

PERSPECTIVES

The Theory Section Newsletter

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"And, paradoxically, the more the individual is concerned with the reality that is not available to perception, the more must he concentrate his attention on appearances" (Irving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* [Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1986], p. 249).

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY: A CASE OF MULTIPLE PERSONALITY DISORDER

Janet Saltzman Chafetz

University of Houston

Theory, as a distinct specialty in sociology, is characterized by multiple, often isolated, and mostly dysfunctional personalities. Most of these personalities appear largely irrelevant to sociologists who do not define themselves as "theorists" and to students required to study them. Much good theory, however, is produced by scholars who do not label themselves as such or affiliate with the theory organs of the discipline (e.g., the ASA Theory Section, the ASA journal *Sociological Theory*, and theory annuals such as *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*). The results are that our discipline fails to provide adequate theoretical training for students; cumulative theoretical development is impeded as we constantly re-invent an often four-sided wheel by a multitude of different names; and research is substantially atheoretical (albeit dressed up with the requisite "theoretical discussion").

At least five different personalities co-exist, often uncomfortably and usually unprofitably, within the beast called "sociological theory": 1) the Talmudic exegesis of classics by long dead scholars and their minor revisions to fit more contemporary concerns (e.g., what did Marx, Weber, Parsons, etc. "really mean?" or how can their ideas be stretched to relate to each other or something else?); 2) the paraphrasing ("showing the relevance") of contemporary, mostly European, inevitably pretentious, often incomprehensible and typically "anti-positivistic" metatheories (e.g., Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, Semiotics, Hermeneutics, Discourse, and Critical Theory); 3) abstract epistemological and ontological navel-gazing (e.g., the relationship between agency/micro and structure/macro, theory as discourse; text as reality, all the "how to theorize about" papers); 4) conceptual development and (sometimes) application; and, closely related to this, 5) substantive, explanatory theory.

I am sufficiently antediluvian to take seriously the word "science" in "social sciences." I accept as a matter of working faith (in practice, if not as a matter of TRUTH) the possibility that we can develop relatively general, abstract explanations of why and how empirically observed regularities in the social world occur. Moreover, these explanations are amenable to some form of empirical testing, to some manner of deciding that a given set of ideas is more credible than others—however crude the measures and regardless of the particular method employed. This is what I interpret as the irreducible core and lasting value of the term "positivism," that rarely-defined but ever-abused bête-noire of much of what today passes for sociological theory. Of the five types listed above, only the last constitutes theory by this definition, although number four, conceptual development, is a crucial prerequisite to the fifth. The fourth and fifth types are alive and quite healthy in our discipline, done mostly by some of the people who define themselves in terms of a substantive label (e.g., urban, medical, gender or political sociologist, social psychologist or

small-groups researcher) and taught in substantive courses. These are the theories that are developed and refined through constant reference to empirical data, and they sometimes actually cumulate. They constitute the (perhaps small) bedrock of whatever knowledge sociology may legitimately claim beyond that of journalists, politicians, social workers, clergy, and the lay public. It is such knowledge which justifies public support of our efforts.

As Craig Calhoun pointed out in his October, 1991 essay in *Perspectives*, theorists need to stop simply reading other theorists and begin to attend to explaining historical and contemporary social life. The reason so many do not, I suspect, emanates from two facts: 1) many theorists, by personality or lack of training, are poorly equipped to leave their libraries and offices to attend to the world around them, and 2) many have no burning substantive interest or expertise within sociology. Thus, many theorists come to focus on one (or more) of the first three types of theory: The exegesis (by sociology's equivalent of religious fundamentalists) of our discipline's long dead forebears (who mostly did have substantive interests in their real social world); the paraphrasing of esoteric Europeans, many of whom are not social scientists by training or inclination and probably have less to say to practicing social scientists than meets the eye; or philosophical navel-gazing at how theory should or should not be done. There is a faddish quality to much of this work, with specific issues and metatheories constituting the focus of hot debate and discussion for five to eight years, only to be abandoned, quite unresolved, and replaced by a hot new topic.

The first three types of theorists write the maximum number of publications possible out of an inherently unresolvable issue before moving on to a new fad. Empirical researchers typically find little of use in any of these three forms of discussion to help them understand whatever it is they are examining (although they "dress up" their papers with jargon selected from such discussions). Students (confronted with theory courses whose content focuses on one or more of these three types of material) often fail to see theory as both a viable tool in their sociological research and an on-going, centrally important enterprise to which they should eventually contribute. Ironically, because the language employed by those who write (and teach) theory of types 1, 3, and especially 2, is so abstruse and impenetrable, such scholars are often the recipients of a level of respect and prestige totally unwarranted by their real contributions to the discipline (the emperor is still not perceived as unclothed).

Sociology really should not have a section, journals, required courses, etc. entitled "theory," which serve primarily to ghettoize theoretical concerns. Substantive relevant theoretical ideas (types 4 and 5) should be and often are thoroughly incorporated into our substantive classes,

cont. on page 2

The Theory
Section Program
for the
forthcoming
American
Sociological
Association
Meeting,
Miami, Florida

Mini-symposium:
What Is Living and
What Is Dead in the
Classical Tradition

Organizer:

Stephen P. Turner,
Theory Section Chair,
Department of
Philosophy,
University of South
Florida

(by invitation)

Voices from the Margins:
Challenging the
Theory Canon

Organizer:

Prof. Miriam Johnson,
Department of Sociology,
University of Oregon,
Eugene, OR 97403
(open)

This session is designed to provide an opportunity for new and/or neglected perspectives in sociological theory to be discussed. This could include theoretically relevant voices from groups marginalized by virtue of gender, sexual orientation, race, class, and ethnicity. It could include neglected theoretical perspectives of various sorts or discussions of specific theorists who have been marginalized. Also relevant would be discussions of the nature of "the canon" itself and how it might be changed.

Referred Roundtables
Organizer:

Professor Mary F. Rogers,
Department of Sociology,
University of West
Florida,
Pensacola, FL
32514-0102
(open)

THE EDITORS TALK

Chorus: We are exploring what it means to "co-edit" the newsletter. In addition to having worked out a rough plan for the division of labor, we are going to engage occasionally in what we are calling "editorial conversations." One of our goals is to continue to publish articles written from a variety of viewpoints. A second, closely related, goal is to promote conversations among theorists from different perspectives. By "conversations," we mean effective listening and reading as well as articulate talking and polished writing.

Moodey: Publishing the article by Janet Chafetz and the materials from T.R. Young satisfies our first goal, but not necessarily the second. Chafetz and Young take different perspectives, but they are not engaged in a conversation. Indeed, they each characterize the perspective from which the other writes in ways which would make conversation between them difficult. Chafetz would be, in Young's terms, a "well-schooled modern scientist," who will find it difficult to accept that what she does is, "in fact, poetics and operatics." Young would not be flattered by Chafetz's typology, in terms of which his work would be either Type Two, "the paraphrasing ('showing the relevance') of contemporary, mostly European, inevitably pretentious, often incomprehensible and typically 'anti-positivistic' metatheories," or Type Three, "abstract epistemological navel-gazing."

Doubt: Concretely, Chafetz and Young, of course, did not have an opportunity to converse, but, by juxtaposing their articles here, we are providing an occasion for a conversation between positivism and postmodernism. I wonder, do the two commitments have anything in common? Speaking of postmodern criticism, Michel Foucault writes, "The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating, it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them" ("What is Enlightenment?" in *Inter-*

pretive Social Science: A Second Look, edited by Paul Rabinow & William M. Sullivan [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987], p. 174). Would either Chafetz or Young resist this haunting muse in today's academy?

Moodey: I cannot speak for Chafetz or Young, but I believe that the fragmentation of perspectives is a historical limit upon us as sociologists, and that one way of transcending those limits is through a kind of "ecumenical" dialogue—conversations based upon the agreement among men and women of often profoundly different beliefs and values to cooperate in searching for common truths and goods. It is just possible that what Chafetz and Young have in common is that they both believe in and value these sorts of conversations. By continuing to talk in spite of our disagreements, perhaps we can show that sociology is not the impossible muse (see Stephen P. Turner & Jonathan Turner, *The Impossible Science: An Institutional Analysis of American Sociology* [Newberry Park, CA: Sage, 1990]).

Doubt: I would like to start to try to foster conversation with a column titled "Dogmas and Heresies, Pearls and Scraps," in which salient and provocative passages from classical and contemporary sociology are cited for the purpose of constructive reflection. The ideal quotation is one that represents what Max Weber calls an inconvenient fact. "And for every party opinion there are facts that are extremely inconvenient, for my own opinion no less than for others" (Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation" in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* [New York: Oxford Press, 1958], p. 147). This issue, I will start the column, and for future issues I invite readers to send me their submissions.

Chorus: It is by extending both the theory and practice of ecumenical discourse that sociology can make significant contributions to contemporary educational and political life. The diversity of beliefs and values in U.S. education and politics, popularly celebrated as "multiculturalism," is mirrored in the condition of sociology as a multiparadigm discipline (George Ritzer, *Soci-*

cont. pg. 3

Multiple Personality Disorder *cont.*

publication organs, and section interests. For types 2 and 3, let us call them what they are—epistemology and ontology. By doing this, we will have to confront several uncomfortable facts: 1) philosophers already lay claim to these topics (academic administrators honor these claims, and philosophers do epistemology and ontology better than most of us); 2) few people who call themselves sociologists want (and, in career terms, can afford) to admit that they are not sociologists; and 3) only a small number of sociologists will attend to articles or books called "epistemology" instead of "sociological theory." Type 1, the Talmudic exegesis of classics, is mostly intellectual history and should be considered as such. Again, my suspicions are that historians lay a recognized claim to this topic, that sociologists who do this kind of work do not want to call themselves historians, and that the small readership that exists would decline even further if the substance was called by its proper name.

If we are to have a theoretically informed (dare I say impregnated?) discipline, we need to do things like integrating ideas of agency and structure in terms of an empirically relevant topic; not talk in the abstract about how one might go about doing so. We must bracket all the (not unreasonable) doubts about the nature of sociological knowledge, "truth," "objectivity," etc. and get on with gaining the best knowledge we can in the here-and-now,

knowing that it is never TRUTH. If Marx (Weber, Mead, etc.) had an idea that someone thinks is useful for explaining something today, why not just use it and ignore whether Marx really meant precisely that? Does it even matter that Marx (Weber, etc.) first had the general idea?

Another way of saying all this is that, as sociologists, our first task is to raise interesting and important questions about the observable social world—here, elsewhere, now, and historically. Theory should constitute our accumulated tool kit of abstract, general ideas that can be applied in helping to answer important questions as well as possible at a given time in the development of the discipline. Currently, too large a proportion of the minds in our discipline that are most interested in and capable of sustained abstract thought are not focused on this task. Every sociologist should be a "theorist," and none should be a theory specialist, if we are to survive and thrive as a discipline.

"Scientific 'theory'—most generally defined as a body of logically interrelated 'general concepts' of empirical reference—is not only a dependent but an independent variable in the development of science" (Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* [New York: Free Press, 1969], p. 6).

POSTMODERNISM AND THE CHAOS THEORY

T.R. Young

Editors' Comments: Murray Beauchamp's "Chaos in Sociology" (April, 1989), and David Sallach's "Chaotic Models in Complex Domains" (January, 1990) both encouraged the readers of Perspectives to consider chaos theory for their sociological work. In this article, T. R. Young presents a "menu" of excerpts from his writings on postmodernism and chaos theory in sociology.

From "Chaos Theory and Postmodern Sociology: Essays in the Poetics and Operatics of Sociology," in draft.

... we now must accept that, in economics, politics, human cognition, crime, disease, and other natural phenomena, causality opens and closes; comes and goes; fades and reappears like the grin of the Cheshire cat in a factual basin of events.

The postmodern scientist is very different from her modern counterpart; not better, just different. There will always be a place for studies of what is; however, the postmodern scientist will be just as interested in "what might be," "what could be," "what should be," and "what might have been had we not acted." The postmodern scientist will accept the role of poetics as a metaphor and as an ideology that informs the knowledge process; indeed, poetics and operatics are synonymous at the most fundamental levels of knowing with truth and validity.

It may be difficult for the well-schooled modern scientist to accept that what s/he does is, in fact, poetics and operatics. When, however, one understands that poetry is a conceptual process which contains a kernel of truth that lasts beyond the moment, that poetics borrows the imagery from one domain of life to explain the dynamics and structures of another domain, that poetics is a style of thinking which joins clarity of vision with parsimony of language, that poetics is a way of phrasing human experience in a way that reaches the most profound depths of understanding, that poetics is a way of conceptualizing a truth that is recognizable in the lived experience of the author and reader alike, then poetry is not the worst model available with which to speak to that which is center to human life.

The place of operatics in social science, indeed in every science, is even more difficult to accept as part of the knowledge process; yet it means, simply, that human work is involved in the process of choosing research problems, in the selection of research concepts, in the preference for research tools and methods and in the weaving of theoretical models of understanding—all is human labor and not to be scorned. There are not universal, ontological independent social forms or physical forms subsumed by one and only one concept, fitting and filling the truth value of one and only one theoretical model—all science is bound and given birth from human interest, passion, need and desire. That is the postmodern message.

For copies of articles and manuscripts with fuller discussions of these issues, write T.R. Young, Senior Distinguished Visiting Professor, Sociology, Virginia Polytech, Blacksburg, VA 24061-0137.

The Editors Talk cont.

ology: A Multiple Paradigm Science [Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1980]). We will prosper as sociologists, educators, and citizens—to the extent that we can learn to cooperate in creating better sociological research and theory, helping students realize their full human potential, and working for liberty and justice.

Moodey: This hope does not arise out of our sociology, but is something we bring to it and which informs it.

From "Chaos Theory and Postmodern Philosophy of Science," a lecture presented at Virginia Polytech.

Two events have presented themselves to the knowledge process in the past 40 years ... postmodern critique has developed since 1955 to challenge all truth claims, all standards, and all efforts at objectivity. Such claims have been in the air for centuries; most centered in traditional religious sensibility. Now comes chaos, itself an elegant and mathematically driven theory to confirm what post-positivists, post-structuralists, and post-modernists have been saying "for years."

If modern science and its claims of objectivity are insupportable, the task of postmodern sociologists is to frame a sociology that is value-full. By value-full, I simply mean that the researcher acknowledges the value agenda from which concepts are selected and research is done. We may not share the same set of values in every scientific enterprise; indeed, it would be most surprising were that the case. However, in the postmodern epoch, science and the knowledge process writ large must face up to its partisan and its creative nature.

From "An Open Letter to Postmodern Colleagues"

... some of you who are doing postmodern work may be greatly offended by my suggestion that chaos theory can be the "theoretical envelope" for the postmodern. You will view these comments to be just another effort by Euro-centered white male elites to package, constrain, explain, and delimit every human product.

I want my postmodern colleagues to know that the comments are written more for those in modern sociology and in the philosophy of science than for those in a postmodern modality. I accept that one need no theory or theoretical paradigm at all to do postmodern art, music, poetry, medicine, history or sociology and to do them well. I concede that postmodern expression in art, prose, architecture, psychology and sociology have infinite centers, infinite length and infinite detail. I agree that the selection of one center from which to judge all others is a political act. I appreciate that the choice of some set of details (variables in our language) to study does not, thereby, eradicate the incredible richness and connectedness of all other details in that field of study.

Chorus: We want to express our appreciation to Chris Prendergast for the tremendous help that he gave us in passing over the editorship. Craig Calhoun was right when he observed that two people were now needed to maintain the high standards that Chris established for *Perspectives*. On behalf of the Theory Section, we thank Chris for the great job that he did the past three years.

Dogmas and Heresies, Pearls and Scraps

"There is, then, a statistical relation between appearances and reality, not an intrinsic or necessary one" (Irving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* [Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959], p. 71).

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"Were it possible to induce the masses to adopt atheism, this belief would exhibit all the intolerant ardour of a religious sentiment, and in its exterior forms would soon become a cult. The evolution of the small Positivist sect furnishes us a curious proof in point" (Gustave LeBon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* [Marietta, Georgia: Lardin Corporation, 1982], p. 64).

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"The tangled web of hatreds, of complicities, of rivalries between different schools of thought and of changes in mood causes each atom in the intellectual world ... to prefer itself, while all the atoms detest each other."

The fact that certain disconcerting effects of beauty and truth may spring forth from time to time ... remains a miraculous paradox" (Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories* [London: Verso, 1990], p. 88).

LIKELY PERTINENT INFORMATION

Call for Papers

Fifth Annual International Conference of The Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics, March 26-28, 1993

New School for Social Research, New York City

The theme of the conference is "Incentives and Values as Foundations of Social Order." The host institution is the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science, New School for Social Research.

Topics to be covered include: Markets and Democracy in Eastern Europe and Latin America; The Socio-Economics of War and Conversion; Health Care; Ethics; Decision Making; Mobility and Migration; Trust in Economic Transaction; Endogenous Growth; Patterns of Economic Resistance; Socio-Economics of the Environment; Risk Taking; Micro and Macro Socio-Economics; Gender Issues in the Workplace; Teaching Socio-Economics.

Abstracts for papers should be received by December 31, 1992. SASE, 714H Gelman Library, The George Washington University, Washington, DC 20052 USA Phone: (202) 994-8167 FAX: (202) 994-1639

The new editor of *Sociological Perspectives*, the official journal of the Pacific Sociological Association, is Jonathan H. Turner. The journal is actively seeking manuscripts of general interest to the profession. Members of the theory section are invited to send manuscripts to the editor at Department of Sociology, University of California at Riverside, Riverside, CA 92521, USA. See the journal for format instruction, but in general terms, the ASR format is required. Send four copies, plus a \$10 processing fee (made out to the Pacific Sociological Association).

The 31st Congress of the International Institute of Sociology will be held 21-25 June 1993 at the Sorbonne in Paris. Over 70 working sessions have already been confirmed, and 500 participants are expected, including over 100 Americans. The two official languages for this Congress are French and English. Michel Maffesoli, Congress Coordinator and Professor of Sociology at the Sorbonne, and William D'Antonio, IIS President, have named a distinguished set of plenary speakers, including: Margaret Archer, Michel Crozier, Franco Ferrarotti, William Form, Anthony Giddens, Niklas Luhmann, Carlo Mongardini, Edgar Morin, Birgitta Nedelmann, Jack Riley, Matilda White Riley, Jacek Sztatka, Piotr Sztompka, and Alain Touraine.

Founded in 1983 by Rene Worms, the IIS is the oldest continuous association in sociology, and, certainly, the discipline's senior international body. During its founding years it was supported by Simmel, Tonnies,

Schmoller, Veblen, Small, Tarde, Ward, the Webbs, Alfred Marshall, Enrico Ferri, and Edward Ross.

The chairs of working sessions for 1993 include: Amitai Etzioni, Sheldon Stryker, David Knoke, Francois de Singly, Tamara Hareven, Yves Dezalay, Donald Black, Bart Landry, Karen Cook, Keith Hawkins, Michael Hechter, Robert Antonio, Charles Camic, Angel Federico Nebbia, Donald Levine, Horst Helle, Roberto Cipriani, Guy Menard, Roberto Moto, Dudley Poston, Gerald Marwell, David Willer, Mary Zey, Marizio Catana, Jean Guy Belley, Roderick MacDonald, and Rhonda Montgomery.

The deadline for paper submissions is 1 March 1992, but the best strategy is to submit a paper or abstract to session chairs either before or immediately after the holidays. The registration fee is \$100.00 (if paid before 15 April 1993), and one does not have to be a member of the IIS to submit for this Congress; members, however, are guaranteed a place on the program to present their work. A rating and price range of hotel accommodations near the Sorbonne is available, and the IIS is negotiating a discount fair with a major American airline.

For a complete list of confirmed working sessions and chairs, mailing addresses, and additional information about the 31st Congress—including hotel and travel information—contact David Sciulli, Sessions Coordinator, at Department of Sociology, Texas A&M University, College Station TX 77843, (409) 845-5133. For information about membership, contact R. Alan Hedley, IIS Secretary, at Department of Sociology, University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, V8W 3P5, (604) 721-8653.

Kenneth Burke Society Convention

Airlie House in Airlie, Virginia is the site of the May 6-9, 1993 Kenneth Burke Society Convention. The Airlie Convention will provide programs featuring stimulating speakers, congregation with fellow Burkeians, and intensive seminars. Seminars bring together scholars interested in one specific facet of Burke for six hours of discussion and debate. Some seminar topics and their coordinators that may be of interest to members are: "Kenneth Burke and Feminism," Sonja K. Foss, Dept. of Communication, Ohio State University; "Kenneth Burke and Postmodernism," Thomas Carmichael, Dept. of English, University of Western Ontario; "Kenneth Burke as Dialectician," David Cratis Williams, Division of Language and Literature, Northeast Missouri State University. For information contact James W. Chesebro, Dept. of Communication, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN 47809, (812) 237-3245. 15 January 1992 is the registration deadline.

BOOK ANNOUNCEMENTS/MINI REVIEWS

Paul Colomy (ed.), *The Dynamics of Social Systems*. London: Sage Studies in International Sociology, 1992, 279pp.

This volume contains papers first delivered at a 1990 International Sociological Association on neofunctionalism. Colomy's introduction situates neofunctionalist theorizing and research in a contemporary social and intellectual context and discusses the prospects and problems of this scholarly movement. In the first section, essays by Bernard Barber, Richard Munch, Frank Lechner, Samuel Surace, and Duane Champagne reconstruct orthodox functionalism's treatment of social systems and structural change, highlighting the centrality of contradictions, conflicts, and crises in traditional and modern societies. In the second section, papers by Mark Gould, Miriam Johnson, Leon Mayhew, Bryan Turner, David Sciulli, and Sally Bould reconceptualize the problem of societal integration, examining gender and racial inequalities, the struggles to institutionalize citizenship and democracy, and developments undermining liberal democracies. Several essays raise the possibility of a critical liberalism that recognizes both the achievements and the dark side of modernity.

Richard A. Hilbert, *The Classical Roots of Ethnomethodology: Durkheim, Weber, and Garfinkel*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992. 260pp. \$39.95 cloth.

The long-awaited historical reconstruction of the origins of ethnomethodology is now available with a valuable foreword by Randall Collins. Tracing ethnomethodology's concern with language and indexicality to important themes in Durkheim and Weber, Hilbert argues

that the classical roots of ethnomethodology were concealed by Talcott Parsons' famous convergence thesis.

These themes, Hilbert shows, are retrieved by Harold Garfinkel through eminent critique. Hilbert's interpretation places ethnomethodology in the center, rather than on the fringe of the discipline's mission.

David MacGregor, *The Communist Ideal in Hegel and Marx*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990. 312pp. \$19.95 paper.

Originally published in 1984, this new paperback version brings MacGregor's careful reading of the primary texts to a wider audience. MacGregor argues that Hegel's logic suited Marx's purpose so well because it already contained the unique elements which later appeared in Marx's social theory, including surplus value and the transition to communism. The mature Marx, MacGregor argues, gets even closer to Hegel, and is increasingly indebted to him.

David MacGregor, *Hegel, Marx, and the English State*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992. 345pp. \$44.50.

Revealing the revolutionary content of Hegel's social theory and the Hegelian themes that underlie Marx's analysis of the Victorian state in Capital, the author shows how the transformation of the English state in the nineteenth century influenced the mature Marx to reclaim Hegelian arguments he had earlier abandoned. These ideas included a theory of politics and social class that colored Marx's view of capitalist and working class opposition to government reform initiatives such as the Factory Acts.