

Good the durkheim school:structuralism, semiology, and beyond book review example...

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There are few theories and theoretical frameworks in the realm of sociology that can rival structuralism and semiology in its scope and lasting impact in the academic realm. The “ Durkheim School” as it was called in the academe, was primarily concerned with the matter of treating ‘ social facts as things’. The sociologist from which this movement shares its name - Emile Durkheim - advocated for a sociology that was not based on a theory which took the individual as the starting-point of analysis (Thompson 35).

Subsequent sociologists that followed Durkheim’s philosophy were also concerned with the objectivity of the field, removed from influences of history and sociopolitical context. Foremost among these sociologists is Claude Levi-Strauss who, in his essay “ The Structural Study of Myth”, advocates the structural study of culture and widely-held cultural beliefs, he terms “ myths”. In the essay, Levi-Strauss analyzes the Oedipus myth in his deconstruction. In so doing, he attempts at a critical understanding of the meaningful elements of cultural products in their structured relations to each other. He arrives at the conclusion that the Oedipal story reflects the human concern in the conflict between the human and the primitive. Another sociologist, Jean Baudrillard, also followed in Durkheim’s and Levi-Strauss’s footsteps. In his “ Simulacra and Simulations: Disneyland”, he explored the social reality of simulated worlds, arguing that today’s modern world has erased the distinction between social and simulated reality. Finally, Roland Barthes is perhaps one of the more recognizable names in the realm of sociology and cultural theory itself. His establishment of semiology, as a derivative of structuralism and the Durkheim school, has garnered him a distinct following in the academe. Barthes’ “ Semiological Prospects”

showcases his attempt at establishing a systematic and structuralist study of cultural forms. Barthes, Durkheim, Levi-Strauss, and Baudrillard are all academics who derived their meaning from the objective practices of their cultural analyses. Partly in response to Marxist analyses, these sociologists were motivated by a desire to locate cultural analyses in the realm of objective science.

The Durkheim school may be seen as an attempt of academics and sociologists to remove the field from political and historical influences. In contrast to Marxist theory as espoused by Gramsci, Althusser, and Zizek, structuralism and semiology are more concerned with an objective analyses of cultural forms such as films, music, advertisements, and books.

Structuralism and semiology are also different from feminist theory in that it does not have any political agenda. In fact, the very purpose of establishing structuralism is to remove the study of culture from political representation and sociopolitical analyses. This is an understandable development, and affords a fresh perspective on the study of culture and art. In way, the attempts of Durkheim, Barthes, and Levi-Strauss are means by which cultural analyses are moved closer to the realm of science and objectivity. These are useful in that they present an attempt of academics to become more in tune with objectivity and removing their own personal biases and beliefs from their medium. These are welcome theories - in the realm of sociology and other academic endeavors - that prove the academics' desire to become an unbiased look into the realm of culture.

Works Cited

Thompson, Ken. Emile Durkheim. New York: Ellis Horwood, 2002. Print.

RESEACH PAPER TOPICS

1. The Sociology of Cinema
2. The Sociology of American Horror Films
3. The Sociological Implications of Social Media