

Review of Johannes Angermüller: *why there is no poststructuralism in france*, London/New York, Bloomsbury, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-4742-2630-1.

The English title of the text gave me initial concern because I recently contributed to *The Edinburgh Companion to Critical Theory*, ed. Stuart Sim, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2016, an essay entitled 'Phenomenology and Poststructuralism' (pp. 91-108) in which I argued that the inspiration for Pierre Bourdieu's post-structuralist social science lay in his absorption of the legacy of Husserl's phenomenology. My concern increased when I found that Angermüller's analysis is heavily dependent on Bourdieu's conceptual framework. Indeed, the book consists of five chapters, the first four of which were originally published in French (in 2013) as *Le champ de la Théorie: Essor et déclin du structuralisme en France* [the field of Theory: rise and fall of structuralism in France], explicitly acknowledging, in other words, the application of Bourdieu's 'field' theory to consideration of Theory.

The first problem that I have with this book, therefore, is that it deploys those concepts and methodology developed by Bourdieu in France between 1960 and his death in 2002 which I regard as 'post-structuralist' to argue, in the English title, that poststructuralism does not exist in France. In my view, Bourdieu's post-structuralist position developed in his *practice* between 1960 and 1980. In his early fieldwork in Algeria at the end of the 1950s, Bourdieu was sensitive to the danger that he might superimpose colonial attitudes and values on the behaviour of the indigenous Algerians whom he interviewed and interpreted. His intention was to use phenomenological assumptions to disclose the 'sinnhafte Aufbau', the meaningful constructivism of social agents (to use Schutz's phrase adopted in the title of his 1932 critique of Weber's 'verstehende Soziologie' [interpretive sociology]) without contaminating these meanings through the a priori imposition of explanations generated in a different (Western) socio-political context. This determination led Bourdieu to formulate a model which distinguished between the self-understanding of their situations developed by social agents on the basis of their primary experience and the 'objective' analyses of those same situations produced by observers/social scientists. The first understanding is derived from the dispositions which people inherit from their family upbringing (their 'habitus'), and the second understanding is articulated within the logically distinct discourses of competing 'sciences'. Bourdieu outlined this position in the mid-1970s between the writing of his *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* [sketch of a theory of practice] (1972) and the publication of its translation into English as *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) when he also began to make it clear that the theorising of the second kind of understanding has no privileged status in relation to the first but, instead, is only a linguistically extended version of the first. Hence he emphasized that sociology should be systematically 'reflexive', by which he meant that all analyses of discourses ('structured structures' or 'intellectual fields') can only be saved from a self-referentiality designed to protect social distinction if they are themselves subjected to a meta-sociological analysis which indicates the social and socio-historical origins of their production (analysis of their 'structuring structures'). It is important to note that Bourdieu wanted to advance a *theory of practice*, one which would help to clarify both the practical actions of ordinary people and the theoretical stances adopted by scientists

as their forms of practice. He was always hostile to disembodied Theory which he called 'theoretical' or 'theoreticist' theory.

Angermuller's endeavour is, therefore, highly paradoxical or ambivalent. There are good chapters on the social conditions of production of poststructuralism in France, particularly chapter 3 which gives an important account of the 'boom of the human sciences in the 1960s and 1970s', 'the formation of the structuralist generation', and 'the neoliberal turn of the 1980s'. These detail some of the 'structuring structures' of 'Theory' in France in the period after World War II. However, Angermuller's opening chapter formulates the problem which he is addressing in a way which suggests that he acquiesces in consideration of Theory as a 'structured structure' without reference to the account of the conditions of its social production which he offers. He is aware of the difficulty that 'Theory' or 'poststructuralism' were not identified as such by the people who have been thought to be their main protagonists. Angermuller says, for instance, of Foucault: "What a tragedy: a leader of a movement who knows nothing of his movement!" (p. 2). The 'Theory' about which his passion was first aroused by a seminar at Duke University in 1995 (Preface, p. vii) is, by his own admission, a 'field' which has been constituted by the North American *reception* of French thought more than by the social conditions of the French intellectual 'field' within which it was produced. He even, rightly, asks the question: "Is the talk of 'French poststructuralism' perhaps the product of a huge international misunderstanding?" (p. 2). It is. The crucial question then is how we react to this recognition. In chapter 4, Angermuller convincingly analyses the conditions in the United States which generated a distorted understanding of French thought. However, he seems happy to accept misrepresentation as a phenomenon to be studied. To put this in terms of other descriptive labels, he seems happy to borrow from Bourdieu a modernist methodology to analyse a postmodern phenomenon and, by legitimating 'Theory' as a product he contrives to condone the detachment from practice which Bourdieu was intent on criticising. Highly relevant here is the critique which Bourdieu offered of misrepresentations of his work in his concluding remarks entitled "For a Sociogenetic Understanding of Intellectual Works" in *Bourdieu. Critical Perspectives*, ed. Calhoun, LiPuma, and Postone, 1993, Oxford, Polity Press.

In an interesting and important final chapter, Angermuller treats the rise of unreflexive Theory as an irreversible aspect of contemporary life. He even suggests that such spurious Theory might offer a paradigm for the development of a 'post-classical social theory' which 'aims at deconstructing societal representations of social order' (p. 101). I agree with Angermuller that we have increasingly to find ways of understanding international relations in terms of inter-cultural personal relations rather than in terms of the 'structured structure' discourse of nation-state identity, but this does not mean that we should renounce authentic adherence to our different primary experiences in favour of fake theory peddled in an international intellectual field dominated by American conceptual imperialism.

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