

Perspectives

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SECTION OFFICERS

Chair's Message

Chair:

Social Theory Beyond the Academy: Intellectuals and Politics

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The much rumored resurgence of interest in theory should not be surprising. The academic generation now coming into its own includes many whose first sociological ideas dawned not in the academy, but in the streets, churches, and campuses where, as 60s activists, they challenged and rethought then prevailing social doctrines. In 1962 the opening words of the Port Huron Statement captured the vision of many who are today practicing social theorists: "We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit."

Sociology, and most especially social theory, is fundamentally changed since the 60s. Few could reasonably deny that sociological thinking must include or respond to powerful, new theoretical traditions -- feminist theory, a revived and radicalized political sociology, world systems and development theory, social historical studies, cultural studies, among others ranging from orthodox Marxism to the sociology of emotions. It is especially impressive that those working in these areas share and cooperate across perspectival boundaries. It is a long way from the fabled hegemony of late fifties functionalism and the wide-eyed, pluralist enthusiasms of the mid sixties.

Social theory has become more sophisticated as members of the new generation are more empirically grounded and mutually respectful than we believed our predecessors had been. These accomplishments may be due, at least partly, to values learned in our youth -- an intense political commitment, a struggle to work collectively, a desire to rethink the idea of a good and just society, and an authentic, if awkward, openness to the continuing challenges of the excluded -- women, people of color, the third world.

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It has been a good generation's work. Yet, these achievements are under attack, most prominently by William J. Bennett and Allan Bloom who are disgusted by the 60s legacy in social thought. Bloom thinks we are foolish. In The Closing of the American Mind he complains that "not a single book of lasting importance was produced in and around the movement." Bennett, Reagan's education czar, thinks we are dangerous. He laments the extent to which university students and faculty have taken seriously one of the our generation's more reasonable ideas, that college curricula should teach world — as opposed to white, male European— perspectives.

However obnoxious one may think they are, Bennett and Bloom must be taken seriously, and especially so by theoretical sociologists. They are correct to say that 60s social ideas are influencing and politicizing today's students. What sociologists should worry about is that the most influential ideas are not sociological in origin. Indeed, some of the most compelling social theory written today has little to do with sociology. The two most striking examples are literary theory and feminist theory. Works like Sandra Harding's The Feminist Critique in Science and Henry Louis Gates's The Signifying(e) Monkey are, respectively, strong theories of scientific knowledge and Afro-American literature entailing an explicit but extra-sociological social theory. Both argue that the social experience of exclusion and difference, of women and American blacks, is foundation for a reconstruction of social understanding. Bennett and Bloom know enough to recognize the importance of such notions. Do we sociologists have a clear explanation for the fact that new social theories come from outside our discipline?

To make matters worse we are also under assault from within. Russell Jacob, a respected left social theorist, denounces the 60s generation in academia. He insists, in The Last Intellectuals, that we have passed into an obscure professionalism while abandoning the political responsibilities of the public intellectual. Jacob exempts no one from his scorn — neither deconstructionists nor the leading social theorists of the day.

Ironically, these criticisms attack social theory where it has made substantial scholarly advances: politics and its understanding of the social role of intellectuals. Surely, a refreshing political perspective is central to most of the new theoretical traditions in sociology, quite explicitly in research on elites, social revolutions, theories of the State, and comparative political economy. Likewise, the sociology of intellectuals, though less visible, has made important contributions beyond earlier Marxist and sociology of knowledge views of the social basis of ideas.

Yet, our critics force us to ask if we have effectively considered the relationship between our work and the contributions of social theory to a wider society. Bennett and Bloom fear that we may have made too much of an impact, while Jacoby thinks our discourse is so turgid we are unlikely to make any. The truth no doubt lies somewhere between these two extremes on a issue of undeniable importance.

A generation whose formative experience was in the 60s is naturally interested in politics and intellectuals, especially if, as academics, intellectual work is the means in mid life to continue the politics of youth. Yet, having successfully incorporated these themes in our intellectual work, it seems time to consider more forthrightly how that intellectual work bears on the world beyond the academy, and thus to pull together the themes of both moments in our generation's life.

1. What is the public responsibility of intellectuals?
2. Which social theoretical ideas have political power in the current situation?
3. How do new departures in social theory — like feminist theory, critical theory, ethnomethodology, postmodernism, among others — inform our understanding and critique of ideology?
4. What in the present situation are the theoretical foundations of social criticism, of political engagement, and of politically responsive social knowledge?

These questions are neither unique to our time or exhaustive of those that could be asked. But our critics give us cause to bring them back to the fore. The Section's 1989 miniconference, Social Theory Beyond the Academy: Politics and Intellectuals, will provide occasion to explore them more fully.

Section News

1989 Miniconference

Charles Lemert, section chair, announces that the theme of the 1989 miniconference will be Social Theory Beyond the Academy: Politics and Intellectuals.

1989 Theory Prize

Samuel W. Kaplan
Bryn Mawr College

The Theory Prize Committee of the Theory Section of the American Sociological Association has set February 14, 1989, as the deadline for nominations for the 1988-89

competition. The annual prize goes to outstanding work in sociological theory. The selection committee operates in a broad, pluralistic, non-sectarian fashion.

Any article, paper, or book chapter, including dissertation chapters, whether published or not, may be nominated, providing only that it is no more than fifty pages long and has been completed or published in the last two years. Authors are encouraged to submit their own works.

Nominations must include a short cover letter identifying the author and title. Five copies of the text must be included. If possible, the text should not reveal the identity of the author(s).

The members of the prize committee include Samuel W. Kaplan, Bryn Mawr College, Chair; Roslyn Bologh, CUNY, College of Staten Island; Randall Collins, University of California at Riverside; Victor Lidz, Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania; and Alan Sica, University of Kansas. Nominations should be sent before February 14, 1989, to Samuel W. Kaplan, Theory Prize Committee, Department of Sociology, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010.

Change in Publication Schedule for Perspectives

Perspectives has been operating on a March, June, September, December publishing schedule. Beginning with this issue Perspectives is moving to a January, April, July, October schedule. This is more practical given the timing of the ASA meetings.

1988 ASA Conference

The ASA Convention: A Scene for Feminism

Patricia Ticineto Clough
Fordham University, Lincoln Center Campus

I arrived at one of the ASA mini-conference sessions on feminist theory expecting a performance. I came more to see, anticipating, at least, a look at the look of Dorothy Smith whom I knew of but had never seen and Jessie Bernard who I had seen years ago, and of whom I knew I could expect a display of feminist determination. One would speak first; the other last and I suspected that what would come between them would be enveloped by them, giving it the shape of feminist political conviction within a feminine psychic embrace.

Her hair severely pulled back from her face, her features were nonetheless not sharp. More than features, her face was made up of a surface, smooth and calm: an

insistent receptivity for the absence of lines that would fix an identity in traces of experience. Dorothy Smith, in the few moments of a presentation gave a sense of her project. Re-reading Durkheim's The Rules of Sociological Method, she was shifting her efforts from constructing a methodology which would not introduce an artificial objectification into the sociological representation of social processes to focus instead on clarifying sociology's articulation as a mode of representation, part of the ruling apparatus. One could easily imagine that Durkheim's text was not to be read for its methodological orientation but re-read for its institutionalization of the sociologist's scientific authority, its textualization of ideological practices of authorization. It was to be understood as a text among others, "a constitutional work of sociology," of constituting sociology as "a world-apart."

The presentation was a sketch; it sketched the audience in a space, making the space around us visible—the large auditorium, the mirrors behind the speakers, the podium, the stage, the lobby of the Peach Tree Street Mall—as a space apart, a conceptualizing, institutionalizing space to which she had come, to trouble it with the world of experience, the experienced world of women. Her arms gestured a surround; her hand indicating and indicting what was to be seen around us, as she fractured the space with that woman's face, a synecdochic signification for the whole body, itself fractured by the podium, the authority of sociology. She had come to risk taking a place in opposition to the whole edifice of sociology—"to bring it down." Not even feminist sociology was to be spared, as she pointed to the insistent phallogocentricism of a socio-logic, even when being made to serve the study of women's lives. The sociological concepts, the methods, the articulation of demonstration, often perversely, transformed that feminist project. Even methods against positivism, for preserving experience—ethnographic field work, life history, case study—everything had to be re-visioned, considered again in the name of experience. Then, let there be something more subtle in presentation, something more evocative in address, something more chilling or self-disturbing than merely speaking in the name of—even in the name of those with whom one is oppressed. And when in the name of experience, the textual moment is reflected as constituting a discipline, the very concept of experience is made itself, to tremble.

With Dorothy Smith's initiating a project, still ahead for feminists, of deconstructing sociological discourse, there could be no surprise in Joan Acker's voicing that sense of sociology's still-missing feminist paradigm shift, even though since 1984, when Stacey and Thorne first noted the missing feminist revolution in sociology, the gendering of all social relationships had become a near common place among the theoretical assumptions of social science. With patches of gender analysis here and there,

distributed about sociological texts, feminism had become the difference within, which reconstitutes the academic discipline, extending its discursive domain. Feminism thus normalized, makes it easier for young women to see their professional survival as surviving as feminists within sociological discourse. Joan Acker presented us with the irony of the common sensical fit between a distorting discourse and the distortion of lived relationships of subordination: a normalized variable analysis of gender most often engages the latter distortion while disavowing the former.

And so it might seem that we were at the beginning again or rather at another scene, a prior scene when so many of us had stood in the midst of men, masters of various discourses and recited lists of names, women's names. We righted the record at first, by merely insisting that women had always been there among men, trying to authorize 'their own' texts. Our lists meant to de-legitimize the rational order, which only inscribed names of kings, priests, generals, male philosophers. Edith Kurzweil, the compiler of 'difficult' structural and post structural theories, had come to thread a relationship from feminism through psychoanalysis to social theory. She weaved a surface for an alphabet of names, a list of women who struggle against the master-texts of Freud who named sexuality, repeatedly stumbling over female sexuality and of Lacan who took the position of the feminine, the impossibility of the full-voicing of desire, as the very condition of possibility of the psychoanalytic project. The list was of women who struggled with a discourse in which feminism had always been the difference within, a list of women caught in the between of politics and sexuality, a list of names within a discourse always about women, but which yet noted the impossibility of woman's speech, her action and her own name except through the indirection of her sexual transfer as property. There was this list of women that knew the need to struggle against their exclusion but whose recognition of psychoanalysis draws our attention to a criticism of unitary identity, to a de-mythologizing of an ideology of presence, informing the concept of experience. They uneasily locate within psychoanalysis, within its unconscious, a criticism of representation as an adequation of reality.

There was such a list and Edith Kurzweil read it. Yet, how could such a list, how has any such list stood up to, resisted recuperation? How can a list, other than by its repetitive performance, steady itself outside the institutional arranging of who shall speak and whom shall be spoken to or about? Norbert Wiley presented for his part in a work, co-audited with Christine Chambers. His gesture to correct Lacan by reformulating object-relations theory, making it nearly synonymous with the Peirce-Mead tradition, was made in this scene, a gesture for women (the written text made no claim to be

a feminist text). What must have appeared in the context of writing to be an innocent choice—feminism or simply theory—was in his presentation, made to become deliberate. His performance settled on a posture, unsettling any apparent easiness in the adjustment of classical sociological theorizing to feminism: he used his analysis to advise women about theorizing about women.

What was to have been for women was his warning against Lacan's "unofficial theory" in which anatomy is indispensable: the instincts of psychoanalytic theory, a problem, especially for women. He criticized literary and film critics for ignoring Lacan's weak spot(s). To the weaknesses, especially of Lacan's speculative mirror stage, he had come to bring evidence, empirical, observational evidence about child development. But feminist film critics have found Lacan's mirror stage useful as an allegory of the itinerary of male desire not as a theory of child development. Feminist literary critics have drawn on Lacan's theory of the phallus as transcendental signifier because his theory critically deconstructs the order of the visible, the seeming, the apparent. Both literary and film critics have made much of and with the psychoanalytic distinction of instincts and drives, a distinction upon which the social or sexualized body is seen as propped upon, not reduced to biology. These feminists, then, are to be read for the temporary release which they example, from a commitment to empirical theories of child development and sexual maturation, for in the end, these are subversions of the very notion of the unconscious. There is now that list of women, Edith Kurzweil had read many of their names, women who have urged a turn from an economy of accumulating evidence for generalizing a theory of man.

Lacan has been for feminists, an irritating ally against American ego-psychology, even against object-relations theory when it invites using feminism as an empirical corrective of already existing social psychological theory. What was to have been for women, what Norbert Wiley capably argued so to "normalize Lacan for sociology," is not for feminists who at this time are focused on the development of psychoanalysis as a socio-political historical moment which reveals the limits of representation against which the human sciences propose themselves in their positivity. Feminists, critical of psychoanalysis, nonetheless take up with it in its positionality at a slant with that concept of reality as only what can be empirically established.

But problematizing the very notion of experienced reality is no mere indifference to women's experience, rather, it is the seeming of an indifference to the positivity of social science of human experience. Those feminists apparently most focused on making visible the often invisible world of women's experience have always had that sense of making a scene to bring forth out of

the factual, the counterfactual of excluded others. Although their 'practical' orientation might make them allergic to the 'high-theorizing' of relating epistemology to feminist style, their crafting of a style of their own is with what they have fired the imagination of other feminist scholars. When last I saw Jessie Bernard, I was in an audience of only women sociologists. Then, she talked of her career, how it was that she had come to write about women: her life, the scene with which to characterize the inner curve of other women's lives. Then, after her presentation, we talked among ourselves, aglow with the sense of her enabling us as a path breaker, a founding mother, for some even a grandmother.

But now she seemed uncomfortable, hesitant when she referred to Norbert Wiley's work as the Lacan and Chambers' paper. But when corrected, she insisted that she knew what she was doing. And later there was some comment, a mere passing remark, something to the effect: one man's correcting another man's theory, I'm suspicious: I don't expect much. This easy dismissal came to appear more deliberate, intensified, when at the end of her comments, she focused only on the women presenters. She summed up their efforts for feminism, her remarks encircling them, leaving the male theorist outside, for a mere moment of exclusion. The softness of her face, framed in silver gray curls, seems now only to masquerade the sharpness of her critique. Her remarks had their effect on the audience. Not this time was there among the women an immediate sense of being enabled, but rather a first sense of this mixed audience, framed in discomfort: a discomforting encouragement.

"Men in feminism," an expression coined at the 1984 Modern Language Association meetings, to give notice to the considerable number of males who are consciously deploying feminist thought in their work, gives some indication of just how hot feminism has become in academia, at least in the humanities, including cultural studies. In these disciplines, feminism is part of the epistemological trembling brought on by post structuralism so that it is perhaps no surprise that men would take up positions within feminism, even to protect themselves, there, during the changes which are meant to have so profound an effect on them, by effecting the very definition of culture(s) and the methods of analysis.

Men in feminism is not so much an unwelcomed development of a women's movement. Its disturbance is rather a discontinuity that it proposes between changes in academic discourse and changes in women's lives, even women's lives in academia. That is, it situates the problem of relating theory and politics, the problem of grounding politics in a community recognized by the irrationality of its oppression, the specificity of its experience. As feminists take up the challenge proposed by Dorothy Smith of deconstructing sociological discourse, that men

will consciously conjoin 'our' theorizing, will challenge only one face of 'our' identity. There will also be the increasing pressure to recognize the fictiveness of experience, constructed in relationship to forms of identity. This recognition will not only be an effect of a post structural, deconstructive stance toward theory but of the effective interruptions of 'our' identity by its very overdetermination in terms of sexual orientation, race, class and ethnicity. All of this demands a heightened sense of political theatrics so that when there is a performance of feminist theorizing, when there is a feminist making a scene, we will, because of the contradictions and discontinuities of 'our' identity, nonetheless, be able to return to and be enabled by the worlds of women, reminded again of taking risks, of making noise, of becoming unbecoming.

Thanks to Ruth Wallace for the way she chose to use her security of position, her seniority, for staging a scene for feminism at the ASA convention.

Report on Sociological Theory

Norbert Wiley
University of Illinois

Sociological Theory is doing well. There are about 1444 subscriptions, a heartening number, but libraries are still too low (about 200) for the long-term stability of the journal. Overall expenses are about \$24,000 and income is also about \$24,000. And the quality (and diversity) of the articles is holding well. It looks like the ASA, which has weak marketing skills, will lease the journal to Blackwells, which has strong marketing skills, though this should not hurt the journal for our purposes. Blackwells likes ST precisely for the qualities it now has.

I am stepping down as editor at the end of 1989, and the new editor-designate will be chosen at the winter meetings of the ASA Publications Committee (early December) and Council (January). The job takes me about a quarter time, though it is very satisfying. Randy Collins did an incredibly good job getting the journal launched and through the first few, difficult years. I tried to follow Randy's policies (diversification, a nudge toward empiricity, a push-push on the quality threshold), which included convincing his board to stay on. The American community of theorists is full of talent, and I have no doubt the next editor will do an excellent job.

To be considered for this position, you have to be nominated (17 people were already nominated at the August Publications Committee meeting) to Bill D'Antonio of the ASA or Caroline Persell of the Publications Committee. Everyone nominated receives a letter from the ASA, asking if they accept nominations and also

inviting a letter to the Publications Committee, outlining the nominee's views on their possible editorship. It helps a great deal to write a fairly lengthy, serious letter. These active nominees - say a dozen - are then voted on by the Publications Committee. Their ordered shortlist - say, of three names - is then forwarded to the Council, which makes the final selection. I hope a lot of strong candidates accept nomination.

In any case let me say what a pleasure it has been, editing this journal. The American theorists are clearly on the move. Our journal, ST, is on its way to becoming the world center of social theory. And remember, social theory nowadays is not just going on in the social sciences. The language departments, literary criticism and philosophy are also moving, rather aggressively, into social theory. I think our job is to organize and lead the whole, complex social theory process, with ST gradually becoming the central medium of the discussion.

Eastern Meetings

David Sciulli

University of Delaware

Jonathan Turner was among the most provocative presenters at the annual meetings of the Eastern Sociological Society, March 11-13 in Philadelphia, insisting in blunt terms that social theorists should render their ideas consistent with principles of positivism and the scientific method. Turner presented his thesis at a thematic session organized by George Ritzer on meta-theory which was held on the second day of the meetings. Turner was questioned, of course, but questioning was tame as compared to the provocation of the thesis. Other participants in the thematic session were Edward Tiryakian, who dealt with a reworking of modernization theory, Jeffrey Alexander, who emphasized the need for hermeneutics in theory and research, Norbert Wiley, who addressed the subject domain of meta-theory and why there is renewed interest in it, and Ritzer, who categorized classical theorists in terms of meta-theoretical "paradigm." A formally organized two-hour question and answer period followed the presentations.

The first evening there was a plenary session in appreciation of Robert Merton, including candid and well-received remarks by James Coleman regarding Merton's influence both as a teacher and a theorist. Among the sessions on the two succeeding days were ones devoted to the Social Relations Department at Harvard (with Robert Bierstedt discussing papers by Lawrence Nichols, William Buxton, and Barry Johnson at a session organized by Frank Wilson), sociological theory (chaired by Charles Lemert, with papers by Louise Lopman, Harvey Griesman, Ernest Kilkner, and discussion by James

Farganis and Janet Billson), post-modernism in theory and the arts (chaired by John Robinson and Richard Brown, with Sondra Meyers, Judith Balfe, Rolf Meyerson, Remi Clignet and Braulio Munoz participating), and a "debate in theory" involving Harold Bershad, Victor Lidz and Mark Gould regarding Parsons and his critics over the years.

Book Announcements (Notify Perspectives of new publications)

David R. Mafnes and Carl J. Couch (Editors), Communication and Social Structure, Springfield IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1988.

Scott Lash and John Urry, The End of Organized Capitalism, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987.

Donald Levine, The Flight From Ambiguity, University of Chicago Press, now available in paperback.

James Rule, Theories of Civil Violence, University of California Press.

Murray Webster and Martha Foschi (Editors), Stasis Generalization: New Theory and Research, Stanford University Press, 1988.

Sam Whimster and Scott Lash (Editors), Max Weber, Rationality and Modernity, New York: Allen & Unwin, 1987.

Nominating Committee

Janet Chafetz, University of Houston
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Michael Hechter, University of Arizona
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