

Book Review: The Oxford Handbook of Sociology, Social Theory and Organisation Studies

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30/03/2015

This volume aims to strengthen ties between organisation studies and contemporary sociological work at a time when there are increasing institutional barriers to such cooperation, potentially generating a myopia that constricts new developments. Gurbinder Lalli recommends this book to scholars and students whom either design specific courses or study anthropology and culture.

The Oxford Handbook of Sociology, Social Theory and Organisation Studies.
Paul S. Adler, Paul du Gay, Glenn Morgan, and Michael Reed (eds). Oxford University Press. October 2014.

This volume is the successor to an earlier edition titled *The Oxford Handbook of Sociology and Organisation Studies: Classical Foundations*. The fundamental concern in the previous volume was to explore the organisational studies in pre-1950 sociology, compared with this volume which brings the reader up to speed with a more contemporary view.

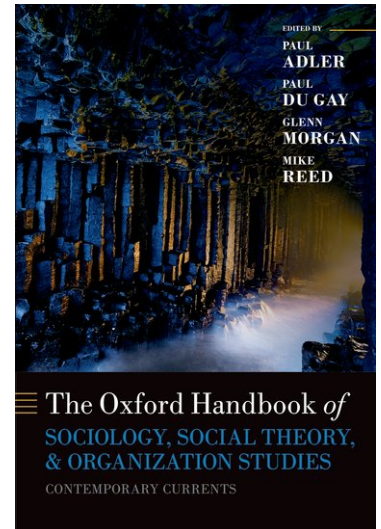
The importance that organisations place on sociology and social theory to form and develop new perspectives continues to grow, particularly in the Western world, where the book's editors (Paul Adler, Paul du Gay, Glenn Morgan and Mike Reed) are based. The book is organised into three parts: "European influences"; "Anglo-American influences"; and "Organising Social Worlds". This review places a focus on the second part, which is comprised of eighteen chapters, with a further emphasis placed on the works of [C.W. Mills](#) and [Clifford Geertz](#).

Chapter 11, written by Edward Barratt draws on the work of Mills and theorists of power. It is organised in a clear way, and is chronologically situated, giving reference to the earliest work of Mills (1939), which ignites the idea of how inner life and conduct of the human subject was shaped through symbolic interplay. Mill's main focus was on those 'actors' who enjoyed the power of decision. In his stance, he takes up an 'ethico-political' position and established that the overall problem with American society related specifically to undermined democracy. More specifically, this involved a corrupt integration of powerful political, business and military forces. This particular chapter delve into three major texts by Mills and key conclusions are made through this analysis and applied to organisational behaviour today.

Mills recognised the emergent American labour movement, which he judged to be leading political movements during and immediately after WWII. He acknowledged the upward power and political potential of the American labour movement and this was evident through the increase in union membership. Mills was further interested in the redistribution of power and argued for the unions to engage in formulating their own plans for industry and was encouraged by new thinking among elements of labour.

Following political debates in Germany, Mills's interest in America's expanding middle class began in the early 1940s, with a concentrate on the 'white collar' worker. He was particularly interested in raising questions on the class position and identity of the American white collar worker and the likelihood of an association with the labour movement. This was followed by an examination of the ruling elites and a completed trilogy of the major 'classes' of his time.

With regards to power in the contemporary world, [Ron Kerr and Sarah Robinson](#) point out how there is currently a



revival of interest in the work of Mills. For example, the 'war on terror' policy is very much guided by a logic that holds an international influence through the encouragement of business investment as well as the support of numerous foreign military bases, and the maintenance of client states. Although some commentators argue that Mills exaggerated the influence of the military in political circles in his time, [Stanley Aronowitz](#) argues that the 'permanent war economy' has not completely disappeared and evidence supports this claim, with expenditure on the military accounting to 4.33 per cent of GDP. This was the case in the final year of the Bush administration.

Overall, the work of Mills is recognised as an inspirational influence in trying to establish knowledge developed through critical reflection; posing questions on matters of truth. The chapter closes with a return to the original ethico-political stance taken by Mills, in his philosophical arguments. Further importance is placed on self-criticism and reflection of events in order to help seek the truth in such movements.

Chapter 15 firstly gives recognition to American cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz on his contribution to the interpretative lens on social science. Although this particular volume places focus on the works of contemporary social theorists, the work of Max Weber. Classical sociologists such as Weber appear more frequently in the previous volume to this book. In terms of organisational culture, Geertz's ground breaking work, [The Interpretation of Cultures](#), is widely referenced across the social sciences. Geertz saw culture and structure as distinct from one another, arguing that 'culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience' and guide their action, whereas 'social structure' is the form that action takes, the actually existing network of social relations.

The chapter then describes the journey Geertz makes towards establishing himself in anthropology. The remainder of the chapter takes shape through definitional means, which include 'adopting an interpretivist approach in organisational studies'. This section begins to highlight the significance of the views of Geertz and the growing relevance and recognition to literature on cultural organisation. Culture and organisation are defined in this chapter, followed by a chronological journey into the second wave of organisational culture studies, which comes to an end with a postmodern critique. This then gives rise to the fragmentation studies and the boundaries of subcultures, causing meaning-making to become more difficult.

Overall, it is evident from the views of these two particularly influential chapters that organisational studies are very much alive and that self-criticism and reflection are central in trying to understand organisational culture. The remainder of part two of the book continues to build a social theory context on organisational studies.

This book is geared for those who wish to review the contemporary philosophies of organisation studies from a sociological lens. Clearly, it challenges an international context and would be useful for scholars and students who wish to either design specific courses or study anthropology and culture. This book brings both inspirational and relevant scholars together and is a thought-provoking directory for those involved in the fields of business, politics and the social sciences.

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