories and the researcher must reconstruct them’ (p. 17). A major accomplishment of *Assassination* is such hermeneutical reconstruction. Eyerman allows us to enter into the immensely rewarding prism of sociological (not moral) relativism. He produces deeply researched cultural portraits of the tragedy’s characters – not only ‘Mohammed B.’, but the feminist anti-Islamist crusader turned Dutch politician Hirsi Ali, the libertarian sociologist-turned-prime minister candidate Pim Fortuyn (the victim of an earlier political murder), and less detailed sketches of such other collective actors as the Dutch media, police, and intellectuals on left and right. These deft portraits are novelistic in their realism and subtlety, bringing the reader into the vortex of complex social meanings and feelings. Less biographical than sociological, they are concerned not with individuality but with what individual characters came to represent: ‘The central actors... are interesting not so much for their biographies or their intentions as for what they symbolize[,] for the tropes they carry and the potentialities they mobilize in audiences and other actors, including the mass media’ (p. 161).

Eyerman’s ambition is not only hermeneutical. We should aim, he suggests, not only at Geertzian thick description but also at what Eyerman labels ‘thick explanation’. There are two different pathways his movement from hermeneutics to explanation takes. One places the...
events of the assassination inside an upgraded framework of social drama. The ‘symbolic
types’ he carefully reconstructs, Eyerman tells us, should be seen as ‘protagonists’ in a
‘meaning struggle’ that is plotted as drama. Further, ‘any analysis of contemporary social
drama must not only clarify the protagonists’ but the ‘social spaces in and through which
they . . . act to define, set, and control the meaning or interpretation of the situation’.
For it is ‘in these spaces – the mass media most especially but also the debate forums provided
by political parties, the parliament, trade unions, schools, churches, and other public arenas –
that protagonists present themselves and map their positions in opposition to others’ (p. 41).

The other pathway by which Eyerman makes meaning-sociology causal is through cultural
trauma theory, revised and expanded in a similarly tough-minded way. Van Gogh’s murder
triggered sharp and painful feelings among observers, but these emotions were experienced
inside of, and directed toward, collective meanings. The centuries-long sense of the ‘good
Dutch’ had been abruptly interrupted by World War II, not just by the physical occupation
but by the gnawing sense that many Dutch had collaborated with the German genocidal
project. Traditional pride in Holland’s empire was undercut by post-colonial guilt. Second-
class citizenship for waves of new immigrants, especially those from Muslim worlds, threat-
ened the self-identity of the Dutch as a tolerant nation. The van Gogh assassination was
experienced through this nest of layered cultural trauma, Eyerman explains. That is why it
provoked such an explosion of boundary drawing. Rather than sewing doubt about minority
treatment, the event energized a simplistic us-versus-them schema. Rather than a foul-
mouthed, often bigoted, upper class bohemian celebrity, van Gogh was transformed into a
collective representation of the ‘good Dutchman’, and the meaning work that followed upon
this construction allowed the earlier traumatic anxieties to be pushed away, to the ‘other’
side: ‘Cultural trauma is a theoretical construct, a heuristic that permits us to set borders
around an occurrence that reaches back into the past and forward into the future. The aim
is to make deeply buried culture structures available to the analyst [.] not to construct
hypotheses [but] to uncover layers of meaning that help us gain a deeper understanding of
significance and consequence’ (p. 164).

While exculpating clash-of-civilization interpretations became the dominant channel for
painful collective emotion, minority religious and ideological groups developed collective
representations in sharply different ways. ‘In the interpretation of meaning’, Eyerman writes,
‘one must take into account the mediated process of framing and narration of actions and
events, including those that guide actors and audiences, as these are part of the conditions
structuring actions’ (p. 10). Boyeri’s murderous act ‘was a highly symbolic and stylized
performance, a carefully staged occurrence’, and ‘he knew what he was doing and what
interpretations his actions would encourage’. Yet, despite this clear performative intention,
Boyeri’s action ‘set off a barrage of public and private speculation . . . triggering a struggle
over meaning that included many layers of interpretation and many interpreters’ (pp. 13–14)
The Dutch right turn was likely not what Boyeri wanted, but the performance he projected
did fuse with narrower audiences. Rather than being represented as a ‘bad Dutch’ citizen,
Boyeri presented himself as ‘an exemplar of another form of integration, into a global
oppositional network’. He wanted his action to ‘be interpreted as an attempt to inspire
others to revolt’ (p. 85), and in this his dramatic ambition may have succeeded. In a series of
interviews carried out one year after the murder, at one of the schools in Mohammed B.’s old
neighbourhood, ‘a journalist found clear evidence of feelings of solidarity with Mohammed
B.’s “predicament”: how to deal with someone who slanders one’s faith’ (p. 61).

‘The assassination of Theo van Gough was a performative event,’ Eyerman writes, in the
sense that ‘it seemed to create a new reality’ (p. 13). When John Austin distinguished
denotative from connotative speech acts fifty years ago in his Harvard lectures, he could not
have put the matter any better. It is hardly possible that the British philosopher realized that
it would require the methods and theories of cultural sociology to interpret and explain the
new reality performative actions create. Perhaps he would not have agreed. Yet, I suspect
Austin would have enjoyed this brilliant little gem of a work, by an American turned
European who came back to the USA to help show us the way.

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Feltham, Oliver Alain Badiou: Live Theory London: Continuum 2008 159 pp. £50.00
(hardback) £12.99 (paperback)

In the past few years, Alain Badiou’s oeuvre has imposed itself as the most significant
philosophical import from the Continent. Combining a mathematical recasting of ontology,
a new theory of the subject and an ambition to affirm the irruption of truth-events in a vast
array of domains, Badiou’s thought has been hailed for its faithfulness to a strong philo-
sophical project, after the cautions and equivocations of postmodernism and deconstruction.
It has also been criticized for its neo-classical wish to resuscitate Platonism and communism
in the twenty-first century. Badiou’s delineation of four ‘truth-procedures’ (science, politics,
art and love) has helped his ideas gain academic currency, especially in discussions of art and
radical politics. But what consequences, if any, does his philosophy have for social theory?
Does Badiou’s disdain for the human sciences – from which he only exempts aspects of
anthropology, structural linguistics and Marx’s critique of political economy – impede the
use of his ideas for a rethinking of the social?

Though in no way a sociological primer on Badiou, Feltham’s elegant introduction allows
us to pose this question in a manner that previous treatments of the French thinker’s work
have not. Faced with the punishing task of synthesizing an immense and protean intellectual
career (Badiou is also a playwright, novelist and political militant), Feltham has chosen to
consider Badiou’s work through the prism of change. Although the centrality of revoluti-
ary practice to Badiou’s Marxist writings, and of the event to his recent works, have usefully
been explored by many commentators (especially Peter Hallward and Bruno Bosteels),
homing in on change permits us better to evaluate Badiou’s possible contribution to thinking
not just radical novelty but social transformation.

Feltham leads the reader on a compelling journey through Badiou’s philosophy, ably
balancing the demands of exposition and the investigation of tensions, impasses and paths
not taken in Badiou’s work. The book is split into three chapters which periodize Badiou’s
thinking into conceptually and methodologically distinct phases: an Althusserian period,
where he complements the political-economic work of the Reading Capital group with an
inquiry into science and ideology in mathematics; the years of Maoist militancy, which see
Badiou developing a new interpretation of dialectics where the idea of ‘destruction’ looms
large; the development of Badiou’s mature philosophical system from the 1980s onwards,
crystallized in Being and Event, and now complemented and furthered by Logics of Worlds.
Combining historical contextualization, close readings of key texts and lucid conceptual
syntheses, these chapters convey a dramatic sense of the advance of Badiou’s thought over
four decades, and elucidate some of the thorniest concepts in his oeuvre (the power set, the
evental site, forcing) as well as broader concerns (the function of mathematics, Badiou’s
voluntarism, and so on).

Feltham’s sustained engagement with Badiou’s early epistemology, especially Concept of
Model, is an important contribution to Badiou scholarship and offers suggestive insights into
the sources of Badiou’s attempt to articulate scientific truth, radical discontinuity and politi-
cal novelty. It also provides an excellent account of the enduring importance of formalization
for Badiou. It would be uncharitable to complain about omissions given Feltham’s remit, but his inquiry into Badiou’s contributions to Althusserian epistemology could have benefited from greater attention to Badiou’s other major early influence: Sartre. It was Sartre’s reflections on history and subjectivity in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* that arguably allowed Badiou to propose, in his review of *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, that Althusserianism be supplemented by ‘the theorization of structural change in society’ (p. 4) – what Badiou called, in a Sartrean turn of phrase, ‘a theory of historical sets’. To the extent that Badiou has developed an increasingly sophisticated criticism of theories of totality or global change – especially through the formal resources provided by set-theory – it would be interesting to contrast the respective influences of Sartre’s and Althusser’s Marxisms on his refusal of a ‘total science of society’ (p. 21). This would also allow one to tackle more seriously than Feltham allows the relevance, if any, of Badiou’s philosophy to a theorization of contemporary capitalism – something that Badiou himself touches on tantalizingly in the very brief interview contained in this book, where he declares that ‘the ‘contemporary world’ as a world formatted by the totality of capitalism does not form a world for the women and men from which it is composed’ (p. 136). It would also permit us better to evaluate Feltham’s suggestive but mostly unexamined declaration that ‘in the present period of [Badiou’s] work, it is not a matter of leaving Marxism behind, but rather of dividing, multiplying and transforming it’ (p. 87).

This question of the totality is also at stake in the other major models of change that Feltham instructively contrasts Badiou’s with, Aristotle’s ‘productivist model of change’ (p. 9) and Hegel’s dialectic. Badiou’s relation to the latter is a topic of considerable scholarly debate, to which Feltham’s patient and detailed account of Badiou’s ‘middle period’ theories of contradiction and of the subject makes a worthy contribution, though the confluence of political imperatives and dense conceptual work in the those texts make this phase difficult to reconstruct in the confines of a single chapter. This is especially true for the ‘detotalization of history’ (p. 72) carried out in Badiou’s 1982 *Theory of the Subject*.

The third chapter of *Alain Badiou* provides an assured summation of the French philosopher’s mature system, outlining his conceptions of ontology, the subject and the event, while making interesting links to his earlier work, especially to the idea of ‘modelling’. It is here that, taking some poetic license, Feltham also resumes and dramatizes three tendencies in Badiou’s thought: a leftist or voluntarist model of punctual and absolute change (whose Nietzschean emblem is ‘the eagle’); a ‘rightist’ theory in which ‘change is identified with the genesis of the whole’ (p. 119) (its emblem is the Hegelian owl); and, balancing these two out, a properly dialectical theory of situated interventions and discontinuous mutations (this is the moment of Marx’s ‘old mole’). In conclusion, Feltham’s critical interrogation of Badiou as a thinker of change, and his attempt to draw from his work a nuanced thinking of radical novelties and situated transformations, is a fine starting-point for those interested in exploring the consequences for social theory of this resolutely ‘anti-social’ philosopher.

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The attacks of the Janjaweed militia and Sudanese government forces against the non-Arab people of Darfur, which began in 2003 and are still continuing in 2009, constitute the largest-scale genocidal violence anywhere in the world since the Rwandan Genocide
of 1994, although perhaps they should be considered a ‘rolling’ rather than – like the latter – a ‘volcanic’ genocide (in the words of Madeleine Albright). Although there has been considerable informed documentation and analysis of these events, the academic literature is still weak, certainly relative to Rwanda which has been extensively studied, and the ‘genocide’ frame of analysis is still contested. In addition, although sociologists have made considerable contributions to the conceptual debate on genocide, and recently to its historical sociology, they have been marginal to the analysis of recent cases, where anthropologists have made the running. We can only welcome, therefore, this volume which proposes to apply not only sociological but (innovatively) criminological perspectives to the Darfur situation.

Hagan and Rymond-Richmond’s main contribution is their analysis of an important victimization survey of survivors of the initial violence in Darfur, conducted in 2004 for the US State Department and which formed the basis for then Secretary of State Colin Powell’s unprecedented allegation that genocide had been committed. The Atrocities Documentation Survey has since been suppressed by the State Department and Hagan and Rymond-Richmond’s is the first serious analysis of its disturbing findings, which go a long way to support the genocide case in general, and the international criminal charges against Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir and other state leaders in particular. The refugee interviews are indeed, evidence of genocidal violence. They demonstrate, in extensive and graphic detail, the interlinked killings, rapes and mass displacements which made up the violence of the genocidal process.

The analytical crux of this book, however, is an argument about how the destruction of communities and lives was ‘racially’ constructed. The authors link the use of racial epithets by al-Bashir and other Sudanese leaders with the survey evidence that victims often (but not always) experienced the violence as racial, due to the (widespread but not universal) use of racial epithets by militia and soldiers during the attacks. According to Hagan and Rymond-Richmond, therefore, the attacks were genocidal not because the victims were black or members of particular groups such as the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa, but because the Sudanese state and the militia constructed them racially through persistent use of derogatory language (‘Zourga’ is the term used by al-Bashir). The authors ‘see racial epithets as forming the spark that transforms the specific forms of racial intent emphasised in international law’ into the type of ‘collective racial intent, or collective targeted fury and frenzy, that so often characterises genocide’ (p. 177).

This is an interesting contribution to the confused debate about the genocidal nature of the Darfur violence, which seems particularly unclear because of the overlapping nature of local identities (although that is not actually so unusual) and the common Muslim religion of perpetrators and victims. Clearly, as in all genocides – and this point is increasingly gaining ground even if there are stubborn objectivist resisters especially among legal scholars – it is the genocidists’ construction of the targets as a particular enemy (or enemies) which defines each genocide. The question here, however, is whether the particular ‘racial’ construction proposed by Hagan and Rymond-Richmond is an adequate representation of how the regime and the militia have constructed the civilian populations they have attacked.

There seem to me to be two problems with their approach. On the one hand, they give definitional and analytical priority to racism, although this is (in general) only one of numerous types of potentially genocidal ideology and there is no particular necessity for the determination of genocide (even in international law, let alone in sociological understanding) for it to be indentified as the main driver. On the other hand, they are over-dependent on a narrow evidential base, namely the use of racial language by both leaders and direct perpetrators, and fail to consider other possible drivers apart from racism. These weaknesses seem to be rooted in the particular type of sociological/criminological approach that the
authors adopt, which tends to Understate the political dynamic of the Darfur conflict and abstract recent events from their historical context. Certainly the conflict has been extensively racialised by the regime and the militia, but it is not clear that this is, in a simple sense, its driver, rather than an ideological form in which it has been represented.

Hagan and Rymond-Richmond also take for granted the international legal definition of genocide: for example, they compare events in Darfur to the Srebrenica massacre, because this has been internationally ruled as ‘genocide’, but don’t consider the wider parallels between Darfur and Bosnia-Herzegovina, presumably because the latter conflict as a whole has not been ruled genocidal. They also indulge themselves in extensive discussions of the history of criminology and expositions of Hagan’s other work, which will be of interest to criminologists but are not strongly relevant to the analysis of Darfur. Thus they conclude with unenlightening comparisons of the exclusion of homeless youth in Canada with the violence of Darfur. Overall, this is an interesting study, marrying social-psychological theory to a criminological framework in the analysis of important evidence about Darfur, but it raises more questions than it resolves.

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Haney, D.P. The Americanization Of Social Science: Intellectuals And Public Responsibility In The Post-War United States Temple University Press 2008 283 pp. $54.50 (hardback) $24.95 (paperback)

This is an excellent study that explores sociology’s ambivalent engagement with the public. From its inception as a distinct discipline, sociology was conscious of the need to demonstrate its relevance to public life. Writing in the inaugural issue of The Journal of American Sociology, its editor Albion Small argued that if ‘sociology is to be of any influence among practical men, it must be able to put its wisdom about things that interest ordinary men in a form which men of affairs will see to be true to life’. That was in 1895. After more than a century of experience it is evident that sociology has far too often failed to realize Small’s ambition. Haney’s book on the history of American sociology provides a compelling account of a discipline that was and arguably remains estranged from the world of normal human beings.

Haney argues that as a relatively new discipline, sociology was preoccupied with establishing and consolidating its professional authority. The single minded pursuit of this objective led many of America’s social scientists to the conclusion that ‘the discipline’s scientific endeavours could only flourish if they took place in isolation from public discourse and insulated from publics’ (p. 9). Distancing sociological work from the proceedings of everyday life was justified on the grounds that the development of true science required autonomy and disinterestedness. At times, the promotion of the discipline’s scientific status was fuelled by defensiveness towards critics who argued that sociology merely stated the obvious in an esoteric language. Leading sociologists attempted to counter the sceptics by insisting that the problems of society were far too ‘complex’ for ordinary mortals to grasp and required the scientific value-free contributions of experts. Talcott Parsons’ defence of sociological expertise is paradigmatic in this respect. He questioned the idea that ‘the common man is his own social scientist’ who is ‘qualified to understand the operation of social processes’ (p. 34). From this standpoint, the superior insights of scientific sociology had to trump the common sense thinking of ordinary folk.

Excluding non-sociologists from sociological discourse was one of the outcomes of the consolidation of disciplinary authority in the postwar period. According to Haney, one of the
tactics used to insulate sociology from public was to develop research techniques and methods that would legitimate its scientific status. In the USA the ascendency of quantitative methods assisted what Haney characterizes as the ‘institutionalization of exclusivity’ (p. 46). By the 1950s the Harvard–Columbia school of empirical science dominated the discipline. This model eschewed ambitious theoretical reflection and upheld a quantitative methodology that demonstrated sociology’s scientific techniques and expertise. This emphasis on methodology and technique served to demonstrate both a disciplinary claim to expertise and practical relevance for policy makers dealing with the problems of society.

In one sense sociology was no different from other disciplines engaged in constructing their professional identity. But sociology did not merely distance itself from public life. It also contributed to devaluing it through calling into question the capacity of citizens to play a constructive and responsible role in public affairs. Haney states that the anti-modernist mass society theories that dominated postwar American sociology encouraged a complacent and elitist orientation towards the public. Sociological ideas about people’s apathy, conformity, irrationality and prejudice ‘seemed to call into question the average American citizen’s capacity for direct participation in a democratic order’ (p. 87). Liberal critiques of so-called ‘working class authoritarianism’ served as a form of disciplinary self-flattery for an enlightened elite that refused to be fooled by the irrational features of mass society. As Alvin Goulder noted in 1970 in his *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* the discipline was in danger of defining itself against the mentality of the masses. Sociology’s elitist disdain for ordinary folk invited a counter-reaction and explains some of the derision and hostility that populist culture directs towards the discipline. Sadly often a backlash against disciplinary pretensions helps reinforce a defensive anti-populist strain within sociology.

Haney’s story fills in the background to the recent attempts to construct a public sociology. Although individual sociologists like Robert S. Lynd and C. Wright Mills have sought to develop a more public role for sociology their efforts were continually overwhelmed by the imperative of disciplinary professionalization. Successful public sociologists like David Riesman faced the wrath of their colleagues for the simple reason that they were popular. It is only during the past decade that there is a substantial group of sociologist who are prepared to take the public seriously. However it is not sufficient to develop an orientation towards public dialogue. As the author of *The Americanization Of Social Science* contends, sociology did not simply isolate itself from society. In part its isolation was theoretically justified through questioning the moral and intellectual resources of the citizens that ought to make up its public. And although many sociologists are committed to speaking up for the underdog and provide a voice for the powerless its is not always evident that it is prepared to take seriously the concerns and preoccupations of its potential public audience. After reading Haney’s fine book it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that we should spend less time obsessing about maintaining professional boundaries and devoting more effort to developing ideas worthy of our public.

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*Trusting Doctors* by Jonathan B. Imber provides a deeply rich and intriguing account of the decline of patient trust in physicians. It is part history, part cultural critique, part sociology, and part religious studies. The breadth of scholarship brought to bear on his analysis
is unique in the recent literature on doctor–patient trust. In this book, Imber presents a novel take on what Eliot Friedson would call ‘professional dominance’ and its decline. Much of the empirical work on trust in physicians attributes the changing nature of the doctor–patient relationship over time to the emergence of corporate control of the practice of medicine whether derived from governmental regulatory pressures, ‘managed’ care in its various forms since the 1970s, growing legal challenges, or business interests ranging from insurance and drug products to medical technologies. While Imber acknowledges many of these factors, especially in the latter half of the book, they never take centre stage. Instead, Imber reveals his deep knowledge of Protestant and Catholic religious history as it has shaped the intertwined nature of physician–patient and clergy-client relations in the American context.

In Part One – Religious Foundations of Trust in Medicine – the book begins with an extended analysis of the nature and roots of the physician as healer based on the role of the clergymen dominant in American society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He cites Kafka’s *A Country Doctor* (1918): the doctor is supposed to be omnipotent with his merciful surgeon’s hand (p. 2). He traces the origins of this sacred trust to belief in the doctor as healer, rather than just scientist, and we see in the stereotypical persona of the doctor of the day the image of the physician – a man in white, generally of Protestant background, duty bound to be a ‘good man’. Becoming a physician required more than training – it was about character and obligation – as immortalized by Hippocrates in what has become the physician’s sacred oath of service.

In his dense and detailed historical account, Imber reveals much about not only the ties between physician and clergy, but also the early embers of the separation of medical authority and healing based on faith in various forms, versus science from evolution to public health. There is no simple thesis in this tale of the decline of moral authority in American medicine. It is a complex and twisting treatment with multiple strands of argument not easily described. Part One, in particular, wanders through a vast array of texts and obscure sermons to portray the varied and interrelated sources of the decline in moral authority primarily of individual physicians. As Imber shows, this decline was coterminous with the rise in the authority of science, technology, epidemiology and institutionalized medicine. In this section of the book the reader confronts long passages about the healing powers of prayer, the early days of positivism in social science, medicine as a calling and the influence of psychology, therapeutic modes of interaction and, oddly, vocational guidance (the requirements for becoming a doctor). It is a very interesting, if not altogether convincing, read. Imber weaves together a tapestry of many threads to explain what he refers to as the golden age of trust in medicine. He shows how trust was anchored deeply in the character of the man (i.e. doctor). Trust is unlikely to reemerge in this form.

Part Two – Beyond the Golden Age of Trust in Medicine – takes us beyond the golden ages on a journey to the end of life, cryogenics and the hope of becoming prosthetic gods. Here, the sweep of the book is breathtaking. In the chapters in this section of the book we also take detours into the evolution of the fields of bioethics and epidemiology, the social movements of the 1960s – specifically the feminist movement in relation to abortion and women’s health issues – and patient autonomy, as well as mortality and end-of-life debates. While it is hard to encompass all that the author argues in a brief review, the book raises issues and themes that are relatively new in the many discussions of trust in doctors. It is worth reading if only to gain a deeper historical, religious and contextual sense of why trusting doctors remains an important topic in the social sciences.

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How Professors Think examines the decision making process of inter-disciplinary academic panels who were tasked with awarding prestigious US fellowships. Drawn from observation and interview data, Michel Lamont describes how academics from different disciplines negotiate across their disciplinary boundaries and make shared choices over who in their mind is most deserving of a research fellowship. She describes a relational process of decision-making in which agreements are made following discussions that include a certain amount of horse-trading and strategic voting. Lamont concludes that this interpersonal subjective element is intrinsic to the process, and is not an avoidable contamination. Her conclusion is that given the nature of the job, it could not be any other way.

The five core chapters outline how panels are created, how disciplines differ in their epistemological approaches, how despite these differences they deliberate together, how they come to define excellence and what value is placed on interdisciplinarity and diversity in research proposals. Lamont explicitly contrasts her work with approaches taken by Merton, Whitely, and Bourdieu. Instead she takes her intellectual lead from the field of science studies, typified by the work of Bruno Latour, Stephen Woolgar and Harry Collins, which focuses on examining the social, political and cultural processes within which scientific research and technological innovation is embedded. Combining this approach with ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism and cultural analysis leads her to produce an account which is concerned with meaning production, understandings, negotiations and positions. In short, this is an account of the practice that underpins intellectual negotiation. Following the science studies approach Lamont ‘opens the black box’ and looks at how concepts such as significance, excellence, and fairness differ across disciplines, and how out of these differences norms or common understandings are created and re-created.

Where Bourdieu and Whitley see strategic competition, Lamont sees negotiations over what it means to be an academic scholar, negotiations which often have an emotional element, such as taking pleasure in learning, the excitement of new ideas, caring about the subjects under discussion. However, the lack of competition evident in her study may well be a reflection on the type of panels she is studying, the decision makers do not have to live with the results of their discussions (in contrast for example to hiring panels) and would not personally lose if resources are allocated one way or another.

The third chapter, ‘On Disciplinary Cultures’ is entertaining, and has already received quite a bit of attention within academia. In it, Lamont outlines what different academic cultures think of each other. For example, all disciplines seem to have difficulties with philosophy because it has few shared points of understanding with other disciplines. It speaks a language of its own, and those outside find it difficult to understand whether the research proposed is socially or intellectually significant. Some disciplines, such as history and economics, exhibit high internal agreement on how to define quality. Historians looked for solid craftsmanship, good methodological skills and proposals that are grounded in empirical research. Disciplinary agreement works in their favour in that they receive most of the grant proposals. Economists wanted mathematical formalism. Whereas the English scholars were skeptical of the evaluation process itself, economists found it easy to judge between good and bad. Their confidence was not shared by those outside the economic field who thought that economic proposals relied too much on un-defended assumptions, and that economics evaluators were overly positivist in their approach and dismissive of other methodologies. English scholars were more likely to privilege proposals that were ‘smart’ or ‘interesting’ over the type of methodologically based proposals favoured by the historians and economists (p. 73). From the outside, anthropologists

Lamont, M. How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment
Harvard University Press 2009 330 pp. £20.95 (hardback)
were thought to be insular, producing jargon laden proposals which use ‘fuzzy methods’ (p. 91).

The most important criteria for assessment were significance and originality, followed by clarity and methods. Within this, evaluators had varied tastes as to what was important in determining quality. For example, for some theory is key, whereas others looked for social or intellectual significance. Other, more emotional characteristics were mentioned: did the proposer seem to love their field? Were they absorbed in their topic? Was the proposer a risk-taker or appropriately humble?

Despite these differences, panelists were surprised at how collegial the decision-making processes were, in comparison with more negative experiences with their own colleagues at staff meetings or interview boards. Though, as Lamont points out, there is less on the line in these decisions. Additionally, panel members who did not show the ability to co-operate risked finding themselves deselected in the following years. She reports that in this arena a macho, dogmatic style is not appreciated.

Proposals were not so much assessed on their own merits, but on their own merits in comparison with the other proposals being discussed on that particular day. Proposal writers will probably be dismayed to find out that the decision is also influenced by the time at which their proposal is discussed and by how many proposals have been dealt with before theirs is reached. Typically, panel members have read and ranked proposals before the evaluation meeting. The meeting begins examining those with the higher markers, moving down the list towards the bottom. As the group moves down the list, it allocates grants until all are allocated. The further down the list the evaluators go, the fewer grants they have left to allocate. As they rarely return to proposals that have been allocated grants, if a proposal lies further down the list, it is therefore less likely to receive an award. Similarly by the end of the day, evaluators are more likely to accept the judgment of their peers, rather than defend an unpopular proposal. There is less discussion and debate.

For those interested in organizational cultures, this account is a challenge to accounts that see group decision-making purely in terms of rational calculation or thoughtful deliberation, processes which occasionally get contaminated by other behaviours. Lamont argues that negotiation, role-playing and emotional attachment to one’s point of view, are, rather, intrinsic to the process and unavoidable. Human interaction is always messy. Finally, any sociologist who has ever written a proposal will find this account interesting. Although they won’t necessarily find the key to success, they will find much to make them think about how they will construct future submissions, and about what they themselves value in the research of others.

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Moskos, Peter Cop in the Hood Princeton: Princeton University Press 2008 196 pp. £16.95 (hardback)

What now is known about policing as a craft? Important earlier studies of policing as a craft, seen as a facet of the occupational culture, were elaborated by later work done ten or more years ago, but few fieldwork-based studies have appeared of late (see Manning, ‘The Study of Policing’, 2005; ‘A Dialectic of Organizational and Occupational Culture’ 2008).

Peter Moskos set out to do a participant observation study for his dissertation at Harvard, was refused, and then invited to join the Baltimore, Maryland police department as a patrol officer. After passing the academy, he worked as a patrol officer for eighteen months. While there, he reflected on his actions and attitudes, made notes and interviewed fellow officers.

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The result is an imaginative ethnography, unconventional in style and purpose. It is at once a close and moving description of big city policing with an ironic subtext, and a plea for reconsideration of drug policy. The book covers his period in the academy, working the street, especially in regard to drugs, answering calls, making arrests, and concludes with observations on drug policy. It ends with a reflective epilogue. It is a vivid picture and revealing of the patrol officers' craft.

Policing is a métier, over-determined by the organizational structure, the resource deployment and rewards of the police organization. As Moskos shows, in the eyes of his colleagues, much rests on the incident and the interpersonal tactics characteristic of its handling. Because police work overvalues skillful and decisive action in the incident, it is the theatrical core of patrol work. Deft handling of incidents, the use of verbal and non-verbal signs, close readings of intentions, the stare and the body and other tools, is much admired. It is all about the officers’ authority and very little else counts on the street. The working rules, both implicit and explicit are clear: come home alive, stay safe, keep out of trouble and protect your pension; use authority sparingly; be aware of subtle differences between stops, frisks, and searches. The working rules made it possible to sustain the official version of policing. As it is a mock bureaucracy, one that purports to operate by the rules but does not, a grasp of informal rules is essential. This idea is introduced in the academy where the formal policies were words, but the students were expected to pick up on the music e.g., you don’t chase a car, that is against policy, but you can report following one; you do not ‘frisk’ for drugs only for guns; make arrests first then search. Always be able to articulate your reasons for probable cause. Moskos learned nine things in the academy, all of them tangential to the work itself. One of these was always to have shiny shoes. He found the academy neither intellectually challenging nor informative.

Police in Baltimore believed that laziness, ignorance, sex and drugs caused the poverty they observed in the ghetto. They view it as a living hell. Class and culture are seen as the problem and officers deny holding racist views. Because ‘junkies’ have forfeited their rights, they have little or no legal protection (pp. 43–6); they are merely to be ‘herded’. Moskos soon began to minimize unpleasant dealings, avoided paperwork and focused on getting home safely (p. 47). Discretion, criminal behaviour, probable cause and the rest were useful fictions in paperwork but irrelevant otherwise. While an unlimited number of arrestees was always present, the number of arrests expected was set, almost arbitrarily, by supervisors. Moskos notes ‘you can always lock up someone’ (p. 55). Although lying was necessary and considered prudent by his colleagues, the police he observed spoke of ‘creative writing’ rather than lying in writing up their arrests. A variety of known actions captured in the reports permitted upgrading or downgrading any incident e.g., theft to lost property. Moskos shows how police prose is written with an eye to future expectations of an audience- a sergeant, a supervisor, or a prosecuting attorney. On the street, police language is vulgar and direct rather than comprising the stilted formalisms of television drama; it plays on social nearness while holding back the threat of action. A common crime is ‘failure to obey’ an officer (p. 117).

The police craft or métier is illustrated by the circular reasoning involved in policing drugs on the street. Police are allocated on the basis of calls for service and oral culture defines areas, their residents and habitués in moral terms. Some areas are over policed in respect of arrests because they are characterized by drug use and dealing, fueled by poverty, unemployment and marginalization. In such areas ‘everybody’s dirty’ (p. 83), ‘junkies have no legal rights’, and police are expected to make arrests (p. 55). Arrests ‘count’ and are rewarded by overtime and court time. These arrests sustain the moral character of the place, its reputation as a high crime area and a ghetto. The police believe that their practices are politically correct: ‘we are paid to herd junkies’ (p. 88). Arrests are tools, not means to some remote
notion of justice. Even given parsimony of action and restraint, this tautological reasoning sustains the métier.

Moskos’ analysis of how police manage calls for service is excruciatingly pointed. The officers’ interpretations, redefinitions and avoidance of paperwork drives a context of lies, misrepresentations, and focus on the means, rapid response. The quality of the response or its adequacy to the problem is irrelevant. There is no ‘problem-solving’ done in East Baltimore. The craft work here is subtle, clever, and above all about job control. Even in the highest crime area of Baltimore, a crime-ridden city itself, officers handle on average only one call an hour.

The details of this ethnography are vivid and revealing of its foundational matter: ‘crime’. It shows how the rest of police work cannot be separated analytically or empirically from police activity. This suggests that the way into understanding policing is to understand their circular, context-based, self-fulfilling practices. Moskos states flatly (p. 25) we have little choice but to trust police officers and hold them responsible for their actions.

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**Therborn, G. From Marxism to Post-Marxism** Verso 2008 194 pp. £16.99 (hardback)

Regular readers of the *New Left Review* will find in this book many of the traits associated to that journal: a broad – sometimes Olympian – sweep; a level-headed combination of radical critique and sober analysis; a dialectical conception of society as a ‘totality’, irreducible to this or that social-scientific discipline. This is because two of the three essays that form the book first appeared in the *NLR* at the start of the new millennium. Seen in this light, it is difficult to evaluate this volume as a single, substantive work, or to treat it as any more than, as Therborn himself disarmingly concedes ‘a traveller’s notebook, unpretentious notes jotted down after a long, arduous journey through the climbs, passes, descents and dead ends of twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Marxism’ (p. x). It is an essentially summative account – with few normative or explanatory aspirations – that reads like a collection of introductory lectures for an advanced social-scientific audience.

Most of the book is dedicated to identifying the broad contours that have shaped the socio-economic, cultural and geopolitical dynamics of the world since the end of the Cold War. Therborn has a surveyor’s eye for the structural interconnections between various components of contemporary global politics and delivers an elegant, comprehensive but largely derivative topography of world power today and its intellectual challengers in the shape of a broadly-conceived critical theory.

The first essay, based on a talk delivered to a gathering of left-wing Mexican senators in 2001, establishes two schemas along the axes of collectivism/individualism and irreverence/deference on the one hand, and states/markets/social patterning on the other, in order to chart the neo-liberal triumphalism that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet bloc. This rather cumbersome analytical apparatus tends to deliver quite staggering platitudes: ‘even though the US has become the only superpower, the geopolitical space has not simply become unipolar; instead, it has begun to assume new forms of complexity’ (p. 3). At the end of the essay there is a tantalisingly brief discussion of how such insights might substantively inform a Marxist or socialist politics. Therborn invokes the idea of a ‘trans-socialism’ where class politics is articulated with struggles against sexual, ethnic or imperial oppression in a programme for democratic transformation of capitalist societies. To this he adds Marxism’s moral commitment to human dignity and its occasional defence of a ‘universal society of fun.
and enjoyment’ (p. 64). What exactly the ‘trans’ prefix adds to a conventional definition of
socialism in this instance, is a mystery.

A second essay in the collection takes the reader on another short and un-taxing explo-
ration of western Marxism. Readable and informed as it is, this is a remarkably perfunctory
account of Marxism as a theory of the dialectic of modernity. It offers an overview of the
major milestones in the history of western Marxism (with an unexplained emphasis on the
Frankfurt School) but degenerates in the final section into an annotated list of the most
influential Marxist and critical texts of the twentieth century. Once again, there is little
attempt here to probe the standard accounts of western Marxism, nor to engage in wider
considerations in the history of ideas, concept formation or the sociology of knowledge.

The final essay in this collection comes closest to offering a more substantial case for the
continuing relevance of Marxism to contemporary social theory. Echoing the apparent
response to the question posed by a 2004 British Academy conference on whether Marxist
historiography was alive, dead, or moribund, Therborn demonstrates that Marxism is very
much alive (and often kicking) in the social sciences and humanities more broadly. To back
this view of Marxist influence in contemporary history, geography, philosophy and cultural
studies, Therborn offers a judicious tour d’horizon of contributions to these fields by Marxist
scholars like Chris Wickham, David Harvey, Slavoj Žižek, Frederic Jameson or Giovanni
Arrighi, among others, illustrating how their ideas have challenged or qualified other non-
Marxist works. Yet this vitality of Marxist social science and philosophy has receded mark-
edly to the point of extinction in the third ‘pole’ of Marxism identified by Therborn, namely
politics. In the advanced capitalist west, Marxism has over the past four decades detached
itself from the project of transforming the world, whilst all the time continuing to interpret
it. Meanwhile, the anti-capitalist and anti-imperial mobilizations outside the west have rarely
been informed by the Marxist theory that Therborn surveys in this text. Exploring and
explaining this kind of paradox may have given this short book greater depth. But it seems
Therborn was loath to seize the opportunity, settling instead for a more comfortable,
panoramic account of Marxism in our times. All of which begs the question of why these
three modest essays left the pages of the NLR in the first place.

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Vidler, A. (ed.) Architecture: Between Spectacle and Use Yale University Press and Clark
Art Institute 2008 184 pp. £16.99 (paperback)

Despite the boom in the sociology of culture in recent decades and despite its increasing
prominence in discussions of popular culture, the most visible of the arts – architecture –
remains largely ignored by sociologists. This collection of papers from a Conference in 2005
at the Clark Art Institute, Massachusetts, gives plenty of good reasons why sociologists
should pay more attention to architecture. As the editor Anthony Vidler explains in his
introduction to the book, the idea for the Clark Conference came from Hal Foster’s critique
of Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Bilbao (probably the most famous building since the Sydney
Opera House). Foster, elaborating on Debord’s definition in Society of the Spectacle that
spectacle was ‘capital accumulated to the point where it becomes an image’ (p. viii), argued
that Gehry’s building (the most prominent, but one among many examples) shows that
spectacle is ‘an image accumulated to the point where it becomes capital’ (p. viii). While this
debate might seem arcane, Vidler successfully puts it in the context of Weber’s disenchant-
ment of the world, Benjamin’s loss of aura, and what he himself labels ‘the cultural ideology

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of mass society’ (p. xi) – ideas that most sociologists will recognize. The Guggenheim museum in Bilbao, completed in 1997, has been credited with transforming this declining industrial city into one of the most sought-after tourist destinations in Europe and of raising the cultural and political profile of the Basque country. While the economic impact of the museum might have been somewhat exaggerated by the Basque authorities who have invested millions of Euros in the project, there is no doubt that the Guggenheim-induced ‘Bilbao effect’ has made the city and the Guggenheim Foundation exemplars for urban boosters all over the world who wish to put their own cities on the global map. In its first two years of operation around 8,500 press items (most with images of the museum) appeared, more than half outside Spain. As I write (September 2009) a google search turns up 861,000 sites for Guggenheim Bilbao. Something is clearly going on. Foster concludes the volume with an trenchant essay on ‘Image Building’, arguing that architecture has taken its place in Pop culture, just as Pop culture became the official culture of the avant-garde of the right. Archigram, Venturi et al’s Learning from Las Vegas, the Pompidou Centre in Paris, Rem Koolhaas, various versions of postmodernism and, of course, Guggenheim Bilbao (illustrated with a spectacular and fairly unusual image taken from the street rather than the river), are all enlisted to support his conclusion that such spectacle architecture ‘is a winning formula for museums, companies, cities, states, and other corporate entities that want to be perceived, through instant icons, as global players’ (p. 175). While Foster rather sidesteps them, Vidler precisely raises the twin questions that need to be raised here: what are the aesthetic implications of this critique and does it condemn all contemporary iconic architecture? (And, of course, the same question can be asked for any cultural form).

Sandwiched between Vidler’s setting out of the problem and Foster’s stern reply are ten papers, some more accessible than others. Those most likely to be of interest to sociologists include Smith on the Sydney Opera House, the first great late-modern instance of spectacle architecture and, apparently, the only contemporary building that the activists of Situationist International approved of. Kurt Foster explores Scharoun’s Berlin and Gehry’s Los Angeles (Disney) concert halls, arguing that concert halls are moving from theatre spaces to arenas, with implications for architecture, music and urban space. A recurring theme in the book, unsurprisingly, is the thesis that the architecture becomes the image. Dorrian in ‘The Way the World sees London’ (quoted from the website of the London Eye) juxtaposes Iain Sinclair’s dystopian Sorry Meniscus against the marketing of the major millennium projects to great effect; Colomina expands on her well-known argument that: ‘Modern architecture is all about the mass-media image. That’s what makes it modern...’ (p. 60); Goldhagen shows how monumentality works as a pictorial still with some telling illustrations from Brasilia, Empire State Plaza in Albany, New York and the World Trade Center.

One of the most challenging contributions is Carpo’s analysis of ‘Nonstandard Morality: Digital Technology and its Discontents’ which thoroughly demonstrates that the new division of labour made possible by CAD-CAM means that a new era of digital artisanship has arrived – he illustrates this with pictures of the very expensive ninety-nine unique Alessi coffee and tea towers (pots) made by Greg Lynn, and Bernard Cache’s Tables Projectives. Digital technology overcomes the problem of identicality, though perhaps not entirely of aura and authenticity. Nevertheless, the inflated exchange value of these similar but unique luxury items is a powerful argument in itself. Carpo connects this intriguingly with the work of Rem Koolhaas, from S/M/L/XL to the CCTV Tower in Beijing, but lack of space prevents me from going there in this review. Vidler in his own essay on architecture’s expanded field argues that as architecture gets more sculptural, sculptors get more architectural. This leads him to some interesting speculations on the connections between architecture and its environments and the idea of ecological aesthetics, but he too seems to run out of space.

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In the end, Debord’s theory of the society of the spectacle and Foster’s critique or revision of it seem equally totalizing, no doubt explaining why the debate has proved so attractive to those of one of the many postmodernist persuasions still bubbling away near to the surface of contemporary cultural studies. The merit of this book is that it poses some fundamental questions and often engages with these questions with convincing concrete examples and crucially, in this field, with some excellent images (though too many are too small). This does permit readers/viewers to come to their own judgments about whether or not these buildings and spaces are beautiful or uplifting or appropriate to their surroundings, all questions that are both aesthetic and sociological. The fact that a building is the result of processes intrinsic to the culture-ideology of consumerism within the constraints of capitalist globalization (or spectacular) does not necessarily mean that it is ugly, degrading and inappropriate to its surroundings, or vice versa.

While this book is likely to be a tough read for most sociologists (and, I suspect, for many architects) it thoroughly deserves a place on the shelf of anyone interested in the ongoing controversies swirling around architecture, urban life, image and reality, and consumer society.

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Wagner, J. Modernity as Experience and Interpretation: A New Sociology of Modernity

Every attempt to define modernity has to address the problem that it is both a concept and a historical condition. It has been variously equated with modern society, or with a process of modernization, or with a particular temperament or attitude concerning the specificity of the present. The distinction between modern and non-modern societies, or societies that are less modern, has increasingly been abandoned with the recognition that we are all modern. But while the acknowledgment that there are simply different ways of being modern may be a necessary response to the globalization of experience, it does not tell us much about the meaning of modernity. What then is modernity? For Peter Wagner the debate about multiple modernity needs to address more basic questions concerning the nature of modernity as a particular kind of experience and interpretation. While he criticizes some of the mainstream social theorists for claiming that they have discovered a basic characteristic of modernity, following Castoriadis, Wagner claims that the fundamental condition of autonomy is what defines the condition of modernity. Modernity occurs when and wherever people see themselves as autonomous, and its extension into wider areas of social life defines the scope of the sociology of modernity. It is not then a condition that is specific to a particular period or to western societies. The condition of autonomy simply means that answers to problems cannot reply on a principle of certainty and are never final.

On this basis Wagner proposes a general conceptual and historical analysis of modernity in terms of three main kinds of experience of autonomy, which produce questions or problems that require interpretations. The interpretations of collective experiences give shape to the different forms modernity takes. The first concerns the rules for life in common, the second concerns the satisfaction of needs, and the third is the search for valid knowledge. His book is primarily concerned with these three dimensions of modernity, the political, the economic and the epistemic. While these dimensions are not specific to modernity, the fact that the solutions to the problems they pose cannot be for once and for all answered is what defines modernity. Modernity is then a condition of uncertainty and contingency. Not only
are experiences of modernity very different, but so too are the interpretations, which are often contested. In an account of political modernity that owes much to Lefort and is one of the most interesting chapters of the book, Wagner characterized modernity in terms of not one narrative but four – the liberal version, the story of the modern state, the rise of democracy and revolutionary politics – none of which lead to a specific institutional form. The inter-relations of these and the wider interaction of the three central problems of modernity relating to the political, the economic and the epistemic lead only to open ended outcomes. Possible outcomes are inherently plural and unpredictable. This is the case too for capitalism, which is only one interpretation of economic modernity, and there are varieties of capitalism as there are varieties of democracy. In a key chapter on the historical-comparative sociology of capitalism, Wagner argues that modernity cannot be conflated with capitalism, and that this relationship should not be naturalized. Consequently the critique of capitalism should not be conflated with the critique of modernity. While accounts of modernity generally emphasize the central role of democracy and capitalism, Wagner’s approach broadens these to wider interpretations of common experiences and in addition includes a consideration of the pivotal role of modern science which has the capacity to transform and master as well as to explore. The social sciences themselves, and specifically sociology, arose as one way of responding to the predicament of modernity. The history of sociology can be read as the history of interpretations of modernity.

Further chapters provide an interesting digression into European political modernity, in particular in light of the project of European integration. Here Wagner convincingly demonstrates that European political modernity is formed out of a constantly changing pattern of interpretations as opposed to the progressive unfolding of a single narrative. Rather than look for common structures whether cultural or political, a sociology of European modernity would instead look at different kinds of interpretation of experiences.

The concluding two chapters, the first of which is largely concerned with the work of Boltanski and Thevenot, look at the contemporary task of social theory in relation to political philosophy. Social theory originally arose as an interpretation of crisis and took the form of a criticism of moments of crisis. It progressively took over from political philosophy, substituting a social term for what had been a political term, but today we need to reconsider the relation between the two largely because it has lead to the separation of the social from the political. The separation of society from the polity is no longer credible, Wagner argues. Wagner’s book overall makes an interesting and much needed contribution to theorizing modernity. His essential contribution is to highlight the importance of an interpretative perspective: modernity entails the proliferation of interpretations that derive not from a dominant philosophy but from the plurality of interpretations people make of their experiences in very specific contexts. In this way, political philosophy and a historically based social theory have a common purpose.

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Wolff, J. The Aesthetics of Uncertainty Columbia University Press 2008 200 pp. £27.50 (hardback)

about the current loss of faith in universal values and the dilemmas it poses about moral, political and aesthetic judgements. The book contributes to this debate, and to the challenge of building a ‘new discourse of value’ (p. 5) that does not rely on recourse to universalisms or relativisms, with a proposal for a ‘principled aesthetics’; a form of analysis that makes explicit how aesthetic judgments are the outcome of negotiations located in a specific ‘culture and its values’ (p. 42).

The first five chapters are case studies on ‘principled aesthetics’. Chapter one, ‘Groundless Beauty: Feminism and the Aesthetics of Uncertainty’, explores the relationship between feminist art and beauty, arguing that an acceptance of the feminist distrust in beauty stops short of investigating the bases of aesthetic judgment underlying this form of critique. Chapter two, ‘English Art and Principled Aesthetics’, follows the same line of enquiry, with a study of the basis for the (re)evaluation and rediscovery of twentieth-century, modern English art in the gallery and in academia. In both cases, the criteria of aesthetic judgment and the establishment of hierarchies of works of art are the product of ‘reflexive deliberation in the context of communities of interpretation’. The task at hand, for Wolff, is to lay bare the ‘social, cultural and ideological’ basis of these judgments and hierarchies (p. 37). For example, the critical reception of Gwen John’s work reveals how even though, in the early twentieth century, her work received very complimentary reviews, it was feminist revisions of art history, since the 1970s, that have been crucial to the ‘rediscovery’ and promotion not only of Gwen John’s work but also of the work by women artists more generally (p. 44). Thus the question of whether her work is ‘good’ needs to be situated in the context of past and present aesthetic judgments, as well as analysed in aesthetic terms, for example its composition, form and originality.

Chapters three to five offer further explorations into the workings of aesthetic judgment, focusing on the grounds for the reception, both positive and negative, of Holocaust art, diasporist art and European modernist art, respectively. The key issue in these chapters is to ascertain how privileging of the allusive over the figurative in Holocaust art, the hostile reception of diasporist artist R.B. Kitaj in England, and the resistance to European modernist art, are not personal preferences but part of a broader socio-cultural and political context. In this light, the rejection of figurative Holocaust art must be seen as an attempt to condemn visual pleasure in its negation of horror and the aestheticisation of violence and atrocity. The hostile reaction to Kitaj’s work was part of a more general trend of ‘resistances in English art criticism’ such as an antiliterary prejudice, a lingering anti-Americanism, and a persistent antisemitism (p. 82). Similarly, the resistance to European modernist art echoed a general resistance to other forms of radical thought in England in the interwar years.

The chapters so far are empirically stimulating and exemplify how analyses of aesthetic judgments can be carried in the context of an uncertainty of values. In chapter six, ‘The Sociological Image’, Wolff leaves aside this form of analysis to identify a form of sociological description going back to the Frankfurt School, found in the work of Benjamin, Kracauer, and Simmel, which favours a focus on the detail, the fragment (a visual or textual image) in order to say something about its broader social context. She calls this trend an imagistic sociology, even though the visual image is not in play; imagistic is used in an ‘extended sense’ to denote ‘a verbal or literary picture’ (p. 122). An example is Simmel’s Rembrandt, which even though it does not provide visual images, shows how the concrete, Rembrandt’s works, illuminate a broader historical moment, e.g. the emergence of a new form of individuality in the seventeenth century. The issue for an imagistic sociology is to ascertain ‘what counts as a “significant” fragment’; how to choose which ‘micrologies’ to study (p. 125). Even though writers from the Frankfurt School referred to ‘word images’ and not to visual images, Wolff makes the case for an ‘imagistic sociology that works with actual (visual) images’ (p. 133).
Overall, this is a thoroughly engaging book, mainly for the various levels of analysis it provides. It links the sociological study of aesthetics to current debates in social theory, addressing Bauman’s claim about the present uncertainty of values. It contributes to this debate by exemplifying how a discourse of aesthetic value can be built on the basis of a ‘principled aesthetics’ approach that accounts for the socio-cultural and historical context of aesthetic judgments. From this point of view, the book tackles an unresolved bone of contention in the sociology of art: that of how to incorporate the work of art into its analysis. This is the debate that tries to move away from an externalist perspective where sociological analyses of art are merely focused on illustrating and explaining the social context of its production, distribution and consumption, at the expense of analysing the artwork itself. However, the book does more than simply challenge existing lines of enquiry in the sociology of art. It offers an exciting contribution to what I would call an imagistic art sociology. A form of sociological analysis following the tradition of an ‘imagistic sociology’, as outlined in chapter six, where the fragment, in this case, an analysis of aesthetic judgments, helps shed some light on the broader historical and socio-cultural context in which they take place. *The Aesthetics of Uncertainty* is a clear example of the contribution a sociology of art and aesthetics can make to current debates on the nature of sociological knowledge and to the relevant methodologies for its analysis.

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