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Generally, reviews of new ethnographies are solicited and compiled by the New Ethnographies Editor. The preferred form is the short, critical essay addressing theoretical, methodological, and/or substantive contributions of recently published materials relevant to ethnographic inquiry. In preparation of this section, and in addition to the standard academic audience, the New Ethnographies Editor invites the participation of practitioners and graduate students committed to the application of field research. Please direct volunteered reviews to Marc L. Miller, New Ethnographies Editor, University of Washington, HF-05, Seattle, WA 98195.

NEW ETHNOGRAPHIES

CLASS: A GUIDE THROUGH THE AMERICAN STATUS SYSTEM, *Paul Fussell*, New York: Summit, 1983, 202 pp. \$13.95 (cloth).

Dear Sir:

My bank teller embarrasses me terribly by saying at the end of the transaction, "Have a nice day." I don't know what I'm supposed to say back. Can you help?

Sincere

Dear Sincere:

I suppose you can say "You too" or "Have one yourself," although this last, like "Have one on me," would sound a bit flippant. You should never say "Mind your own business"—that would be very rude.

The best response to "Have a nice day," I think, is the one devised by a British friend of mine. He says: "Thank you, but I have other plans." Perfectly polite, and yet it leaves no doubt that you are *not* in that person's social class.

Like much of Stephen Potter's work, this book is so much fun that it is tempting not to take seriously its acute analysis of social interaction. Unlike the large body of survey research on class-based behavior, which provides little feel for intercultural variations in style, Fussell approaches the style issue directly.

"My researches," he says (with no further reference to what sort of activity constituted them), "have persuaded me that there are nine classes in this country." He groups the nine into (a) "top out-of-sight," "upper," and "upper middle," (b) "middle," "high-proletarian," "mid-proletarian," and "low-proletarian," and (c)

"destitute" and "bottom out-of-sight." Distinctions among the top three classes depend mainly on the ratio of inherited to earned income. The middle group is divided by the nature of their work ("the wider the difference between one's working clothes and one's 'best,' the lower the class. . . . Occupational class depends very largely on doing work for which the consequences of error or failure are distant or remote, or better, invisible, rather than immediately apparent to a superior and thus instantly humiliating to the performer").

Fussell describes the characteristic preferences of each class in clothing, residence, consumption (drinking, mainly), thinking, and speech. His examples are well chosen and witty.

With regard to consumption practices, the "proles" are treated most harshly.

"We seem to have developed a multibillion-dollar industry based on proles' eating junk (consider the chili hot dog, for example) and then taking junk—chalk, largely—to overcome the effects of eating it. . . . The housewife who puts up the soothing plaque in her kitchen can also invest in a stoneware pie dish reading 'Pies by Karen' (any name available). One wants to weep."

For the most part, however, it is the upper and middle classes that are savaged. Fussell applies his skill as a professional prosodist to telling effect in remarking a number of widespread usages that it is no longer fashionable to dismiss as substandard. "The 'grand' words *exquisite*, *despicable*, *hospitable*, *lamentable* invite the middle class to stress the second syllable; those anxious to leave no doubt of their social desirability stress the first, which is also to earn some slight, passing Anglophilic credit." Elsewhere, his deep concern with misplaced emphasis on second syllables surfaces with regard to various other words, including most French disyllables (*chablis*, *chauffeur*, *gourmet*), *patina*, and the British composer Purcell. (Unaccountably, he misses the example of the name Peabody, the western pronunciation of which strikes some of its distinctly upper-class eastern bearers as positively risqué.) It may be relevant here that the first line of his entry in *Contemporary Authors* reads "Fussell rhymes with 'bustle.' "

In an appendix Fussell provides detailed hints for anyone who would like to persuade him they are of a higher class. Here, he has

"tried to bring Chapin's Living-Room Scale up to date and make it a more trustworthy gauge for measuring the socialclass of your neighbors and friends." This exercise, unfortunately, turns out more embarrassment than parody because it is genuinely an example of the very worst sort of quantitative social science. Like so many bad examples of quantitative sociology, the Fussell Living-Room Scale fails in its intended purpose on numerical grounds (by classifying everybody's living room as middle-class). A room with all the good stuff (parquet floors, potted citrus trees, *Paris Match* and the *Hudson Review*, as well as at least one obelisk) would barely achieve upper-middle ranking unless it also boasted large numbers of items such as threadbare oriental rugs, leatherbound books, and original paintings by internationally recognized practitioners.

The reason the Scale is not successful is that Professor Fussell is not doing precisely what he claims in this book. As he declares, he is not commenting on the sociological dynamics of the class system but, rather, on the stylistic performance of those who occupy different positions within it. (Were his intent otherwise, making fun of the apparently innate tastelessness of the "proles" would represent a very unclassy Tory callousness.) That the behavior he describes is specifically organized as strategic impression management (in very much the same sense as Potter, John Brooks, Erving Goffman, Michael Korda, Russell Lynes, and the rest), however, puts Fussell theoretically rather up a tree. For impression management presupposes the possibility of successful faking, which he explicitly denies.

A substantial clue to his real gist appears in the very beginning, when he mentions that "you can outrage people today simply by mentioning social class." On the surface, then, he is prepared, even eager, to offend everyone. He goes on, however, to note that "it is the middle class that is highly class-sensitive, and sometimes class-scared to death." Fussell's sharpest barbs are reserved for those people whom IBM and DuPont hire "from second-rate colleges and teach . . . that they are nothing if not members of the team." He doesn't hesitate at lines like, "proles being more interesting than the middle class in almost every way, we'd expect their beliefs to be too." It is fairly obvious that he is not writing for a middle-class audience, as indeed he should not,

as they read nothing but "unreadable second-rate pretentious . . . books" anyway.

Because nobody of the other classes reads at all, this book is for those who like to consider themselves upper-middle. That class should have sufficient purchasing power to justify publication of a manual on how to fake class, since "it's a rare American who doesn't secretly want to be upper-middle class." Virtually nothing derogatory is said in the book about the upper-middle class, while the most penetrating send-ups are reserved for the two classes adjacent to it, the upper and middle. It is perhaps no accident that a great gulf appears directly below the upper-middle class, lumping upper-middle with upper and middle with proletarian.

Indeed, Fussell's upper-middle class encompasses a considerable range of styles and it is precisely within the upper-middle class that he might grant the possibility of gaining strategic advantage by superior style. In fact, a good case could be made that the upper-middle class is characteristically preoccupied with social rank, not in the gross sense of the middle class, but in terms of subtle but locally significant differentiations.

Fussell's perceptiveness and cultivation are impressive by any standard. But from the point of view of variation only within the restricted range of the upper-middle class, he appears considerably more parochial on regional, occupational, chronological, and other grounds.

His values are zealously eastern-seaboard, to the point of a eurocentricity impossible to an upper-middle residing in Chicago, Denver, or Seattle. This eurocentricity is carried so far as to deny "class" to Spanish (a perfectly good dialect of west Indo-European, but one spoken by a lot of brown-skinned folks). This neatly disposes of Houston and Miami, as well as Fussell's native Los Angeles, all of which are hopelessly compromised by hispanic history and population. (Atlanta and New Orleans, not to mention Asia, seem to be places of which Fussell has never heard.) It is certainly true that (with the perennial exception of San Francisco) North America's "old money" comes from the eastern seaboard. But this has little bearing on what is really an examination of variation within the upper-middle class.

Fussell's most celebrated academic work has been in the areas of history and poetic form (certainly archaic enough to be upper, even ignoring the recurrent British theme), but he seems to have real qualms about science and technology (which he defines as intrinsically middle-class if not proletarian). Once more, his nominal goal, to refer everything to the specifically archaic values of the upper classes, would entirely justify this. But since the real joy of the book lies in its assertion of our upper-middle values (the uppers, after all, don't care about history or poetry, either), his perspective is revealed as quite personal and idiosyncratic.

The giveaway appears in the final chapter, "The X Way Out." Despite the fact that he describes the upper-middle class on the whole quite benignly, Fussell seems to share some of the feelings of the man he quotes as blurting, "Social class should be exterminated!" The X person, according to Fussell, has altogether transcended the classlessness of having a class:

You are not born an X person, as you are born and reared a prole or a middle. You become an X person, or, to put it more bluntly, you earn X-personhood by a strenuous effort of discovery in which curiosity and originality are indispensable. And in discovering that you can become an X person you find the only escape from class. . . . When an X person, male or female, meets a member of an identifiable class, the costume, no matter what it is, conveys the message "I am freer and less terrified than you are," or—in extreme circumstances—"I am more intelligent and interesting than you are: please do not bore me". . . . The places where X people choose to live usually have a decent delicatessen and a good wine store. There is likely to be a nearby Army and Navy or hiking shop, for the dress-down clothes, and a good public or university library as a stay against boredom. A sophisticated newsdealer is also an attraction, for one needs British, French, German, and Italian periodicals. [Not Japanese, or Russian, and certainly not Spanish!] X people move away when they, not their bosses, feel they should.

This is an accurate description of the upper-middle-class dream, in a version most nearly approximated by graduate students from very top of that class, and by intellectuals and artists with secure and independent incomes. In fact (due to Roger Price's First Law, "If everybody doesn't want it, nobody gets it"),

the X life style is rather an expensive one, at least for postadolescents. Having first established that money is not the same thing as class, Fussell feels free to ignore the unfunny realities of economic opportunity altogether. He does so here, and gives no clue about how to parlay curiosity and originality into the ability to live in this desirable way.

In the final analysis, then, the book comprises the collected peeves and preferences of one exemplary individual. I share most of them, and reading them so trenchantly stated made me feel good in much the same way as a good piece of critical history makes me feel good by referring to obscure authors and concepts that I happen to know. But Fussell is preaching to the faithful and his arguments have no more intrinsic force than those in the check-out-line weeklies whose "method, dear to the prole sensibility, is to take an opinion and proclaim it as fact." Doubtless, the "mid-to-low prole" reading the *Weekly World News* obtains much the same smug ego gratification that we do reading Fussell.

This piece, nevertheless, goes on the list of required reading below Brooks and above Korda. It is once more a demonstration that if critical interpretation is the name of the game, a good English professor will lick a good social scientist ten out of ten times.

—Jerome Kirk

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OFF BALANCE: THE REAL WORLD OF BALLET, Suzanne Gordon, New York: Pantheon Press, 1983. 216 pp. \$15.95 (cloth).

The news of this book for anthropological and sociological field researchers is that ethnography is alive and well in the real world. Suzanne Gordon, who would most likely describe herself as an author, journalist, or editor, before ethnographer, exposes with insight the institutional conflicts and realities of the American ballet scene. Gordon, a lifelong follower of the ballet (she had no interest in taking instruction until she was thirty), reported for *GEO Magazine* in 1979 on a precedent-setting labor dispute