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Edited by Richard Harvey Brown and Stanford M. Lyman

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STRUCTURE, CONSCIOUSNESS, AND HISTORY

EDITED BY

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The New School for Social Research

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[More information](#)

Dedicated to the memory of

Robert Zane Levine (1947–1974) and Donald Katsumi Sakuma (1936–1975)

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Introduction: Symbolic realism and cognitive aesthetics: An invitation</i> RICHARD HARVEY BROWN AND STANFORD M. LYMAN	1
Part I: Structure, consciousness, and history	
1 Symbolic realism and sociological thought: Beyond the positivist – romantic debate RICHARD HARVEY BROWN	13
2 History and hermeneutics: Wilhelm Dilthey and the dialectics of interpretive method RICHARD HARVEY BROWN	38
3 The acceptance, rejection, and reconstruction of histories: On some controversies in the study of social and cultural change STANFORD M. LYMAN	53
4 The history of <i>mentalités</i> : Recent writings on revolution, criminality, and death in France ROBERT DARTON	106
Part II: Structure, self, and evil	
5 Architectonic man: On the structuring of lived experience ROM HARRÉ	139
6 Social theory as confession: Parsonsian sociology and the symbolism of evil PAUL G. CREELAN	173
7 Dignity versus survival? Reflections on the moral philosophy of social order MANFRED STANLEY	197
Part III: Praxis and utopia	
8 Dramaturgical discourse and political enactments: Toward an artistic foundation for political space TRACY B. STRONG	237
9 Toward a semiotic of utopia: Political and fictional discourses in Thomas More's <i>Utopia</i> LOUIS MARIN	261
<i>Contributors to the book</i>	283

PREFACE

The modern era is characterized not only by advances in the sciences, but also by the rationalization of their application to society. With the application of scientific methods to “societal guidance,” positive science has become a dominant political and ethical factor. Science has emerged as a kind of religion, an ultimate frame of reference for determining what is real and true. As such it serves as a vocabulary for public discourse in virtually all areas of social praxis. Scientific management, scientific marketing, scientific warfare, scientific welfare – the application of science in these fields, both substantively and as a legitimating rhetoric – all seem to prefigure a totally rationalized, efficiently administered social order.

Yet in such a world, what is the place for ethics and human values, for moral agency and personal dignity? Indeed, is there not a fundamental conflict between scientism and humanism, between rational calculation and humane values? Such a conflict is expressed in many forms – utilitarian, scientific, or empirical modes of thinking versus intuitive, metaphysical, evaluative ways of feeling; increasing demands for elite technical knowledge to manage complex institutions versus increasing demands for participation, for nonalienating modes of work and governance. In social science itself, this conflict appears in the dispute between value-neutral explanations, as against praxis-oriented interpretations, between deterministic theories of structure as against voluntaristic theories of consciousness.

Descartes hinted at these dystopian potentials when he juxtaposed the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*. But only when we begin to apply science to society, which Descartes with his “provisional morality” postponed as a distant possibility, do we confront the full seriousness of the problem. Descartes never imagined that man in his being could become wholly the object of other people’s expertise, that there would exist an expert other

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

Preface

than the person himself, an expert who manipulated and reconstructed the person in all his social relations, an expert who was himself being managed by yet another expert. These images have such notorious implications as to render the idea of scientific or technical expertise an ironic caricature, a destroyer of freedom even while being proclaimed its savior.

Where can we look for a way out of this dilemma? On one hand the manipulateness of our means for affecting social change tends to negate our humanistic ends. On the other hand in accepting the criticisms of positivist techniques we appear to consign ourselves either to mindless activism or to contemplative passivity. In such a context the debate between positivism and its romantic critics grows more and more sterile. It thus becomes vital to question the basic terms of discourse about the relations between these different forms of theory, as well as between theory and practice. What is needed is a postpositivist, postromantic method for conceptualizing alternative social orders, describing our present conditions, and deriving methods of social change that do not of their nature violate humanistic intentions.

The ten essays of this volume are part of that quest. All the essays are concerned with relations between explanatory and interpretive approaches to understanding conduct, and all of them are sensitive to relations between such theory and an emancipatory practice. All the essays can be placed within the symbolic realist perspective described in the Introduction by Brown and Lyman; all of them address philosophic and theoretical questions in relation to humanistic concerns. Yet each essay is unique in its problem focus and disciplinary moorings.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I addresses relationships between structure and consciousness. One key to that relationship is historicity, in that social structures are historically constructed in consciousnesses and consciousness is structured historically. Part II focuses on values, freedom, and identity. Identity, an active construction of self and personae, is not a fact so much as an exercise of human freedom. Conflict over values and the problem of evil set the scenes in which freedom and dignity perish or survive. Part III concerns the foundations and forms of political discourse. The Hobbesian problem, how is society possible?, devolves into two related questions: How is political discourse possible? And how is it possible to transform a polity?

In the first essay Richard Harvey Brown discusses some of the implications of a symbolic realist ontology for current issues in sociological theory. Then, in a second paper, Brown explores further the logic of method of an aesthetic interpretation of conduct, from the hermeneutics of Wilhelm

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[More information](#)

Preface

xi

Dilthey to the dialectics of contemporary critical theory. These papers are followed by that of Stanford M. Lyman, who explores evolutionary, functionalist, and causal theories of social change, and suggests how they might be reformulated phenomenologically. The next essay, by Robert Darnton, shows how structure, consciousness, and history might be concretely conjoined through an examination of recent works on the history of *mentalités* in France.

Part II is opened by Rom Harré, who demonstrates how two central but usually discrete domains of sociological inquiry might be linked: the phenomenological study of meaning and the structural analysis of order. Then Paul G. Creelan turns from a philosophical analysis of social structuring to a structural analysis of sociological theory. Examining Talcott Parsons's theories as myths, Creelan unveils connections between Parsons's formal theories, his personal background, and his social and civilizational setting. In the final essay of this section Manfred Stanley examines the social and conceptual preconditions for a polity in which human dignity would be fundamental.

The final two essays are concerned with the relation of different forms of discourse to political action and social change. Tracy B. Strong explores this problem by using the rules of drama as a metaphor for the rules by which humanistic political discourse would be governed. Louis Marin discusses differences between the utopian or fictional discourse of moral-political criticism, and the descriptive-theoretical discourse of political analysis and action. Marin concludes his essay by recommending a dialectical form of discourse by which social theory could be a self-reflective instrument of social change.

Thus the essays set up reverberations between structure, consciousness, and history and, taken together, open avenues toward the still developing symbolic realist paradigm in the human studies. The introductory essay is an invitation to that highroad; this book, perhaps, provides a guide.

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