

Editor's introduction

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Collected in this issue are a diverse array of articles from some of American sociology's most prominent theorists and some whose careers are just beginning. Each article stands alone and is well worth reading independent of the others. But in considering the issue as a whole, I see several themes that are central to "modern" (and perhaps democratic) social thought, among them: the fluctuating, morphing idea of knowledge in modern democratic society, globalization and power, our perennial and necessary conversation with the specter of Marx, and finally, the possible relationships between social theory and social justice. To follow is a modest effort to contextualize these themes in the several articles comprising this special issue.

The first three essays address the mutable conception of knowledge in a contemporary Western democracy in one fashion or another. Typically, we frame this issue as a conflict between positivistic and interpretive and/or critical knowledge. These three articles shift the terrain from the dueling polarities of explaining versus understanding to an arguably more evocative ground: the supremacy and possibility of reason.

Often reason and rationality are held to be higher processes when compared with baser human characteristics such as emotion. Recent work, however, indicates that emotion is important, perhaps primary, in producing consciousness, identity, memory, and decision-making ([Damasio 1999, 2003](#); [LeDoux 1996](#)). Jonathan Turner, our first theorist, has been developing a sociological theory of emotion that has significant implications for our understanding of cognition, action, and social organization. In his work here, "The Stratification of Emotions: Some Preliminary Generalizations," Turner presents preliminary ideas and generalizations about the stratification of emotion. He lays the groundwork for the theory of stratification by arguing that emotion works not only to bind us to social groups and institutions, but is also the fundamental source of acts of extreme violence, such as terrorism. Emotion also works to create role distance from economic and educational institutions (both key factors in the modern ideal of democracy) and produces repressed shame experienced as alienation. In a significant contribution, Turner shows how emotion, like class, status, and power, is socially stratified and works to replicate inequalities. Rightly, Turner concludes that "the sociology of emotions will thus be at the center of just about any topic of interest to sociologists."

Although Jon's intent is not to speak to the democratic project, his subject matter is of primary concern. If by democracy we mean "that political relations between the state and its citizens feature broad, equal, protected

and mutually binding consultation” (Tilly 2007:13–14); and if the “attraction of democracy lies in the refusal to accept in principle any conception of the political good other than that generated by ‘the people’ themselves” (Held 2006:260); and if a basic assumption in back of consultation and the generation of political good is a citizenry capable of reason, then the issues of how emotion works in tandem with or contrary to reason and how it is stratified in a society are utmost concerns for democracy and sociology. It is also interesting to note that Turner implies that the modern concern with equality is more complex than class, status, and power.

A reasoning citizenry is predicated upon knowledge. This, of course, is one of the motivations behind the freedom of the press and the importance of education in modernity. As Martineau (2003:203) observes, “In countries where there is any popular Idea of Liberty, the universities are considered its stronghold.” But according to Sam Han, our second theorist, something is happening to knowledge generally, and by implication to the way university students see and apprehend it. In “Theorizing New Media: Reflexivity, Knowledge, and the Web 2.0,” Han argues that the modern view of knowledge is progressive and linear, building incrementally into a rational, stable whole. However, Han argues that information media have negatively impacted this possibility. The idea that the medium through which knowledge or information is transmitted affects knowledge is not new. For example, Lyotard (1984:4) argues that any information “not translatable in this way will be abandoned and that the direction of new research will be dictated by the possibility of its eventual results being translatable into computer language.”

In response, many have suggested that this new media will create a new democratization of intellectual activity and knowledge. Han, however, says no. Drawing on Scott Lash’s notion of reflexivity as non-linearity, Han argues that Web 2.0 transforms knowledge and sociability. Rather than being a base for a new democratization of knowledge, Han sees these media technologies as “responsible for the queering of modernist conceptions of knowledge, including its circulation, production and functionality.” And he encourages us to risk the possibility that the new technologies have implications for not only knowledge and the way we connect with others, but also what it means to be human.

In “Problems of Knowledge and Problems of Order,” Linda Derksen also invites us to reconsider the modernist notion of knowledge. In a provocative argument Derksen examines the implications of DNA profiling for our cultural understanding of objectivity as it is found in law, justice, courts, and the penal system. She documents the moment when the subjective discretion of a scientist was replaced by objective fact. The facticity of DNA, she reasons, was dependent not upon the lone scientist model of discovery, where “human reason reigns supreme in the attempt to divest nature of its secrets”; rather, DNA became an objective fact through newly established communities of practice where meaning was assigned and constrained by broader cultural norms and practices. Derksen documents the processes of creating new social structures around this knowledge and the “resulting new forms of social order.” Here we are taken back to Durkheim’s insight that there is an intrinsic relationship between social and cognitive orders. But Derksen also moves us forward to see that the boundaries among agency, society, and nature are permeable at best, with the substances most likely mutually constituted in an ongoing interplay. Derksen’s work obviously prompts us to question the modernist notion of discovery. But more than that, she argues that there is much for us to learn about society and sociology: “Differences

which have split the discipline, such as the scientific validity of qualitative versus quantitative methods, have the potential to be dissolved, as there is no authoritative pattern from the natural sciences to emulate.”

In our next piece, “Enclosures, Enclaves, and Entrapment,” Bryan Turner shifts our attention from the vexing problems of knowledge to a consideration of globalization, power, and threats to liberal democracy.

Globalization is generally understood as social processes that increase the flows of information, people, goods, and services across national boundaries. These processes involve the formation of global institutions and cities ([Sassen 2007](#)) and increasing levels of free trade and integration of national economies ([Stiglitz 2002](#)).

Globalization also brought with it sets of ideas about the definition of society and liberal democracy and citizenship. As [John Urry \(2006:168\)](#) points out, sociology was founded on the idea of society as nation-state: “To the extent there is something called ‘society,’ then this should be seen as a sovereign social entity with a nation-state at its center that organizes the rights and duties of each citizen.” Globalization threatens to de-center the state and thus has ramifications for democracy. There have been attempts at rethinking this issue. Among the ideas pointed out by Turner are semi-citizenship, late-modern citizenship, and a broader sociological focus on human rights rather than states and citizens.

However, Turner argues, these attempts fall short because there are contemporary developments that limit the social mobility implied by globalization. These developments leave the state centered but imply restrictions of democratic freedoms. Turner argues that in response to factors such as religious fundamentalism, terrorism, fears associated with pandemics, and rising levels of crime, conflict, and incivility, states have developed new forms of control and enclosure, severely limiting mobility and creating a new governmentality. Turner characterizes this shift as the *enclave society*. In response to these threats, governments enclose identified groups through walls (as in Baghdad, the West Bank, and the United States–Mexican border), gated communities, increased surveillance, hidden mechanisms in the housing and mortgage markets, stricter immigration and naturalization policies, and so forth. Like Jon Turner, Bryan Turner shows us a new or different sort of inequality, one he characterizes as the mobility gap. Speaking specifically of walls, but certainly apropos to enclavement as a whole, Bryan points out that limiting mobility “raises serious problems for any liberal democratic theory and for values associated with diversity, multiculturalism and tolerance.”

In our next two pieces we turn to considerations of Marx. Marx has always been troubling, intentionally so—changing the way we think about the social world is at the core of any Marxian project. Our two commentators of Marx continue in this unsettling discourse. In “Post-Marxist Trajectories: Diagnosis, Criticism, Utopia,” Chamsy el-Ojeili provides a thoughtful and thought-provoking journey through some of the problems that post-Marxism addresses, including issues of history, subjectivity, ethics, positivism, vanguardism, and democracy. el-Ojeili then historicizes post-Marxism by exploring some of the implications of what he calls a “post-1999 return of utopian reference and expansive social theorizing,” which “take some of the wind out of the sails of the idea of post-Marxism as a successor discourse to Marxism.” el-Ojeili leaves us unsettled to ponder the indispensable although not self-sufficient place of Marx for anyone interested in studying society.

Charles Lemert continues to unsettle in “Thinking the Unthinkable/Global Realities: Eleven Theses on Marx’s Eleventh Thesis.” The first thing to notice about Lemert’s piece is that it does not look right—the font changes,

the structure of the text varies, there's no abstract, and no apparent references. Thus, even before we read a single word, Lemert disquiets us. When we do read, he continues to invite us to move out of our comfort zone by his choice of topic. Lemert takes to task the possibility of Marx's statement: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." But rather than questioning the possibility of *changing the world*, Lemert interrogates the possibility of there *being such a world*. As Lemert rightly points out, Marx's idea of changing the world is based on an ontological assumption: there exists a singular, objective entity capable of being guided and changed. Marx was concerned with the ontological status of society as well: the material world of production constituted its ontological base. Today, however, Lemert tells us that the metaphysical subtleties of the commodity have played out on a global scale and have thus torn asunder the possibility of such a social world. Lemert asks, "How is it possible to think of the world as lived reality if in the place of a singularity there are pluralities?" Material capacities, he reasons, "outrun any normal condition of human understanding"; ideas such as society, community, and humanity become at best ephemeral shadows of days gone by. Lemert, however, does not offer solutions. He leaves us with questions and interrogations, which, I think, are prerequisites to any form of theoretical (or democratic) thinking. Lemert and el-Ojeili leave us with questions and not answers; they invite us to be as unsettled about our world as Marx was his.

Our final paper is unique in its reach. Not only is it provocatively eclectic, it is also a clarion call for the role of theory and theorizing in the cause of social justice. In "Grounded and Indigenous Theories and the Politics of Pragmatism," Norm Denzin advocates for a theoretical methodology that begins in the collaboration of data and concepts and then reaches to Cornel West's prophetic pragmatism, Patricia Hill Collins' feminist epistemology, and Ron Pielas' methodology of the heart. Denzin employs his theoretical montage to help make better conceptual and political sense of indigenous discourses and post-colonialism. Doing so allows him to first be cautious of and sensitive to difficulties associated with a person of privilege speaking to or about colonized people (whether found in or out of a modern nation). This emphasis also places to the fore the idea that theorizing about social justice and equity is as much pedagogical as it is theoretical; it is meant to embrace and teach and bring change. For Denzin theory is a form of representation and thus entails an ethic of responsibility, not only to proper representation but also to our own authentic emotional involvement. Denzin's approach to theory is "avowed in its commitment to the project of social justice and radical progressive democracy. But there are no absolute truths, no absolute principles. The moral inquirer enacts a politics of love and care, an ethic of hope and forgiveness."

By way of closing this introduction, please know that what I propose here is simply one reading, one way of making these diverse theoretical statements say something collectively. Whether you use my reading to frame your own or not, I invite you to dive fully into the ideas presented by our theorists. Theory is the most volatile, dynamic, pregnant, and vibrant area of our discipline. Social and sociological theories have in the long run defied every attempt to corral and subdue them. Our theories refuse to stay categorized into a grand narrative and they refuse to behave. They come at us from every angle imaginable and they invite and challenge us to think something new; to be so overcome by an idea that our mind is compelled to "travel anywhere and by any means, to re-make itself if necessary, in order to *find out*" (Mills 1959:105). I hope you find fodder for such passion in these pages.

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