



Introduction to the Book Review Symposium

Cultural Sociology

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The following book review symposium began life in the form of an event that took place on 14 October, 2020, organised on behalf of the group for Social, Cultural and Political Theory within the School of Sociology Politics and International Studies (SPAIS), at the University of Bristol. The idea for that event was to invite a selection of key scholars to discuss an important new work in social theory, namely, a recent and particularly promising book by Isaac Ariail Reed, entitled *Power in Modernity: Agency Relations and the Creative Destruction of the King's Two Bodies*. The book caught our attention as it seemed to offer a wealth of insights on classical sociological topics, but at the same time to propose a fresh understanding of those topics, and to provide an important new intervention in the field of the cultural and historical sociology of power. For the initial event, the author kicked things off by outlining the book, followed by discussants who, having carefully studied the book in advance, provided their responses, and in some cases objections, which were in turn met by further elaborations and counterarguments by the author. Although in our initial plans we intended to hold this event in Bristol, we unfortunately had to abandon those plans due to COVID-19 related restrictions. Resorting to an online platform, however, proved to be a particularly rewarding experience: most importantly, it enabled the gathering of a larger and certainly more diverse audience than we could have possibly convinced to make the trip to Bristol.

After the success of the initial event, it was agreed that we would seek the publication of a book symposium. In terms of contributors, we were grateful that Emily Erikson was kind enough to accept an invitation to join us at this later stage. On the other hand, we were sad that Eric Lybeck, one of the initial participants, had to withdraw. Most contributions have been reworked through discussion as well as further study and reflection, while also retaining some of the stylistic imprint of their initial status as relatively informal talks.

Complementary summaries of the book are offered in all of the following pieces, so we will refrain from adding yet another here. Whilst all the responding scholars identify a great deal of merit in Reed's work, they also, each in their own way, provide critical engagement. What follows is a highly abridged summary of some of the key critical themes raised.

Marcus Morgan's response focuses on Reed's typology of dimensions of power. Whilst sympathetic overall to the utility of Reed's categorisations, he nevertheless questions his decision to split 'relational' from 'material' power. Morgan asks whether a re-fused material-relational account of power might not continue to serve us well in highlighting one of the necessary economic features of the various global transitions to modernity.

Emily Erikson chooses to interrogate Reed's identification of the body metaphor as constitutionally significant to modernity, questioning how this metaphor applies in non-European contexts, and highlighting the exclusionary implications it holds.

Stephen Kemp's review is interested in how Reed's work might be seen as a development of his earlier writing on the place of hermeneutics in the social sciences. In particular, he is interested in the degree to which Reed's latest book can be read as expressing a continuity with his earlier preoccupations with understanding society in terms of meaning, interpretation, and process, as opposed to the constraining influence of an external 'social structure' existing 'out there'. Kemp suggests that this new book occasionally risks treating meaning as though it were such a reified social structure, rather than the variable and contingent product of a sequence of interactions.

Monika Krause raises several important critical points of her own. Amongst them, she questions whether the theoretical term 'exclusion' adequately captures all the various ills and victimisations produced by the exercises of social power Reed identifies. Krause also senses some ambiguity over whether *Power in Modernity* should be read as an analysis of a particular social sphere – the specific sphere of political power – that assumes a broader theory of a differentiation of spheres, or whether his account of power should be taken as a critique of such differentiation theories altogether.

Leonidas Tsilipakos takes up the issue of how Reed builds on Ernst Kantorowicz's work, singling out analytically the various methodological, theoretical and conceptual choices that provide for the claim that 'the King's second body' eternally recurs. His review appreciates the scope of Reed's work but remains circumspect as to its (or any work's) ability to adequately synthesise such a broad sweep of ideas and arguments, and, further, to handle the clash between historicist and formal theoretical modes of inquiry.

As readers will discover, in his reply to critics, Isaac Ariail Reed, has chosen to helpfully restate the intent of the book as well as the scope of its argument and to engage with and defend against some of the critical issues this introduction has itemised.

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