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### Review of *The Decomposition of Sociology*. Irving Louis Horowitz. Reviewed by William W. Falk, University of Maryland.

William W. Falk  
*University of Maryland*

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Irving Louis Horowitz. *The Decomposition of Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1993. \$35.00 hardcover.

Horowitz's book follows by over 20 years the well known "sociology of sociology" critiques by Robert Friedrichs and by Horowitz's former colleague at Washington University, Alvin Gouldner. Like them, Horowitz analyzes the present and ponders the future. Unlike them, his account is very, very personal, somewhat autobiographical at times. In the end, he gives us two books or at least two quite different parts to one book: In the first 129 pages, his target is contemporary sociology. In the remaining 130 pages or so, he focuses on social science, not just sociology. My review does likewise and I conclude with a personal reaction to each of these things.

Horowitz begins by lamenting sociology's current state. He sees the discipline as having become balkanized, especially along political lines driven by an expanding number of interest groups (both social—e.g., feminists, blacks, hispanics, gays, etc.—and intellectual—political economy of the world system, rational choice, environmentalists, etc.). Thus, "Sociology has become a series of demands for correct politics rather than a set of studies of social culture" (p. 17). Instead of traditional, separate spheres for the analytical and the ideological, they become fused and confused. The net effect to this balkanization is "the breakdown of any notion of a core discipline" (p. 18). In its ostensibly weakened state, then, "sociology has become a simulated replica of real-world confusions, rather than an analytical tool for explaining or predicting behavior. *Opera seria* turns into *opera buffa*" (p. 35). Lacking any coherent theoretical ideas to hold it together, sociology becomes a series of empirical exercises each of which can be given whatever meaning one chooses, depending on their politics.

Horowitz draws heavily upon historical events to provide the context within which American sociology evolved and changed into its present form. Along the way, his chapters touch on such themes as sociology's (and sociologists) relationship to subjectivity, fascism, communism, socialism (wherein he focuses especially on Jews and their relationship to American sociology), democracy, public (viz., scientific) access to information, and the rational

choice model from economics which has emerged so prominently in sociology (especially via the work of James Coleman).

He concludes the first part of his book with what for me was the most thought-provoking chapter, on "Social Contexts and Cultural Canons." Here, his prose takes on an edge that is especially sharp. It is also for this reason that many readers will react most strongly to this part of the book. His barbs find easy targets in such things as multiculturalism, affirmative action programs, and the new pluralism. The main lesson he draws from these things is rooted in the canons which guide the knowledge we create in sociology, especially "to appreciate the multiple sources of values, not to pontificate in the name of dogma which value is correct. For ultimately the cultural canon is not a thing but an awareness of a process" (p. 128–29). The importance of this need hardly be emphasized.

In the second part of the book, "The Reconstruction of Social Science," Horowitz's gloomy description of sociology is replaced by a more hopeful-sounding future for social science which he believes is undergoing a kind of renaissance. Here again, though, he worries about the politicization of social science activity: "We must finally get beyond the notion that a social variable is a political cause" (p. 185). This shift will occur in a reconstructed social science "not [by virtue of] the size or importance of the subject under discussion but [by] the generalizability of the finding" (p. 186). For Horowitz, then, the hope for social science comes from its potential to rise above any particular historic moment or political cause and seek the larger truths which may be drawn from these events. Only in this way do we achieve a more independent, depoliticized form of knowledge.

Irving Louis Horowitz has written a highly analytical but also very personal account of late 20th century American sociology. The story he tells is not a happy one. Indeed, it is one that will make most sociologists uncomfortable at the least and probably outright angry. Why? Because Horowitz describes a sociology which has veered sharply off course from its original intellectual underpinnings. It has, according to him, become so interest group driven that its intellectual breadth has been drastically curtailed and as a corollary, its intellectual breath has been stifled. To carry the metaphor one step further, sociology needs to be hooked up to

a life support system. To resuscitate itself, sociology must revisit and rediscover its intellectual roots; to recapture the things it did best and could still do well. Myopic empirical exercises must be replaced by broader theoretical questions and a willingness to engage in research less bent on proving what researchers want to have happen. (Horowitz cites James Coleman's unhappy exodus from sociology precisely because his data on school desegregation did not support what most sociologists wanted to believe.)

I found myself captured by Horowitz's analysis and the passion of his prose. I liked better his analysis than proscription for change but even there his writing is very thought-provoking. If he does nothing else, he will have served an important purpose in holding a mirror up to sociology (and its practitioners) and telling them: "Here's what I see. What do you see?" The knee-jerk reaction by many sociologists, I suspect, will be to disagree with Horowitz. They will neither like his analysis nor his proscription. A more detached, dispassionate, reflective reading, however, may lead them to my own conclusion. To wonder about where we are as a discipline and what future we have—in and out of the academy. Like Pogo, Horowitz has "met the enemy and it's us." I wonder. I wonder enough that I recommend the book as a "must read" for sociologists and social scientists more generally since his message must be heard and considered by them as well.

William W. Falk  
University of Maryland

Stanley Aronowitz: *Dead Artists Live Theorists*. New York: Routledge, 1994. \$49.95 hardcover, \$16.95 papercover.

This book represents a genre of literature that has come to be known as cultural criticism. To borrow from Tony Bennett, these writers examine "cultural practices from the point of their interaction with, and within, relations of power". Within this context, the exercise of power is broadly defined to exist in economic leverage, class domination, symbolic violence, gender discrimination, the literary canon, and a host of other covert and overt sources of influence and coercion. The aim of this kind of work is to demonstrate how power is both accumulated and undermined