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Review of *Kinship with Strangers: Adoption and Interpretations of Kinship in American Culture*. Judith S. Modell. Reviewed by Dorina N. Noble, Louisiana State University.

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world (170). But despite numerous examples, this topic is still approached only circuitously.

The link between objectivity and theory is handled a little more comprehensively. Reminiscent of Stanley Fish, Aronowitz apparently agrees with the postmodern position that truth is underpinned by ideology (43). While citing Robbe-Grillet, the practice of science is recognized to "constitute a 'reading' of reality" (65). Furthermore, in his evaluation of critical theory and Bachelard's philosophy of science, Aronowitz conveys the idea that scientific knowledge is inundated by theory and not valuefree (113–114). With respect to the objectivity of science, Aronowitz tends to side with those who argue that scientific knowledge rests on certain assumptions that are not necessarily universal.

Hardly any attention is devoted by Aronowitz to the issue of whether morality is reinforced by a reality *sui generis* or is dialogical. Mostly while discussing the work of Bakhtin and criticizing Habermas, Aronowitz seems to reject the Durkheimian claim that the centerpiece of moral order must be an ahistorical referent. According to followers of Durkheim, society will devolve into chaos unless an Archimedean point of available to support morality. Although Aronowitz does not find this prediction convincing, he fails to provide a serious assessment of dialogical morality.

In sum, Aronowitz's effort is interesting in places and convoluted in others. He is not very easy on his readers. So, anyone who wants to penetrate this book better be patient, and not expect immediate clarity or insights.

John W. Murphy
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Judith S. Modell, *Kinship with Strangers: Adoption and Interpretations of Kinship in American Culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994. \$35 hardcover.

"Mom, my teacher said I have to do a family tree." My adopted daughter's words triggered yet another bemused reverie on the questions that beset those affected by adoption: Which family? What is family? What does it mean to be kin? Such quandaries are not exclusive to members of the adoptive triad (birthparents,

adoptive parents, adopted individuals); they also create fodder for newscasters, talk show hosts, legal scholars, politicians, TV movie producers, and preachers (as witnessed by bitter and public custody fights, parent/child divorces, debates over surrogate motherhood and nontraditional reproduction, and the very public Dan Quayle vs. Murphy Brown exchanges on the core issues of family values).

Modell in her intriguing book, *Kinship with Strangers*, draws the conclusion that adoption is but a representation of the struggle of American society to shape and refine the boundaries of "family". According to Modell, adoption has been structured by law and policy to mirror a public conception of the perfect American family—and that family structure is based on genealogical bedrock: families belonged together because they shared the same blood line. By emphasizing the matching of parents and children, reissuing birth certificates in the adoptive parents' names, and legally treating adopted persons as if they were born into the adoptive family, public policy constructed modern American adoption to mimic genetic blood lines and to mirror the ideal nuclear family unit, complete with gender assumptions. Therein lies the paradox of American adoption, Modell contends: by reflecting the supposed importance of blood ties, adoption actually reinforces the notion that genetic kinship is paramount in defining "real family"—a conservative concept that many who believe in adoption would philosophically deny.

This book (which easily could have been called "The paradox of family") set me to thinking about other imponderables of kinship. What is the basis of the overwhelming human need to belong, to be part of some special group called "family"? Why do people want children, sometimes making the acquisition of children a primary life goal? In a society that gives generous lip-service to protecting vulnerable children, how can we determine what is really in the best interests of a child? Why do children, even children who have been mistreated by their parents, so frequently express a persistent, deep need to have relationships with—and approval of—their original parents? How do we protect the rights of children, of biological parents, and of substitute (including adoptive) parents? As our knowledge base of genetics

mushrooms, how do we make sense of the connections between genetic background and social environment?

Kinship offers no answers, nor was it intended to do so. The value of this book is that it highlights, using adoption as an interpretive model, the strange, even quirky ways, Americans view family relationships. After examining the background of adoption policy in the U.S., Modell considers the different experiences of relinquishing a child for adoption, of applying to be an adoptive parent, and of living as an adopted child. From that perspective she discusses the birthparents' and adoptees' experiences of searching for roots, while viewing the adoptive parents' reactions to searches. Through interviews and group meetings with birth parents, adoptive parents, adopted persons, and adoption social workers, Modell wades through these swamp waters, concluding that most of her interviewees experienced the adoption system as oppressive but felt powerless in that system. Even social workers, presumed to have power to disrupt and create legal parent/child relationships, feel impotent to foresee the future for any child and determine what "good family" means when the larger society and its laws have inconsistent guidelines for family integrity. One way some verbal members of the adoptive triad have begun to establish control is to develop support groups and take their stories to the public, with birth parents (the invisible but critical players in adoption) struggling to reconnect with their offspring, adopted people arguing for open records, and adoptive parents pleading for legal safeguards and recognition of their unusual commitment to parenting.

The operative word, here, is *some*: not all members of the adoptive triad, of course, are activists of change. Some people are either content with their adoptive situations, apathetic, or unable to fight for change. Such people are anonymous, largely hidden from researchers like Modell. Consequently, her sample reflects only the support, training, or change groups where she contacted subjects, all of whom seemed to have translated the experience of adoption into an odyssey of self-discovery and life-analysis. Nor does the sample (as Modell acknowledges) include many examples of the changing world of adoption: children considered unadoptable a few years ago (mentally or emotionally or physically handicapped, older, mixed-race, or sibling group children)

being placed with parents who were previously not candidates for adoption (foster parents, single persons, people with financial limitations, gays, individuals with health problems, etc.) with some degree of openness between all parties to the adoption. Modell contends that the move toward open adoption carries the potential of changing the foundation of American views of family, because of its dramatic departure from the accepted idea that biological, or *as-if* biological, ties are the truly critical components of family connectedness.

Who knows? Perhaps this society is moving toward Kahlil Gibran's admonition: "Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself. They come through you but not from you. And though they are with you yet they belong not to you". Now that, like open adoption, is a truly revolutionary conception of kinship.

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Jonathan Turner. *Classical Sociological Theory: A Positivist's Perspective*. Chicago, IL: Nelson Hall, 1993. \$ 18.95 papercover.

This collection brings together twelve essays on classical sociological theory that were published between 1975 and 1990 and three new essays that were written to fill in the gaps. The essays are unified by one of the leading themes of Turner's writings: the claim that sociology can be a natural science that develops universal laws. To move the study of classical sociological theory in this direction, Turner adopts a presentist strategy for reading Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, Marx, Simmel, Weber, Pareto and Mead. Concerns for context, authorial intent and biography are abandoned in favor of first extracting essential theoretical ideas and then presenting them formally as abstract laws and dynamic analytical models that can be tested. By systematically following this theoretical strategy, Turner wants to demonstrate that his way of reading classical sociological theory can contribute to culmination of knowledge and ultimately "make books of classical theory unnecessary" (p. ix).