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Book Symposium Article

A New Research Programme for Cultural Sociology: On Christopher Thorpe's *Cultural Sociology of Cultural Representations*

Jeremy James Tanner [1]*

[1] *University College London*, UNITED KINGDOM

***Corresponding Author:** j.tanner@ucl.ac.uk

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ABSTRACT

This essay offers a critical appraisal of Christopher Thorpe's 'Cultural Sociology of Cultural Representations' both as a contribution to the historical sociology of English cultural representations of Italy and as the foundations for a new research programme in cultural sociology. It analyses the most important theoretical and critical choices made by Thorpe in setting up his project, and how these inform the analysis of English representations of Italy. It explores the role played Bourdieu's Field Theory and the Strong Programme of Jeffrey Alexander and the Yale Cultural Sociology (YCS) group in the new approach advocated by Thorpe. It identifies particular strengths in Thorpe's new programme, in particular in addressing the complex temporalities of cultural change, as well as some weaknesses linked to the structuralist model of culture in YCS, with its over emphasis on discursive meaning as the essence of culture. It suggests these shortcomings could be ameliorated with the help of Peirce's semiotics, certain strands of recent psychology, and some aspects of action theory.

Keywords: cultural sociology, Bourdieu and field theory, Alexander and the Strong Programme, historical sociology, Peirce and the materiality of culture

INTRODUCTION

Christopher Thorpe's (2024) stimulating new book not only offers a substantive historical sociology of English representations of Italy from the early modern period to today, but also outlines a significant new research programme in cultural sociology, namely the 'cultural sociology of cultural representations'. It is a remarkable book in terms of both its theoretical ambitions and its empirical range. Edward Said's critical theory of representation is transformed and renewed through a dialogue with the cultural sociologies of Pierre Bourdieu and Jeffrey Alexander, an intriguing and at first sight unlikely combination, bearing in mind Alexander's (1995) excoriating attack on Bourdieu. The range of empirical materials analysed within the theoretical framework developed by Thorpe is simply vast: extending from Italian etiquette books and their translation for the English court in the early sixteenth century through to Jamie Oliver's *Italian Kitchen* television series in the twenty first, taking in the aristocrats of the English Grand Tour, travel guides for their bourgeois successors, the poetry of Byron and Shelley, eighteenth century Gothic novels, and the films of Merchant and Ivory.

In the appraisal which follows, I seek first to lay out what I would see as the most important theoretical and critical choices made by Thorpe in setting up his project, and to sketch how these inform the analysis of English

representations of Italy which forms the core of his book. I will then focus on some of the key strengths and weaknesses of this critical framework, their sources and entailments, before concluding with some final reflections on the potential of cultural sociology of cultural representations as a research programme.

CRITICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS

The starting point of Thorpe's study is an interest in how Italy has been represented over a very long period of time as England's cultural Other, culminating in the 'love of Italy' as a distinguishing attribute of the English middle class in contemporary Britain, manifested in phenomena such as enthusiasm for Italian cuisine and style at the more affordable end of the spectrum, and villa holidays and second homes in Italy for the more affluent. Thorpe points out that elements of this cultural complex date back as least as far as the early modern period, when Italian artistic culture and Renaissance learning were emulated in the courts of the Tudor monarchs, paradoxically at the same time, following the English Reformation, as Italy was conceived as a negative Other, the home of Catholicism and Popery, and as such a major threat to the English state and the Anglican settlement.

As Thorpe points out, there is a rich tradition in both the humanities and the social sciences (especially anthropology) of analysis of representations of the cultural Other, influenced by Edward Said's (1978) classic study of *Orientalism*. On the face it, Thorpe acknowledges, Said's work ought to have been an appropriate model for his own project: the combination of literary critical tools from the humanities, and post-structuralist styles of analysis drawn above all from Foucault, permitted Said to range across a similarly broad range of cultural representations. These representations were linked to particular institutional settings, which shaped their character and informed their cultural agency in the context of broader social and political environments, above all the colonial and imperial projects of European nation states in the Middle East. But in relation to English representations of Italy, Thorpe suggests, the Saidian paradigm has one major shortcoming, namely an exclusive focus on the ways in which the Other was negatively represented, as the inferior of those making the cultural representations, forms of symbolic violence which played an active role in the articulation and legitimation of colonial power. How then to address the ways in which, in the long history of English representations of Italy, in different periods and in different contexts, negative representations of Italy – as the nursing ground of Catholic plots in sixteenth century, or as the home of a decadent and corrupt people, incapable and unworthy of self-government in the eighteenth century - sat alongside positive representations – the home of classical humanism in the Renaissance, the source of canonical traditions in the visual arts, like the masterpieces of the Venetian school emulated by English painters, the country which had to be visited to complete the civilising education of aristocratic tourists in the eighteenth century and their middle class counterparts in the nineteenth century and since?

It is against the background of this limitation in the Saidian paradigm that Thorpe turns to the tools of cultural sociology to develop alternative approaches, which can address simultaneous processes of cultural affirmation and cultural denigration, and the complex manner in which these interact with each other in ways which are mutually constitutive in changing social, institutional and historical contexts. The concepts drawn from Jeffrey Alexander and the Yale School of Cultural Sociology (YCS) address primarily the level of cultural analysis of representations, those drawn from Bourdieu's Field Theory (FT) the social contextualisation of those representations, with a particular view to explaining which representations emerge to (or disappear from) prominence and when, over the very long-term history which Thorpe addresses. But it is worth addressing exactly which concepts Thorpe takes from each tradition, and which he ignores, and how he articulates the two on the face of it rather discrepant approaches for the purposes of his own research programme.

From Alexander and YCS, Thorpe takes the 'structural hermeneutic' approach to cultural representation, with its emphasis on the 'structural' dimensions of meaning making. This starts from the Durkheimian assumption that an opposition between the sacred and the profane 'is the fundamental division around which all cultures are organised and structured' (27). This fundamental opposition informs systems of binary classification which ramify, branch like, through culture from its highest to its lowest levels. Such 'meaning' is rooted primarily in language, and as such is arbitrary or conventional, in Saussure's terms, and fundamentally 'discursive'. The moral force of the systems of cultural classification and categorisation which are the fundamental structures of culture come from 'generative and dynamic' (27) tensions between the sacred and the profane, and the affective charge to which that tension, and associated systems of interdiction, give rise. This provides a model for describing the ways in which particular features of Italian civilisation are 'coded, weighted and collectively represented within English culture'. It also provides a way of addressing some distinctive processes of cultural change, specifically through the idea of 'cultural trauma', a concept developed through collaborative research within the YCS group but particularly associated with Ron Eyerman (2012) and Alexander et al. (2004). 'Cultural trauma' refers to circumstances in which a community's collective identity is threatened or undermined in ways that leave 'indelible marks on the group consciousness' (Thorpe, 2024: 28, quoting Alexander, 2003: 85) 'changing their future identity in fundamental and

irrevocable ways'. Such events or circumstances only become traumatic if they are culturally defined and represented as such by 'claim makers' whose definition of the situation as 'traumatic' carries sway with the larger community. Such events necessarily entail transformations in existing meaning structures and intensive meaning making activities, to repair the old meaning structures or construct new ones which restore some sense of 'ontological security' (28-31).

The hinge that Thorpe uses to articulate YCS cultural sociology with Bourdieu's Field Theory (FT) is the role of the claim-makers and 'carriers' of cultural representations. He observes that cultural representations of other peoples and cultures entail claims to knowledge, to know and represent the truth, in this case about Italy and Italian culture. Knowledge claims, and their acceptance, inevitably entail issues of cultural authority, that is to say, in Bourdieu's terms, symbolic and cultural capital, linked to class and to positions in particular cultural fields. Accordingly, Thorpe draws on FT to 'track and trace two interrelated developments: the "classing" of Italy and the "fielding" of Italy' (33-40). 'Classing' refers to the ways in which 'claims to know and represent Italy' have been associated with specific classes and/or status groups over time. 'What Italy means, and how it is represented to and by members of a group is determined by a class-based habitus' (34) shaping a particular envisioning of Italy and Italian culture. Such visions are inflected by the social and cultural interests of a class, and the specific forms of capital which characterise it: even within a specific cultural practice, like the Grand Tour for example, there were differences between the experiences, and their representations of them, on the part of aristocrats (high in economic capital, rather middling in cultural capital) and the paid tutors (high in cultural capital, low in economic capital) who guided them.

Representations of Italy were not a direct expression of class habitus but were further refracted by the 'fielding' of Italy, that is to say through the structure of the field of literary production in the context of which representations of Italy were produced and circulated: the social basis of the field, its relation to and degree of dependence on or autonomy from neighbouring fields (political, religious, economic), and its internal structure (the system of positions internal to the literary field and the kinds of competition or struggles to which these gave rise). These changing structures of the field of literary production 'have made possible particular representations of Italy while constraining and precluding the emergence of others' (33). Needless to say, the structure and character of the field of literary production is transformed many times over during the more than five hundred years of English and Italian history with which Thorpe is concerned. At the beginning of the story a literary field as such scarcely exists: literary production is embedded in the structures of church, court and state, giving rise to the kinds of writing that the performance of religious and political roles required. This is reflected in the character of the writings produced: ambassadors' reports on their visits to Italian courts; martyrologies to strengthen faith, like John Foxe's (1516-1587) *Book of Martyrs* describing the sufferings of Protestants at the hands of the Catholic Inquisition. The eighteenth century saw the emergence of an increasingly autonomous field of literary production, which offered forms of specifically literary success, corresponding to different positions which could be taken in the field, and the different kinds of economic and cultural capital that they required: middle class authors of Gothic novels (set in Southern Italy), of relatively limited economic and cultural capital, positioned at the commercial pole of the field of literary production, opposed to the aristocratic Romantic poets, like Shelley and Byron, richly endowed with economic and cultural capital, occupying the restricted pole and playing for the more purely symbolic stakes of specifically literary creative genius.

Thorpe makes very clear that this linking of YCS and FT is not intended as some kind of grand synthesis, but more simply the selection of two different tools for doing two rather different kinds of job in the research problems that he wishes to address: they complement each other in allowing us to look at the same material, and to understand cultural processes, from differing but complementary angles. He acknowledges very clearly that this involves downplaying or excising certain elements of each theoretical scheme, and the costs and benefits of these choices. Most notably he pays little attention to the pragmatic and performative turn which was an important development in YCS, addressing the kinds of micro-level processes by which the grand cultural binaries of Durkheimian/Saussurean structural analysis might be mobilised, and specific cultural meanings realised, in particular social settings or contexts of interpersonal interaction. So too, it is a repeated refrain in the context of the chapters of empirical analysis that we are not going to receive any Clifford Geertz style 'thick description' (cf. p. 60 eschewing 'overly thick descriptions' of anti-Catholic cultural structures in Elizabethan England; 143 etc), a striking departure from YCS norms, where Geertz is seen as a key ancestral figure in the creation of a strong programme in cultural sociology, and doing thick description is seen as one of the distinguishing features of strong versus weak programmes (Alexander, 2003: 14). Thorpe does not try to disguise this difference, making the not unreasonable claim that in the kind of longue durée study that he is undertaking 'it is necessary to operate at a level of abstraction that is highly sensitive to but nevertheless involves compressing significant amounts of empirical detail by which meanings are made, performed and fuse or not with actors and audiences' (25).

ANALYSIS: CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS IN PRACTICE

How does this conceptual framework operate in practice? For the most part, the analysis Thorpe offers is exceptionally clear and lucid. The broad orientations developed in the introductory chapters are developed as more specific questions period by period, with YCS and FT played off against each other within individual chapters or across pairs of chapters. Because, between the two theoretical frames, there is quite a lot of complex analytical work to be done, the exposition is extremely dense, and defies any straightforward summary, but it is worth offering a sketch of some key moments in the story, however skeletal. Chapter 2 sets some long-lasting parameters informing the cultural representation of Italy in England, shaped by the Renaissance and the Reformation. For the court of Tudor England, very much on the margins of European culture, Italian Renaissance humanism became a cultural model offering both a new style of education for the civil servants of an emerging modern state, as well as models of civility in court etiquette and aesthetic culture. With the Reformation, the 'assemblage of collective representations' of Italy in England became 'increasingly tension laden' (58). While humanist culture, and classical education inherited from 'Italy-Past' (Rome) continued to be valued (Elizabeth I was a great Latinist and spoke Italian), these positive representations were 'overwritten' with 'negative representations of Catholic Italy-Present as spiritually polluted home to the devil incarnate in the figurehead of the Pope' (58; 'sacred-evil'). Protestant tracts and stage dramas were key media in which the cultural structures of 'English anti-Catholicism crystallised and became obdurate' (60), and Italy and Italians-present resignified negatively as politically, morally and sexually corrupt.

The end of chapter 2, and chapters 3 and 4 explore how Italy-Past (classical civilization, and ultimately also the early Renaissance), was separated from Italy-Present in English collective representations, through a series of acts of cultural appropriation. This major transformation in the cultural structures of English representation of Italy was once again significantly conditioned by cultural trauma, in this case the English civil war, culminating in the execution of Charles I, and Cromwell's Commonwealth, before the restoration of the monarchy. Roman republican and imperial history was used as a model for 'working through the traumatic events of the regicide and the civil wars' (85) in ways which exculpated the aristocracy of any responsibility, and helped articulate new cultural structures of Britishness, based on Roman Libertas (but reconceptualised by Locke with an emphasis on private property), and with an increasingly prosperous and ambitious Britain as the modern heir to ancient Rome, 'the embodiment of world civilization and the greatest imperial superpower of the present' (85). This provides the cultural context for the invention of the Grand Tour. The tour involved English aristocrats visiting the archaeological sites where they could commune with the traces of Roman antiquity, and the churches, palaces and museums which housed the heritage of the Italian Renaissance. The Grand Tour is described by Thorpe as an instance of what Jeffrey Alexander has described as 'ritual-like practices'. Such practices have some structural parallels (orientation towards sacred objects, heightened affective arousal, and collective effervescence consolidating solidarity of participants), with the kinds of traditional and institutionalised religions studied in classical religious sociology (Durkheim, Weber), but, in the highly socially differentiated societies characteristic of modernity, they lack the ability to 'fuse' (YCS concept) with the whole community, characteristic of traditional religions. Correspondingly, writers from the ascending middle class criticised the Grand Tour, and the behaviour of the aristocrats who indulged in it, on patriotic grounds, as frivolous wasting of national wealth and sycophantic favouring of foreign culture over British.

It is at this point that Field Theory begins to play an increasingly important role in Thorpe's analysis. The consecration of travel to Italy as a highly valorised form of cultural capital, and the 'iconicisation' (another YCS concept to which we will return) of classical styles in art and architecture, patronised by the English aristocracy and royal family, formed the background to the creation of the Royal Academy, under the leadership of Joshua Reynolds, in 1768 (92-3). This was a crucial moment in the formation of a relatively autonomous artistic field, in so far as it created an institutional space which in some degree insulated artists with the right forms of cultural and symbolic capital (acquired by travelling to Italy, and learning from its artistic heritage) from the constraints of both the market and direct patronage. This entailed the gradual institution of specifically artistic capital, with the work of painters being evaluated according to professional criteria set by them, as articulated in the Discourses of Reynolds and later academicians, and rewarded in terms of symbolic capital (prizes), specific to the field and in some degree set against the purely monetary rewards secured through patronage or the market.

So too, the appearance as a new 'carrier group' of the 'critics and commentators drawn from the educated fractions of the ascending middle class' (88) marked the emergence of a specifically literary field of cultural production (disembedded from religious and aristocratic patronage) characterised by commercial and restricted poles, soon differentiating into two increasingly bounded fields. Various forms of commercial and serial publication, amongst them the new newspapers and journals (Spectator, Tatler, Gentleman's Magazine etc), characteristic of the developing public sphere in eighteenth-century England, permitted the emergence of the role

of professional author. These writers articulated alternative 'counter-representations' of Italy, not just the critiques of the Grand Tour, but also the new genre of the Gothic Novel. Setting such novels in Southern Italy, relatively unknown to Grand Tourists, afforded 'an imaginative terrain on which to think through and consolidate the coordinates of a steadily crystallising middle-class sensibility', characterised by 'simple moral and social oppositions', and revelling in stories of 'corrupt monks, compromised nuns, sexually voracious Latin males and unpredictable and volatile Italian spouses of both genders', all serving to reinforce, in refigured form, the inherited cultural structures associating Catholicism with 'terror and superstition on the one hand' (Reformation) and 'moral, political and sexual corruption, on the other hand' (108-9).

The professionalisation of literary art, and the differentiation of the literary field, Thorpe argues, gave rise to a corresponding differentiation of representations of Italy. Like the critics of the Grand Tour, emerging middle class professional poets – Wordsworth, De Quincy – were characterised by a habitus which opposed that characteristic of aristocratic Grand Tourists. They were 'negatively disposed towards the upper-class veneration of Italy and classical Italian civilization' and 'instead championed the natural beauty of the English landscape' (115). The writing of these Romantic poets took place against the background of another epoch-making cultural trauma, namely the Industrial Revolution. The cultural disorientation to which this gave rise resulted in a 'polarized and polarising response' (133) as the new ways of life associated with industrialism and urbanism clashed with old ways of life and cultural structures. The new concept of the Romantic artist, as a divinely gifted individual, was at the same time a response to the fragmenting character of industrial labour, and a way of 'making and marking symbolic boundaries separating out the restricted from the commercial field of literary production' (113). Whilst middle-class poets like Wordsworth valorised English nature, their aristocratic counterparts, Byron and Shelley, refigured the traditional aristocratic representations of Italy as a place of salvation and liberation, in which Italy-Present, the whole way of life, becomes the focus of celebration, 'a life-giving alternative to the oppressive and repressive nature of life under social conditions in modern Industrial England' (139).

This new positive representation of Italy-present was extended in the context of the democratic discourses of the newly emergent 'civil sphere' (YCS concept) characteristic of nineteenth century Britain. These discourses located sacred social values in the civil sphere, amongst them popular sovereignty and the right to national self-determination 'recoded within the symbolic discourse of liberal democracy and reweighted as sacred-pure' (142). This provided the culture structure basis for cultural processes of 'psychological identification and moral extension' (YCS concept), which helped to 'overturn three hundred years of negative representations of Italians-present and make them moral equivalents of British' (143). Thorpe discusses some of the main carriers of this new cultural structure, from newspapers and civic associations, to poets like Elizabeth and Robert Browning, who represented the struggle for Italian liberation in ways 'which involved personalising and making morally and personally meaningful (…) the oppressed plight of the Italian people (…) compelling identification' (145).

Concluding chapters show how this new positive representation of Italy, in particular with an emphasis on Italy-present as embodying a whole way of life, has been elaborated from the late nineteenth century, largely following a consistent cultural structure (no new cultural traumas, perhaps until Brexit?), proliferating and differentiating with developments in class structure and their intersections with transformations in the field of cultural production. Particularly telling is the analysis of the increasing degree to which the dominant representations of Italy in Britain are produced and circulate within the commercial field of cultural production. The poetry of Shelley and Byron, in which the Romantic vision of Italy had been articulated in the restricted field of literary production of the early nineteenth century, is recycled in the later nineteenth century, transformed into easily consumed gobbets in the guidebooks produced by John Murray for the first package tourists, 'culturally empowering for middle class travellers', whilst at the same time reproducing their subordinate status within 'the wider hierarchy of class-based visions of Italy of which they formed part' (161). This represents an early instance of what Thorpe describes as 'making Italy fit for market' (191), in which the logic of commodification of the commercial field increasingly informs 'every stage of the production and circulation of cultural goods' (187, quoting Bourdieu, 2003: 67). Thorpe shows how exactly the kinds of cultural processes identified by Bourdieu as characteristic of the field of commercial production of culture have informed British representations of Italy into the present. Anything difficult or sharp edged, which 'might divide or exclude potential consumers' (190) is erased. The result is a 'highly romanticised, idealised, homogenised, depoliticised and dehistoricised' representation of Italy. Thorpe argues that this modern vision of Italy is particularly 'highly sensorialised', its primary contents being visions of 'life-affirming and in many cases positively life-changing sensory experiences' of a kind that 'British people and the British lifestyle typically repress and struggle to express' (191), above all sexual and social liberation and gastronomic pleasure: think the Merchant and Ivory production of *Room with a View, Jamie's Kitchen* and lifestyle magazines like *Italia!* or *Italia Segreta: the Italian Lifestyle Magazine.*

CULTURAL STRUCTURES, CULTURAL PROCESSES, CULTURAL AGENCY: SOME STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS

There is a great deal to like in this book, and in the vision of cultural sociology which it articulates: the emphasis on the autonomy of cultural levels of analysis, the investigation of cultural structure and cultural process, coming from Jeffrey Alexander and the YCS tradition; the effort to bring Alexander YCS and Bourdieu FT into some kind of relationship; the longue durée perspective that brings complex issues of time and temporality into thinking about the relationship between social structures and cultural structures, realised through the application of Bourdieu's Field Theory. But there are also places where the theoretical tools chosen do not seem adequate to the task.

Let's start with the strengths. Much of the vocabulary taken over from YCS structural hermeneutics does a good job. In particular, the recurrence of the same vocabulary in different contexts helps the reader to see significant parallels and differences across time in the logics according to which cultural structures are articulated and transformed. This gives added value to Thorpe's reworking of the more period specific secondary sources of humanities scholarship on which he draws, where the closer embedding in the specifics of particular periods or particular cultural forms might obfuscate the visibility of such structural patterns. A great deal of secondary and primary source material is effectively integrated by Thorpe through such synthesising concepts as 'resignifying', 'coding and weighting' of represented contents, 'overwriting of positive with negative representations' and the like. Similarly, although the analysis of cultural structures does not offer the kind of thick description offered by Geertz's Balinese Cockfight, a consistent set of terms in which to analyse cultural structures – addressing 'the most salient codes, rhetorical devices, tropes and narrative structures' (60) in terms of which they crystallise and take enduring form – ensures a clear focus and a consistency in the degree of resolution at which the analysis is conducted, enhancing the degree to which the reader feels they can rely on the comparison of the multiplicity of different cases that make up the five centuries of history of cultural representation embraced by Thorpe's study.

Indeed, the handling of this long-term history is one of the signal strengths of Thorpe's study, and he seems to me fully justified in the broad claims that he makes for the approach that he has developed for the cultural sociology of cultural representations, namely that his framework allows him to 'cast light on various patterned processes, structures and dynamics that would otherwise remain concealed from view' (211) and that he has been able to 'explain the mechanisms modulating continuity and change' to the meanings and representations of Italy (215). The use of 'trauma theory' and field theory play a particularly strategic role in transforming YCS style analysis – often looking at processes of relatively short duration, for example Alexander's classic analysis of Watergate (2003: 155-78) or his account of the Obama election campaign of 2008 (2012) – to a long term historical cultural sociology. It offers a cultural sociological basis for the periodisation of Thorpe's study. Rather than the slightly arbitrary categorisations which structure humanities scholarship – Elizabethan, Romantic, Victorian – trauma theory identifies key turning points in English/British history in terms relevant to the theoretical issues at hand: the moments when situations and events – Reformation, Regicide, the Industrial Revolution – effect 'tears to the social fabric' which threaten established identities and the basis of agents' 'ontological security' (28-9). This creates an opening for cultural change - a little like Ann Swidler's (1984) account of the ways 'unsettled times' give rise to cultural innovation - in which both established and new cultural entrepreneurs or 'carriers' play key roles, some making visible a crisis by giving it cultural definition, others seeking to repair and restore the rents in transmitted representations of cultural identity, with varying impacts on how Italy was represented as cultural Other.

Field theory, in its turn, complements trauma theory, by showing and explaining the extraordinary complexity of the cultural representations to which the response to trauma gives rise, refracted through multiple levels of social structuring: the differentiation of fields of cultural production, with specific structural properties, in terms of the positions they offer to cultural producers, the kinds of class habitus (associated with specific distributions of economic and cultural capital) of cultural actors who take up those positions and so on. This could hardly be further from the invocations of some kind of unified period spirit (Zeitgeist) which is associated with the inherited periodisations of much humanities scholarship, sometimes updated with post-structuralist notions of period epistemes on the model of Foucault (and surprisingly even invoked as an analytically meaningful concept in YCS scholarship – Alexander, 2003: 17 on Willis and the 'zeitgeist' (sic) of 'the lads'; Bartmanski, 2012: 430 on periods when intellectuals become 'iconic'). The interplay between YCS and field theory gives Thorpe's study an exceptional richness and sharpness in being able to show the diversity and even the contradictory character of cultural representations of Italy in any particular period (the account of the nineteenth century, coming out of the trauma of the Industrial Revolution is particularly strong): an intrinsic logic entailed by certain cultural structures, the field based logic of their elaboration, the tensions between the visions of actors with their specific class based habitus, the possibilities and constraints afforded by specific positions of cultural producers in their respective fields, all combining to inform processes of cultural change which are at one highly dynamic, open ended (no

teleology) and internally contradictory, and yet highly structured. It is really a model of analysis that is able to show, explicate and explain complexly structured patterns of cultural change operating at a number of different levels of temporality over an extended period of historical time: long term cultural structures (the split between Italy-Past and Italy Present, with Catholicism as sacred-evil, coming out of the Reformation and the creation of a Church of England), medium term ones (for example linked to institutions like the Grand Tour or the emergence of specific cultural fields), and short term ones, the kinds of interventions of poets and pamphleteers in response to the immediate events of the Italian struggle for independence led by Garibaldi.[1]

All that said, there are some places where the theoretical apparatus creaks, and the analysis is not fully satisfying. The difficulties seem to me to come mainly from certain inherent contradictions in some of the ways in which culture has been conceptualised in YCS, and which Thorpe's work inherits. The ultimate root of these problems lies in Jeffrey Alexander's model of culture based in Durkheim's sacred/profane binary, mapped with Saussure's structural linguistics, and its assumption of an arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified, and coming with this the assumption that culture is fundamentally discursive, grounded in these binary, culturally conventional, language based systems of categorisation. A number of difficulties arise from YCS style cultural analysis rooted in these assumptions. The first is the slipperiness of the categories, of which the structure and the status is not always clear, sometimes pitched at a rather high level of abstraction and operating in a rather procrustean fashion in relation to the cultural texts which are the object of analysis. At one moment, for example, the opposition between sacred and profane maps onto one between good and evil, whereas at another we have the 'mundane' (so neither sacred, nor profane, thus a ternary structure rather than a binary one), and the invocation of oppositions such as sacred-pure versus sacred-evil (27-8, spelling out the basic concepts with reference to the resignification of Catholicism as sacred-evil).[2]

As a result, it is too often unclear in Thorpe's analysis where these categories and oppositions are either

(1) ontologically given categories intrinsic to any human cultural categorisation (like sacred versus profane for Durkheim and Alexander), or

(2) analyst's categories providing a simplifying representation of the cultural representations being analysed, or

[1] Although the target of explanation – cultural change rather than social change – is somewhat different, Thorpe's approach could be interestingly compared with that of William Sewell (2005), where the latter is much more explicit in his appropriation of Braudel's approach to time, only rather vaguely alluded to in Thorpe's invocation of the *longue durée*.

[2] The confusion is already present in Alexander's in many respects very interesting attempts to develop a sociology of evil: Alexander (2003, 31-38, 109-20). Alexander argues that: "evil must not be seen as something which naturally exists but as arbitrary construction, the product of cultural and sociological work. This contrived binary, which simplifies empirical complexity into two antagonistic forms and reduces every shade of grey between, *has been an essential feature of all human societies but especially important in those Eisenstadt (1982) has called the Axial Age civilizations*" (31; emphasis added). There are two different arguments blended here: (a) that all societies have a concept of evil as a logical counterpart to good, and a counterpart to the fundamental opposition between sacred and profane, indeed mapping onto it; (b) what varies across cultures is what gets defined as evil, and when it gets defined as such, as Alexander shows very clearly in his study of the changing discourse around the killing of Jews in Nazi concentration camps, from simple mass killing to the evil of the Holocaust. But if the opposition is an 'essential feature of all human societies', as indeed the polarising cultural logic which it entails, how can it be 'especially important' in some societies, but not others. If it is an 'essential' feature, in opposition to good, like sacred versus profane, cultures and societies are unimaginable without it. If it is not essential, then it is a culturally specific concept, which has to be invented before it can structure human cognition; but then it does not make sense to use it as an analytical concept, a kind of ontological given, like sacred and profane, as both Alexander and Thorpe do.

It is by no means clear that all cultures are possessed of a concept of radical evil (that is to say a good/evil polarity, in addition to simple good/bad), such as Alexander assumes as a kind of logical/cognitive necessity as the counterpart to the category 'good'. A case in point would be the Confucian mandarins of classical and early medieval China, as analysed by Weber. The Confucian orientation to the world involved harmonious adaptation, rather than the strong tension characteristic of the Christian, and in particular the Puritan, tradition. Not good conduct was characterised as impropriety, or bad manners, showing a lack of taste since it undermined smooth and harmonious intercourse. Weber's argument has been challenged, in particular in relation to the capacity of the Chinese tradition to generate some kind of equivalent to the Protestant ethic from within, and scholars of Neo-Confucianism, like Theodore de Bary and Thomas Metzger, have identified a sense of evil, and the guilt associated with it, in the writings of late imperial (Qing Dynasty) bureaucrats – but of course this was in part the result of a long history of the reshaping of Confucianism through interaction with (Indian) Buddhism, characterised by a radically different cosmology (for a succinct discussion: Shinohara, 1986).

Much of Alexander's account of evil has a deeply puritanical Christian character, reminiscent of certain passages from Weber's Protestant Ethic, accounts of the witch trials in Salem, or the Counter Reformation Inquisition: p. 115: "Such knowledge and fear triggers denunciation of evil in others and *confession* about evil intentions in oneself, and rituals of punishment and purification in collectivities. In turn, these renew the sacred, the moral, and the good… Evil must be coded, narrated and embodied in every social sphere – in the intimate sphere of the family, in the world of science, in religion, in the economy, in government, in primary communities" (emphasis added).

(3) culturally specific categories or oppositions embedded in the cultural texts / discourses being analysed, and thus actors' categories.

One example of where this leads to confusion (at least for this reader) is pp. 49ff, discussing the 'deep cultural codes' of Italian humanism. We are told that the humanist discourse of civility centered on 'binary codes' which 'emphasized "society" over the "self" (49) (perhaps, but what about Burckhardt on Renaissance discovery of the individual?), and while a corresponding 'discourse of barbarism was rooted in many of the same anti-ideals we continue to associate with civility: proximity to Nature (…) "tribalism" and "disorder" over "social integration" and "formal organisation". Some of these categories seem to be actors' categories: civility itself of course, but also barbarism and Nature. But it is hard to see how barbarism and Nature could have been aligned in Renaissance discourse: after all, Nature was the model for Renaissance artists, partly on the basis of the inheritance of 'naturalism' from classical antiquity, partly refigured on the basis of Nature being God's creation, and thus the most worthy object of imitation (in particular by contrast with the work of other artists) (Blunt, 1940: 18-20 on Alberti, in the broader context of exactly the broader civic humanist discourse with which Thorpe is concerned; 24-33 on Leonardo; Summers, 1987). Art imitating nature, whether classical or Renaissance, was contrasted with the anti-classical, anti-naturalistic art and architecture of the Gothic 'barbarians' of the Middle Ages, 'totally lacking in grace, design and judgement' (Fernie, 1995: 32 – extract from Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*). Other categories seem to be neither ontological categories (like sacred/profane), nor actors' categories (like Nature, barbarian), but rather categories of a sociological theory kind, dropped into the mix – 'social integration', 'formal organisation': it is difficult to see of what commonly used concepts in Italian Renaissance thought these terms could be translations or counterparts. This sometimes makes for rather confusing and not always persuasive cultural analysis.

The use of the YCS model of culture also gives rise to some problems with how Thorpe handles the *agency* of culture. Culture certainly does have agency for Thorpe. First, there are the fundamental categories of sacred and profane, good and evil, which have a deep structural status as intrinsic to human cognition. Then, as we have seen, there are cultural categories and oppositions that have a very long-term character, like the opposition between Italy-Past and Italy-Present, between Protestantism and Catholicism as sacred-good and sacred-evil, which are established during the Reformation, and endure for centuries. And with each of the changes in cultural representation that Thorpe analyses – whether changes as the result of cultural trauma, or in the context of changes in the structure of the field of cultural production, or in relation to cultural carriers with different class habitus and in different positions in such fields – it is very clear that the inherited cultural structures act as constraining and enabling factors in the elaboration of new structures. Thus, in some respects the YCS/FT combination overcomes the criticisms of the Marxian reductionism sometimes attributed to Bourdieu's field theory (notably in Alexander, 1995).

But the way in which cultural agency is described is a rather rationalist and reductive one, articulated in terms of the *coercive* effects of meaning, a function, I would argue, of the strictly linguistic model of culture formulated in YCS. The 'coercive capacity' of the symbolic discourse of civility is 'what led Henry VII to install Italian courtiers, musicians and philosophers at his court' (53). 'Compelled by the coercive power and pervasiveness of Republican and Roman imperial symbolism' (97), members of the English aristocracy set off on the Grand Tour. It was the 'coercive capacities' of liberal discourse and the civil sphere that were harnessed to the 'symbolic reframing of the oppressed status of Italians-present' in the struggles for Italian liberation and unification in the 1840s (140). The writings of poets like the Brownings succeeded in 'compelling identification' (145) with the Italian cause, with their texts as agents of 'psychological identification and moral extension' such that the Italian people were resignified as 'sacred pure and the occupying forces as morally impure and polluted' (146-7). Coercion and compulsion seem to me to be unhelpful terms for describing how culture operates: on the one hand it seems to equate the agency of culture with brute force, which seems undesirable in all kinds of ways; on the other it effects an idealistic reduction, effacing the agency of the actor in relation to their cultural setting. There are much better vocabularies to explain what discourse does, namely influencing, persuading, activating value commitments, which recognise the active role of culture, but also that of the individual human actors whose, on some level, consensual response is entailed in their being persuaded and influenced, or having their value commitments activated. Henry VII, for example, was not 'coerced' by Italian discourses of civility and aesthetics; rather he chose them, from amongst a field of possibilities (including inherited English late medieval culture), in part because primed by his earlier education and the prestige of the classical (intensified by Renaissance culture), in part because the new education and the humanists afforded useful resources in the creation of a more effective (early-modern) state, in part influenced by contemporaries (especially the circles of the French aristocracy with whom he had lived while in exile), in part because the new culture also afforded more powerful ways of projecting the symbolic aspect of the new state. They were the reasonable choices of a knowledgeable agent, with already existing value orientations, in the context of social circles through which he was influenced and in relation to specific interests and normative obligations given in his role as monarch. (Other monarchs in comparable situations made less good choices: Mary, Charles I, etc.).

The cultural analysis operating at the level of categorisation and reclassification – the 'resignification of the Italian people as sacred pure and the occupying forces as morally impure and polluted' (147) in the aesthetic texts of poets like the Brownings - works quite well; but less so the claims about 'psychological extension and moral identification'. It is here that one would really like some thicker description to understand how in practice these processes work, and the vocabulary of compulsion is simply not up to it. Both psychological identification and moral extension – which presumably refers to what in pre-YCS vocabulary was referred to as inclusion and the extension of scope of solidarity – presuppose some kind of reference to the personality as relatively autonomous subsystem of action (alongside its social and cultural counterparts). Interestingly in their programmatic article - 'The discourse of American civil society: a new proposal for cultural studies' – which established the theoretical core of what was to become the Strong Programme, or YCS, Alexander and Smith acknowledge that as it stood, their account of the articulation of the cultural with the social based on the Durkheim/Saussure synthesis was significantly incomplete: "It is one thing to lay out the internal structure of cultural order and quite another to say precisely what role this culture structure plays in the unfolding of real historical events or in the creation or destruction of empirical institutions. As far as general statements of this problem go, Parsons' AGIL model still does the job. Culture is always a generalized input, but only through a 'combinatorial' process with more concrete and more material exigencies does it actually affect social life" (Alexander and Smith, 1993: 159). They conclude (p. 196): "We do not claim to provide in this article anything approaching a complete theory of the relationship between culture and behaviour. An adequate account would have to involve a detailed consideration of the psychological, not merely the cultural environment of action, an account of socialization, motivation, and personality that is beyond the scope of our essay." This promise on giving the personality system the same kind of analytic status as cultural and social systems was never made good, and as what became known as the Strong Programme grew 'stronger', YCS doubled down on the notion of discursive meaning, articulated in terms of the culturally arbitrary binary codes of language, for the core of culture (Alexander and Smith, 2018) all as part and parcel of producing a definitively 'post-Parsonian' (Smith, 1998: 3; Alexander [and Smith], 2003: 16) cultural sociology, in which the role of personality as a system and Parsons combinatorial model of process are erased.[3]

Alexander and Smith have sought to address some of the initial criticisms that the Strong Programme was simply a form of cultural idealism (for example Battani et al., 1997, esp. 784; Biernacki, 2000: 290-2; initial response, Alexander and Smith, 1999), most notably in the context of their development of the performance turn (Alexander, 2005), which focusses on the role played by social interaction in the realisation of culture's agency. Alexander and Smith might attribute the shortcomings I have indicated in Thorpe's analysis to his failure to address this, which, to be fair, Thorpe acknowledges. In order to make manageable the kind of longue durée approach that characterises his study, he chooses to focus on the structural hermeneutic level of the Strong Programme, rather than the cultural pragmatic or performative, and thereby compresses 'the kinds of micro-level processes by which meanings are made, performed, and fuse or not with actors and audiences' (25). But in practice I think cultural idealism, and an inability adequately to conceptualise the expressive-aesthetic (and hence the affective) is baked into the initial theoretical core of the Strong Programme, as articulated by Alexander and Smith (1993), and there is a case for seeing the various new directions within that programme as attempts to elaborate a protective belt around the core, but in practice introducing newly contradictory elements (see Lakatos, 1970 for this terminology in characterising research programmes). Nowhere is this more true than in Alexander's theory of 'iconicity', which Thorpe draws upon in his discussion of the role of visual arts in English representations of Italy.

Following Alexander, Thorpe (28) discusses icons as 'containers into which sacred meanings are distilled and condensed', in which discursive 'meaning takes material form'. As such, icons give rise to a special mode of consciousness, 'iconic consciousness', that is to say 'modes of consciousness receptive to moral, sensuous and aesthetic forces'. Thorpe never really spells out what he understands by an iconic mode of consciousness and its entailments, but in YCS studies, and in particular the work of Jeffrey Alexander (2008, 2010) it is a key context in which feelings enter into cultural representation – 'the material feeling of meaning' as framed in the title to his 2008 article – alongside the affective charge intrinsic to the sacred/profane opposition which Alexander, following Durkheim, sees as the underlying deep structural basis of all cultural classification. 'For a material substance to become iconic, its aesthetic surface must, at one and the same time, stand for an invisible discursive depth', Alexander and Bartmanski (2012: 2) state. In the periods with which Thorpe is concerned, this cultural phenomenon plays an important role particularly in the eighteenth century. The Grand Tour is marked by the

[3] Symptomatically, when a YCS adherent (Woodward, 2007: 137-40) asks how we can move beyond 'meaning centered' approaches to objects, focussed on 'communication' to a framework of analysis that can also address 'motivations, drives and attachments', his answer is to introduce (ostensibly as some kind of innovation) approaches 'recently charted by sociologically oriented psychoanalytic theorist Nancy Chodorow', exploring how 'people create and experience social processes and cultural meanings psychodynamically – in unconscious, affect-laden, non-linguistic, immediately felt images and fantasies' (Chodorow, 2004: 26), apparently unaware that Chodorow's work, dating back to her classic study *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) is deeply indebted to Parsons' Durkheim-Freud synthesis.

'iconicisation of Renaissance art works and architecture as the embodiment of high art' (76). Correspondingly, in addition to collecting classical and Renaissance art, the English aristocracy commissioned country houses designed in the Palladian style and often intended to house and display their new collections of classical and Renaissance painting and sculpture. The bold forms, symmetry and clean straight lines of Palladianism, Thorpe suggests, contrasted with the ornate character of French baroque architecture. Whilst Palladianism expressed 'the sacred purity of Roman and Renaissance ideals and values', 'the aesthetic surface' of baroque architecture was 'encoded' by 'English Protestant commentators… as signifying the superficial, deceptive and overly decadent morality associated with profane Catholic depth' (91). To be sure, this was all part of the set of 'ritual-like' performances associated with the Grand Tour, refigured in an English context, and 'serving to consolidate the identity and solidarity of the English elite' (86), through processes of symbolic 'fusion'. But, as both Thorpe's and Alexander's account of how this works suggests, such fusion, and the affects associated with it, are a kind of epiphenomenal fluff for more fundamental discursive meanings. This is exactly the account of art, as 'mere cladding for thought', that Hegel and the entire German critical tradition in art history sought to overcome (Podro, 1982: 26), a tradition interestingly ignored in Alexander's accounts of aesthetics which jump straight from Kant to late twentieth-century thinkers like Danto (Alexander, 2010).[4]

Still more problematic is the underlying assumption that these artistic and architectural styles and iconographies only become affectively charged in the context of this 'iconicisation'. Being receptive to moral, sensuous and aesthetic forces, and the affective involvements they entail, far from being something special and unusual, as the YCS theory of iconicity suggests, is very much part of everyday experience, and characteristic of all properly socialised human beings (Staubmann, 2022). Visible expressions of pain and pleasure – manifested through the face or bodily comportment – invoke feelings of empathy. A Mother's Day card with a beautiful picture of a mother's favourite flowers may express feelings of gratitude on the part of a child, and evoke an affective response on the part of the mother, moved by her child's remembering and expression of filial love. What changed with the collecting of Renaissance art was not whether its viewers were 'receptive to moral, sensuous and aesthetic forces' when engaging with it but the social and cultural structuring of such receptiveness. Typically, in a church setting, such paintings would have added affective intensity to the ritual performances which happened in their proximity, whether a woman praying to the Virgin Mary for some kind of intercession, or a priest invoking a painting of the Virgin in his sermon to enhance attachment of those listening to women's roles as defined in church teaching. In the country houses of the eighteenth century, and the public museums which are their successors, the affective focus shifts to appreciation of and response to the genius of the individual artist, or the national school which a particular artist represents, within the context of the art critical and art historical discourses which were developed as part and parcel of the process of the developing autonomisation of the artistic field (well discussed by Thorpe, 92-4) characteristic of late eighteenth century England. It is far from clear to me that YCS theory of iconicity adds anything to the more conventional vocabulary of 'consecration and canonisation' which Thorpe also uses (e.g. p. 92) to describe the status attributed to ancient Roman and Renaissance art styles in eighteenth century England. On the contrary it comes with a lot of misdirection and extremely undesirable theoretical baggage, all a by-product of the assumption that culture is almost exclusively a matter of discursive meanings, structured along the lines of language as described by Saussure.

CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS AS A RESEARCH PROGRAMME

These criticisms doubtless seem a bit harsh, and in terms of an overall evaluation of Thorpe's project it is important not to let even quite numerous and substantive points of disagreement overshadow the larger achievements. Consequently, rather than focussing on specific shortcoming of the study at hand, it is perhaps more fruitful by way of conclusion to step back from *Visions of Italy* and focus more on thinking about the research

[4] It is symptomatic of the logocentrism of Alexander's cultural sociology, that his account of visual art is so strongly articulated in terms of aesthetic philosophy, notably the eighteenth-century 'aesthetic-cum-moral binary of the beautiful and the sublime' (2010: 13) which he sees as continuing 'to provide the fundamental categories of sensuous experience' even today. According to Alexander, they are the fundamental concepts in the aesthetic sphere (surface), of a similar status to the sacred and the profane in the moral (depth), the two binaries combined in iconicity (2020: 385). Completely ignored are the kinds of material oppositions identified by art historians and visual psychologists as characteristic of artistic practices, whether Wolfflin's 'fundamental categories' (linear/painterly, closed form/open form, planimetric recessional etc), or the oppositions grounded in our physical embodiment in relation to art objects as manufactured objects in real-spaces, which we (as viewers) share with them, and where 'indexical inference' of facture is necessarily prior to symbolic interpretation (Summers, 2003). For a brilliant account of the mediation of the indexical, the iconic and the symbolic in visual art, indebted to Peirce, see the classic article of Meyer Schapiro (1973), 'Frontal and profile as symbolic form'.

programme in *Cultural Sociology of Cultural Representations* of which it is to be hoped the current volume is just the beginning.

Thorpe's approach could be fruitfully extended to many other comparable case studies, which would provide opportunities to develop the approach, both testing some of the specific arguments developed in *Visions of Italy* and refining the theoretical and methodological frameworks laid out by Thorpe in his agenda-setting monograph. A number of possible cases leap to mind. What would an equivalent cultural sociology of German representations of Italy look like? Many of the same traumas that informed the English case – Reformation, Industrial Revolution – are also relevant to the history of Germany, with the additional complication of religious variation, with some regions being Catholic, others Protestant. Versions of the Grand Tour, and the art-collecting and patronage associated with it, were also practiced by the German aristocracy, and their bourgeois counterparts. Goethe's account of his Italian journeys attained such a classic status that it informed both the preferred destination and in some degree the character of the traditional Abitur-Reise of young Germans, on graduating from elite high schools (Gymnasia), at least up until the 1980s.

Each of these cases would offer interesting patters of similarity and difference with the English case, which might help to confirm or question the mechanisms informing patterns of cultural process identified in Thorpe's study. They would also raise the issue of how far the representation of Italy was shaped not on a national level but on a European level, and to what degree this varied over time, in relation to the formation of nation states, with their very different temporalities (England and France relatively early; Germany late). One might guess that if we were to look at the early part of Thorpe's story – the emulation of Italian Renaissance culture and learning at the Tudor court - that one would find pretty similar patterns in France and Germany, all in the service of constructing both the symbolic and the efficient (humanist bureaucrats) aspects of early modern states, a common culture much enhanced by Latin as a shared language. Then the patterns would refract through specific Reformation and Counter-Reformation histories (different 'traumas' and radically different classifications of sacred-good versus sacred-evil resulting from them), divergence from common European patterns being enhanced by the shift from Latin to vernaculars as the primary languages of publication and learning, with perhaps a return to more similar kinds of representations in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in relation to pan-European political and cultural transformations (development of public sphere; Romanticism).

One might also want to look at the history of English representations of Greece and Spain. In the sixteenth century Spain must have been at least Italy's equal as 'sacred-evil' in the context of competition with the Spanish empire, the threat of the Armada and so on. And in the modern era it has been idealised in ways comparable to Italy as the place to pursue a lifestyle that is the antithesis of the British lifestyle – sun, sex and sangria – whether on holiday or, like Italy, as a place for a second home or permanent immigration, but with, I would guess, rather different class (and age?) demographics than Britons moving to Italy. Simultaneous processes of cultural affirmation and cultural denigration have also characterised English representations of modern Greece, particularly during the later eighteenth century when, as a result of the Napoleonic Wars, Greece replaced Italy as the ultimate destination of Grand Tours. In many respects the sacrality of Greece-Past, as the fount of freedom and democracy, was even more marked, with similar doubts about the worthiness of Greeks-Present as heirs to that past (appropriated by the English and the Germans as the true Hellenes), or as viable candidates for self-rule. That said, the current rulers of Greece, the Ottoman Turks, were, in Thorpe's terms, doubly sacred-evil, as both Muslims (Greeks though Orthodox were at least fellow Christians) and imperialists, preventing the Greek people's national self-determination. European support for the Greek war of independence, with Byron participating as both poet and fighter, in certain respects anticipates the cultural context described by Thorpe in relation to the unification of Italy. In short, Thorpe's research programme should be one with a lot of legs.

In the course of these studies, Thorpe, and others who take up his research programme, will doubtless find it necessary to revise certain parts of the theoretical framework advocated in this volume. In this context, one of the more attractive aspects of Thorpe's work is the open and ecumenical character of his theorising, and in particular the way he is happy to put unlikely partners into dialogue, seeking the best out of each to perform particular analytical tasks, within the whole, Thorpe's own programme, being greater than the sum of its parts. This is strikingly different from the somewhat sectarian approach of Alexander and his colleagues in the formulation of the so-called Strong Programme. Alexander and Smith (2018: 14, 19) refer to this as 'our trademark combative manner', 'picking fights with weak programs'. David Gartman (2007: 382) describes the approach as a 'slash and burn strategy', by which Alexander (2003) 'hastily hacks down most of the established traditions of research in the field [of cultural sociology], refusing to share ground with the weak and ill-bred': 'all mongrel and hybrid approaches that bear the minutest taint of the objective or material are declared "weak", then summarily mowed down and set ablaze'. Gartman enumerates the remarkable range of potentially interesting work in cultural sociology which gets consumed in this bonfire of the vanities, and effectively written out of what could be interesting contributions to cultural sociology: Foucault's studies of discourse and power, the production of culture

perspective, Max Weber, the Birmingham School (synthesising Marxism with structuralism), Bourdieu and field theory; even Parsons' action theory is condemned as 'insufficiently cultural' (Alexander, 2003: 16).

As Thorpe's work suggests, there is much to be gained from seeking some kind of accommodation between YCS and the traditions of thought that were anathematised in the early essays where Alexander and Smith sought to define their new research programme. For my own part, I think most of the considerable advances in cultural analysis achieved in YCS could be retained, without the weaknesses (especially in relation to issues of expressive-aesthetic culture) if we were to see the Saussurian account of language which is the basis for YCS cultural analysis, as one specific model of human communication, namely the 'symbolic', alongside and variably intermixed with icons and indexes, as in the semiotics (or semeiotics for the true acolytes) of Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce's triadic concept of the sign (or rather of sign processes) – ground, object, interpretant - builds in the kind of dynamism that Saussure's structural linguistics lacks. Concepts such as the energetic interpretant and emotional interpretant already imply the links to action, affect and embodiment that YCS rather struggles to reestablish in adding a theory of performance and theory of iconicity onto their Saussurian model of cultural signification (Rochberg-Halton, 1982; McCarthy, 1984).[5] Conceptualising the ground of a sign (-process) in terms of varying qualitative possibilities of signification – iconicity, indexicality and symbolicity – would open up the kinds of cultural sociology developed by Thorpe and YCS to a much deeper inter-disciplinary dialogue with long-standing and more recent research in visual studies, whether the critical tradition in art history, with its close relations with Gestalt psychology (Verstegen, 2005), or recent studies in neuropsychology and neuroarthistory (Freedberg and Gallese, 2007).[6] I would see the next step in developing Thorpe's cultural sociology of cultural representations as integrating these theoretical frameworks into the discussion.[7] Perhaps not the least of Thorpe's contributions in his exciting new study is to have demonstrated that the choices open to us in developing cultural sociology are not as binary as the very concept of 'the Strong Programme' might seem to imply.

[5] It is a mystery to me why Peirce only appears as a kind of failed counterpart to the successful Saussure in the key papers in which the theoretical core of the Strong Programme was developed: e.g. Alexander (2003: 29) on early concentration camp reports accepted as facts, 'realistic signifiers of Peirce rather than the arbitrary symbols of Saussure'; 2008: 12 on the inadequacy of Peirce's concept of the sign; 2010: 10 on misleadingly realist assumptions of Peirce's concept of icon. It seems particularly odd when the performative turn within the Strong Programme is partly based on a positive appraisal of the pragmatic tradition in American philosophy and sociology, and yet both Dewey and Mead were significantly influenced by Peirce, and it is difficult to imagine the pragmatic tradition in American sociology without that background.

[6] Particularly relevant to this, note the article by Ringmar (2020), on the ways in which recent work in cognitive neuroscience could provide better grounds than the discursive/textual model of culture advocated by YCS in explaining the affective agency of performances, (published, it is worth noting, in the YCS house journal). This line of argument, although without the assistance of the cognitive neuroscience Ringmar is able to draw on, has already been developed in Lidz and Lidz (1976) (especially pp. 220ff. on expressive symbolism), using Piaget's cognitive psychology to explore the character of the 'behavioral system', and its interpenetrations with the social, cultural and personality systems. The behavioral system is as equally important an environment to culture as the personality system and the social system for the combinatorial model of how culture operates, developed by Parsons, and acknowledged by Alexander and Smith – at least as far as the personality system went – in their early essay, only to be forgotten as they developed the Strong Programme. Bearing in mind the new credence given to the embodied bases of empathy, coming out of the research programme in cognitive neuroscience discussed by Ringmar, and the central concept/finding of mirror neurons and their operation, it might be interesting to return to Heinrich Wölfflin's (1966, o.v. 1888) *Renaissance and Baroque*, which gives an account, in terms of empathic embodied perception and response, of the opposition between the two styles of architecture which Thorpe addresses (pp. 90-2) in terms of symbolic discourses, meanings to be decoded.

[7] Of course, like any critic, I have certainly engaged with Thorpe's approach from a certain theoretical orientation (cf. Tanner, 2000), and he might well argue that, had he sought to incorporate the concepts and levels of analysis that I am asking for, his book would have very much longer than it is, and likely longer than anyone would wish to read (a bit like this essay). It is probably as well to add only one new level of complexity at a time, and trying to do more, as Thorpe himself implies, could well have inhibited the remarkable explanatory power, the unusual empirical scope, and the exceptional clarity that comes from the dialogue he stages between Bourdieu's Field Theory and the Strong Programme of Alexander and the Yale School. That said, I think such concepts could usefully clarify some theoretical gaps in the logic of Thorpe's argumentation, and significantly strengthen his accounts of how culture works.

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