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# *Theory*

The Newsletter of the Research Committee on Sociological Theory  
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### **Editors' Introduction**

Sociological theory evolves in various ways: returning to the same problems, disclosing new areas of inquiry, placing perspectives in new contexts, developing programmes and unending projects, feeling completely perplexed, being open to dialogue. You will find all of these ways of sociological theorising and more in this issue of *Theory*.

We open with RC16's co-chairs' Call for Papers for the next Interim Conference of the Research Committee. Here we only want to note, as is also mentioned in the call for papers, how enjoyable were RC16's previous interim conference meetings in Busan in 2008 and before that in Rio de Janeiro in 2004. We look forward to seeing you in Trento, Italy in 2012.

Although the death of S N Eisenstadt is an enormous loss to the sociological theory community, we are proud to be able to belatedly publish the obituary that we solicited from our colleague Donald Levine. We believe that all of us working in the field of sociological theory, sociology and the social sciences more generally can draw considerable inspiration and sustenance from Eisenstadt's lifetime of dedication and achievement.

It would be difficult to dispute the claim that Eisenstadt's work has given us enormous insight into the human condition in its diversity. The piece that follows by Barbara Misztal addresses one of the main features of the human condition: vulnerability. We are sure that the piece will lead readers to turn to Barbara Misztal's recently published book: *The Challenges of Vulnerability*, which deals, of course, with a topic of considerable contemporary importance. The next piece, by Raluca Soreanu, sits well with Misztal's, as it reconsiders the sociology of emotions and how emotions have been theorised. 'Outlaw Emotions: Working-Through a Psychoanalytic Sociology of the Mind' was originally presented at the last International Sociological Association World Congress and Soreanu challenges certain common assumptions that lead to the obscuring of outlaw emotions. She argues for a more inter-relational understanding, something that Gilles Verpraet explores in a different way and in different terms in his investigation of the question: How to Shape Society: the social explanandum in Latour and Descola.

Finally, we would like to reiterate once again our desire to publish contributions from members of the research committee

and we welcome suggestions regarding future issues.

*Craig Browne & Paul Jones*

### **Call for Papers: RC 16 Mid-term Conference – Cultures and Civilizations in the Contemporary World**

The RC16 mid-term conference will be held in Trento, Italy, June 28-29, 2012. Those of us who attended the 2008 mid-term conference in Pusan, South Korea will remember the lavish hospitality and the stimulating intellectual debate we enjoyed. Indeed, we are daunted by the prospect of following the standard set by at that conference, which was co-sponsored by the Korean Sociological Association and co-organized with Professor Seung Kuk Kim.

The mid-term conference of RC16 provides the most diverse and cosmopolitan forum for all sociologists interested in theoretical debate and conceptual work. Designed to foster critical debate among sociologists of various countries and persuasions, it is the optimal venue to discuss recent theoretical research, beyond and across theoretical schools. We also work hard to provide a forum that is friendly both to long-time members of RC16 and to newcomers.

The mid-term conference, titled Cultures and Civilizations in the Contemporary World, is open to all contributions to sociological theory, broadly construed. In recent conferences we have had exciting papers and discussions about topics such as globalization and transnationalism, multiple modernities, cultural difference and the cultural turn, civil society and the public sphere, media and the creative industries, aesthetics, performance, identity, intersubjectivity, cultural trauma, and postcolonialism, as well as a variety of other interventions into debates about classical and contemporary social theory. We look forward to continuing these conversations, and beginning new ones.

If you would like to attend the mid-term meeting, please submit the title and

abstract of your proposed paper through the conference website:

<http://www2.unitn.it/events/isa2012abstract/reg.aspx>

You can also email your proposed paper title and abstract to

[RC16midterm@soc.unitn.it](mailto:RC16midterm@soc.unitn.it).

The deadline for all proposals is November 30, 2011.

This year, in the night of June 27th, we will also congregate to celebrate the winner of our Best Junior Theorist Paper in Sociological Theory Award ([http://www.isasociology.org/rc16\\_award\\_02.htm](http://www.isasociology.org/rc16_award_02.htm)).

Be sure to arrive in time!

The mid-term conference will be hosted by the Dipartimento di Sociologia of the Università di Trento. The oldest and more prestigious sociology department in Italy, it has been consistently ranked among the very best in the country (<http://www.unitn.it/en/dsrs>).

The conference will take place right in the center of Trento, right in the middle of the Italian Alps. The well-preserved historical center of the city is one of the jewels of North Eastern Italy, with plenty of Medieval and Renaissance buildings, castles and churches worth a visit (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trento>). It is the ideal location for exploring the Alps in a variety of ways (<http://www.visittrentino.it/en/turismo-in-trentino>), either before or after the conference. Cities such as Verona, Venice, and Bozen (in the German speaking South Tyrol) are easy to reach by train, and can easily be integrated into your travel plans as well.

The official conference website will be launched December 1st 2012, and will provide all the necessary information for joining the conference, booking the hotel at the conference rates and, more generally, organizing the trip. Those who cannot wait may use the following general website:

<http://international.unitn.it/welcome-services/how-arrive>.

We look forward to seeing all of you in Trento.

Yours sincerely,

*Peppino Sciortino and Ron Jacobs*

co-chairs, RC 16

### **IN MEMORIAM: SHMUEL NOAH (S. N.) EISENSTADT (1923-2010)**

Shmuel Eisenstadt's oeuvre stands as the worthy successor to Max Weber's comparative historical sociology. Beyond his prodigious productivity – author of more than fifty books; editor or co-editor of some two dozen compilations; builder of a respected Department; University dean; mover in international associations; peripatetic lecturer; generous mentor; indefatigably cheering colleague – Eisenstadt transformed the ways in which we have come to think about civilization, modernity, and societal change.

The seeds of this achievement sprouted at Hebrew University in the early 1940s. At 12 Shmuel came to Jerusalem from his native Warsaw, whence his widowed mother rescued the family moving first to the United States then to Palestine in 1935. An intellectually curious teenager, he devoured new Penguin paperbacks and loved to discern historical patterns. In 1940 he began university studies, gaining a Master's thesis in British labor history. His primary mentor at the University was Martin Buber, under whom he received his doctorate in 1947 with a dissertation on the history of sociological thought. Since the University at that time contained no department of sociology, Buber offered Shmuel access to core texts of the discipline from his personal library along with private tutorials once a month.

This tutelage grounded a deep interest in the field and moved young Eisenstadt toward two hallmarks of his intellectual career: openness to dialogue, and engagement with the interface between particularism and universalism. When he came to publish a treatise on his doctoral project, *The Form of Sociology* (1976), Eisenstadt couched it not

as a compendium of findings or doctrines but as a narrative of dialogical interactions involving vicissitudes of closures and openings.

His relation to the discipline, moreover, involved a distinctive balance: between particularistic attachment and openness to other fields. For all his intellectual, administrative, and collegial involvement with the field of sociology, Eisenstadt felt no less at home in many other disciplines—especially history, political science, economics, and area studies. He sought to help Israeli universities maintain joint departments of anthropology and sociology. Rather than adhere to research programs that took directives from the constraints of a discipline, he championed the concept of *Problemstellung*—*problematique*, he later styled it—in the conviction that engagement with a problem, not disciplinary guidelines, deserved precedence in determining the boundaries of intellectual inquiry.

That distinctive balance between engagement with particular collectivities, on the one hand, and analytic and contextual breadth on the other, which was manifest in Eisenstadt's attitudes toward disciplines, appeared a fortiori in his relation to societal collectivities. Shmuel came of age in the Yishuv (Palestinian Jewry prior to the State), whereas during the year that Israel became independent he was studying in London and therefore, he recalled later, witnessed its transformation into a state from abroad. Viewing that momentous change from afar helped leaven his deep and positive understanding of Jewish history and traditions with a degree of distanced understanding that few have achieved. In time recognized as the foremost scholar of world civilizations of his day, he never forgot his Judaic origins. Rather, he made Jewry the foil for an evolution of comparative brava-do. In the 1950s, he compared differences in childrearing practices between kibbutzim (communal settlements) and moshavim (co-operative settlements), and then dealt with the absorption of immigrants in Israeli society by comparing the Yishuv and the cultures of immigrant groups. Ultimately he moved, four decades later, to compare

*Jewish Civilization* (1992) with other historic civilizations.

In an interview shortly before his passing, Eisenstadt emphasized—in words that serve to rebuke those who champion an inevitable Clash of Civilizations hypothesis—that all civilizations contain both particularistic and universalistic strands. Such understanding he associated with his teacher Buber. Thanks to the latter's capacious intellectual grasp—Shmuel liked to recall that early on his mentor had assigned the Tao Te Ching, and helped him delve into the depths of the Weberian corpus—his growth as a scholar took an ever-expanding form. Postdoctoral work at the London School of Economics connected him with Morris Ginsberg, Edward Shils, and the trove of British social anthropologists, all reinforcing a passion for comparative historical studies, which he pursued with his own analytic bite and insightful theorizing.

Eisenstadt's formative monographs embraced conceptual schemes that dominated the sociological world of the 1950s. *The Absorption of Immigrants* (1955) foregrounded prevailing typologies of social roles, schemata of deviance, and the four-function paradigm of Talcott Parsons. *From Generation to Generation* (1956) solved a long-standing puzzle about the existence of status groups based on age by invoking the particularism/universalism variable that Parsons had done so much to promote. He also followed Parsons, along with Robert Bellah and others, in a return to evolutionary thinking, this time fortified by rejection of assumptions of unilineality and assumed normative progress. He integrated other contemporary sociological emphases, going further than Parsons even in noting the conflicts and reactionary directions inherent in modernization. He identified sources of failed attempts to modernize; analyzed varieties of reactive sectarianism—proto-fundamentalist, fundamentalist, and communal-national; and highlighted the struggle for new forms of collective identity.

The *problematique* that caught Eisenstadt's attention during the last half of his life concerned the fates of human societies in the

wake of the expansive energies that led to the formation of empires. With *The Political Systems of Empires* (1973) he opened a bold new research program, one that had extended his unflagging comparativism to the broadest historical scope. A decade later, engaging Karl Jaspers's pivotal notion of "axial civilizations," he turned a corner that led to the magisterial, neo-Weberian works for which he will doubtless be most remembered. These can be said to have come to a head in *Japanese Civilization: A Comparative View* (1996). That work, perhaps his finest single monograph (and most elegantly composed, thanks to exceptional editing by the University of Chicago Press), offered an unprecedentedly profound grasp of Japanese history and a breath-taking comparison with Europe, India, and China.

Eisenstadt qualified the conventional comparative focus on national societies in three respects. He prodded us to realize that those societies cannot be understood as relatively closed, self-sufficient functioning systems, but needed to be understood as interacting societal units, which never function in isolation. In thoughts for a project on societies of small scale, like Israel, Holland, Switzerland, and ancient Greece (which never reached fruition), he questioned the unspoken assumption that the size of such systems does not affect the conditions of their creativity. Above all, his turn to civilizational studies forced us to realize the larger socio-cultural forms in which contemporary national societies subsisted. From that came his mature touchstone concept, Multiple Modernities, whereby organizational forms that might indeed be on their way to becoming universal would need to be seen as embedded in sociocultural frames of much broader scale of time and space.

In all his treatments of societal systems, Shmuel Eisenstadt was ever on the lookout for phenomena of creativity: protest, change, revolution, transformation. Uniquely, *The Heritage of Sociology* volumes he edited, on Weber and Buber, foregrounded the notions of charisma and creativity. The leitmotif of continual creativity applied reflexively to his own work style: he was, he said of himself,

ever on the lookout for new intellectual problems.

It is unlikely that we shall see the likes of Weber or of Eisenstadt again, even though numerous scholars of comparative civilization continue to work those vast vineyards. Supported by his devoted wife Shulamit, Eisenstadt manifested a level of intellectual energy that literally took your breath away. It will be a formidable challenge to maintain his grand tradition of work, so demanding in breadth of knowledge and scarcely tolerated let alone supported by current academic systems. One hopes that it will come to secure the attention it deserves.

*Donald N. Levine*

### **Sociology of vulnerability and critical stance**

It is now very timely to begin the process of theorizing vulnerability, as the mass media, politicians and academics increasingly use this term to signify the importance of the fragile, insecure and contingent nature of modern living. The proliferation of the notion of vulnerability seems to reflect a new sense of risk and is explained as a result of many new unsettling trends (from global terrorism, through new medical technologies, climate change to the development of GMOs), the growing economic polarization and a lack of vision of the future. Although the term vulnerability has acquired a *Zeitgeist*-like status, the notion itself tends to be defined in many different and unclear ways. Such an ambiguous use of the concept, together with the puzzle of its current popularity, raises a question how to conceptualise it not only in a more critical way but also in a way which reflects this notion's complexity, appeal and multidimensionality. To answer this challenge was the reason for my writing *The Challenges of Vulnerability: In search of strategies for a less vulnerable social life* (Palgrave 2011), which also aims to contribute to debates about how to reduce the experiences of vulnerability.

It was only after I finished writing *The Challenges of Vulnerability* that I realised the empirical and normative significance of

vulnerability for critical social theory. I am not going to summarize the book here but aim to show that sociology, by developing a comprehensive understanding and awareness of vulnerability, can offer an illuminating account of the nature of society, indeed one that can motivate and justify critical stands.

In short, I argue that the vulnerability perspective offers both a critical normative standpoint and an empirical-analytical account of social trends and therefore the recognition of vulnerability is the necessary first step in developing arguments for social change. To comprehend vulnerability matters because it makes it possible to ask questions about equality and justice and enables us to analyse some central mechanisms of social life, and thus revitalise our social imagination. The sociology of vulnerability, by establishing a powerful understanding of vulnerability and by informing public debate about the social character of human vulnerability, can convey much more about social injustice than now very popular studies of happiness which enjoy an enormous publicity in the UK, with both David Cameron, the conservative MP, and Ed Miliband, the leader of opposition, promoting happiness as the central task of the political system. Moreover, happiness is singular; each case speaks only for itself. It is also only subjective as it only belongs to the world what is felt, while vulnerability may allow us to grasp what most alarms us in our contemporary world, what scares us, that is, the forces that shape our lives which are no longer personal, the forces with which make us feeling powerless.

The concept of vulnerability is difficult to define, yet since it is not the only idea that does not bear too much inspection (we implicitly deploy many equally not precisely defined terms, such as happiness, reason or freedom) and since the discourse of vulnerability has a significant role in facilitating a critical stand and evaluation of the present day socio-economic conditions, sociology should take on a challenge to conceptualize this notion and analyse its relevance and implications in a more comprehensive and focused way. In my book, I define the noti-

on of vulnerability in a way that reflects this term's complexity, appeal and multidimensionality and I seek to contribute to debates about how to reduce the experiences of vulnerability. The existing approaches to vulnerability tend to conceptualize it in many different and unclear ways. For some social scholars (for example, Furedi 2005), the vulnerability narrative performs the function of promoting people's passivity and retreat to privacy, implies a lack of agency or responsibility and contributes to feelings of defenceless. For others writers, this discourse either discriminates against people who are subjects to an intervention or imposes a duty on those who are classified as the vulnerable to take preventive measures (Petersen and Wilkinson 2008). Some view the notion of vulnerability as an indicator of subjective well-being, while others try to offer a broader perspective by combining subjective and objective nature of the deprivation (Whelan and Maître 2008). One of the most interesting approaches is offered by Butler's (2004) view of vulnerability as conducive to developing wider modes of commonality and responsibility.

Following Bauman's (2011) argument that human vulnerability is the foundation of all political power and Butler's (2004) idea that the public sense of justice is founded on the experience of human vulnerability, I assert that for the concept of vulnerability to be a productive tool to account for our sufferings, it needs to fuse or bind together body, self and society, it needs to take into account the both objective and subjective conditions of well being as well as the temporal structure of action, that is, the unavoidability of the present, the irreversibility of the past and the unpredictability of the futures. Such an understanding of vulnerability assumes that, in addition to being biologically frail, we are also socially vulnerable, that our vulnerability is constituted socially to the extent that vulnerability is fundamentally dependent on existing norms of recognition and to the extent that the degree of vulnerability of a person is precipitated by and through the actions of others, and finally such an understanding assumes that our vulnerability is

associated with the linear experience of human time in the process of life.

This broad definition of vulnerability captures the ways in which an individual experiences different aspects of disadvantage connected with our contemporary dependence on others, the future risks and insecurities as well as legacies of the past traumas, wounds and harms. In short, I propose to focus on three forms of vulnerability, the first form refers to our exposure to involuntary dependence on others for care, recognition and love, the second form is rooted in the unsecured future and the third form of vulnerability grasps the consequences of painful past. My approach, by capturing vulnerability's several forms that are inherent in the human condition and reinforced by life in society and its institutions, conceptualizes vulnerability as an irreducibly plural, multidimensional notion that cannot be conceived on a single continuum. In short, I propose to understand the concept of vulnerability as an irreducibly plural, multidimensional notion that cannot be conceived on a single continuum.

There are benefits associated with such a comprehensive conceptualization of vulnerability. It allows us to avoid inconsistent, incoherent and often confusing answers to questions of who are vulnerable, what are their needs and how to protect them. It prevents fragmentation of our knowledge and casts the net of our understanding of the issue as widely as possible. The most significant advantage of emphasizing the three dimensional vision of vulnerability is connected with the fact that it opens up possibilities of grasping disadvantage from a more wide-ranging perspective than from the solely economic stand as it is broad enough to capture the ways in which an individual's experience of a range of injustice, humiliation, misrecognition, risks and traumas, while at the same time investigating the strength of socio-economic system.

The multidimensional conception of vulnerability not only helps us achieve the breadth and depth of comprehension of vulnerability without reducing it to economic, political or cultural dimensions of disadvantage. It also

allows us to comprehend individuals' resilience to pain, rejection of humiliation and demands and struggles for respect and rights. In this light, the vulnerability approach's significance is connected with its vision of a supportive society that can make difference to one's life. By allowing us to approach the dilemma of the quality of life from three different angles, it offers an opportunity to promote people's achievements, rights and opportunities in all spheres of life and to conceptualise social change not only in terms of economic criteria, and hence it has implications for public action and social change. Talking about vulnerabilities is another way of talking about injustice as it is referring to the experience of misrecognition, humiliation, a lack of fair way to distribute things and right procedures for organizing protection as well as to the absence of tolerance and respect for different obligations and loyalties.

Another major strength of the proposed approach is connected with the fact that the vulnerability is a very useful notion to discuss the relationships between society and the market, society and the state and society and the global system. As these relationships, due to many contemporary trends, including the process of globalization, are under conditions of change, we need to reconceive these interactions. In other words, in order to develop our knowledge of mechanisms shaping the quality of social life and measures to challenge vulnerability, seen as an indicator of subjective experience of injustice which roots are located in the objective conditions, we need to expand our comprehension of changing relationships between these main spheres. For example, in the context of the increased interest in the way in which economic life interlinks with social structures and practices, the notion of vulnerability, understood as the measure of deprivation which allows accounting for not just fluctuating levels of economic and social well-being but also for people's attitudes and the resilience against advert events, can be a good indicator of potential threats to the socio-economic system. By registering economic risks and people's experience of such crisis, the concept of vulnerability offers a

fruitful approach to grasp the interaction between social and economic threats.

The aggregative conception of vulnerability can also shed light on the complexity of the citizenship process and the scale and consequences of the transformation of the relationships between society and the state. Developing such knowledge is presently of the especial relevance as the idea of citizenship is under scrutiny due to a board change in the ways that states have been responding to the process of globalization. The state's power becomes transformed and as many national governments face the reduction in their capacity to protect their citizens, at the same time however more groups are demanding the expansion and redefinition of citizenship rights. In order fully grasp the nature of these processes, we should place human vulnerability at the heart of citizenship as such an approach would allow us to see tensions that are erupting at the citizenship formation, seen as a product of the interaction of civil society and the state.

The sociology of vulnerability can also offer a new insight to the international communities' willingness and capacities to address the global risks and assist the global vulnerable. We need to acknowledge that confronting the condition of vulnerability on the global level is the essential prerequisite of the creation of a post-nationalistic, open, cooperative and tolerant cosmopolitan society. The salience of the global threats calls for revival of discussions on how can the international community prevent and provide protection against this new type of risks. It raises a question how can nations, international institutions and global civil society's players be brought together so practical progress can be achieved and the world could avert or mitigate the global risks. Studies of interactions between agents global civil society and international and national institutions could complement an account of vulnerability arising on the world scale, while at the same time, research of such vulnerabilities has major implications for our understanding of the relationship between various actors at the international stage. For all above reasons, sociology of vulnerability might be an essential part of

the attempt to grasp changes to global safety and security resulting from the dynamics of interactions at the international level.

To conclude, without suggesting that we evaluate everything from the perspective of vulnerability and without necessarily proposing a shift from the focus on happiness to unhappiness, I think we need to appreciate the social relevance and practical appeal of the vulnerability perspective. This approach can convey much more about social injustice and carries more weight than studies of happiness because being vulnerable is more acutely experienced than desirable states or gains (Offer 2006). Thus, focusing on the comprehension of the cause and consequences of vulnerability can be more productive because it is easier to reach consensus about what we want to avoid rather than to agree on a standard of happiness. The recognition of vulnerability as the focal point for linking personal troubles and public issues can produce important knowledge that can inform public debates and enrich social policies conducive to social justice and help the building people's resilience against and developing ways of confronting of all three types of vulnerabilities. Thus sociologists' contribution to this task of rethinking what kind of interpersonal and institutional structures may better protect people against actual and potential vulnerabilities can be very valuable. Perhaps the recognition of vulnerability can also help the social science to recover their earlier role as synthesizers and generalizers, which - according to Savage (2010) - is only way for sociology to survive within the context of informalization and digitalization.

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*Barbara A. Misztal*

### **Outlaw Emotions: Working-Through a Psychoanalytic Sociology of the Mind**

Reconsidering the place of emotions in social theory is akin to a process of working-through: it refers to the labour of the theorist in freeing herself from the long line of repetitions, interventions, symbolisations and omissions in Western thought which have coagulated into a hierarchical regime of treating human faculties, with emotionality being the most devalued. Emotions are the element explicitly absent from the dichotomies body/mind or nature/culture, while they actually stand right at the centre of these conceptual pairs.

One form that such theoretical labour can take is perhaps to pick up where the Frankfurt School left off, and to recast the resources of psychoanalytic thinking as a hermeneutical apparatus of social and cultural critique. Keeping to this spirit of theoretical working-through, I formulate a theory of outlaw emotions. Here, actors are relational, or multi-relational, rather than phalocentric; they become entangled with one another and they sustain their synchronic entanglements with meaningful objects, on

the basis of their mutual resonance of inner conflicts, and, as a result, they create more meaning. At the level of social institutions, there is an accumulation of the emotional energies flared up in local synchronic entanglements. Social structures are made up through a complex aggregation of emotional energies.

Starting from a commitment to the idea that humans are beings that saturate objects (including themselves) with meaning in an emotion-driven fashion, and that this process of meaning-saturation is at the basis of both microinteraction and macrostructures, I show how accumulations of “improper” emotions (such as anger, fury, outrage, or embarrassment) of those found in positions of domination are at the root of creative social outcomes. Emotions are, first of all, modes of action, or engagements with the world. They are social action, and bear all the predicates of social action, including responsibility. Emotions do not overwhelm us or take us over. They are the ways in which whole persons, capable of corporeal/intellectual interactions, engage the world, with its human and non-human objects.

Psychoanalytic thinking holds the key to elaborating a non-cognitivist account of emotion and to theorising on and around an actor with a psyche. While I draw on a psychoanalytic understanding of the defunctionalised human imagination (following Cornelius Castoriadis), I do so to substantiate a sociological account of creativity, which does not leap out of an interactionist view of social life. This theoretical act aims to open a space of thought at the intersection between sociology and psychoanalysis: I will call this space socioanalysis.

The way the configuration of internal conflicts of an individual – conceived as an individual with a psyche – comes in resonance in the social world with the configuration of conflicts of another individual is the most fascinating terrain that socioanalysis can and should take up the task of exploring. This situation of resonance is also the basic social situation, the unit of investigation in socioanalysis, and the situation where the varying

charge with emotional energy of social networks or zones of networks is accomplished. Enactment and perpetuation of situations of high resonance will bring a considerable emotional charge to the participants. I argue that synchronicity that is sustained by a significant emotional investment is the most reliable resource-generating activity available to human kind.

No social theory can fall short of a notion of social rhythm and social synchronicity, if it aims to account of the way people become entangled with each other in the social world, of the way they love each other, fear each other, or of the way they produce knowledge. The social place where unsolved psychic conflicts meet is a place full of social power and of reformative potentialities. These reformations address our most violent and unjust institutions, such as patriarchy, war, and their historical forms and inter-articulations.

There are three crucial forms of work that this conception of outlaw emotions can do in social theory, and that I would like to discuss here. First, it reinterprets the situational conception of the social (as advanced by Erving Goffman or Randall Collins), and it gives priority to the psychic situation: we can thus comprehend what an actor does, in the sense of social action, in a moment, while implicating her psychic world. Second, it addresses the common misconception in social theory that psychoanalytic thinking does not provide us with a theory of socialisation. I turn this critique on its head, and show how thinkers like Pierre Bourdieu and Randall Collins render the process of the incorporation of subjective structures invisible; in other words, they offer no account of the correspondence between mental structures and social structures. In lack of a theory of inwardness, the psyche appears as a “black box” (De Gaulejac 2008) on which social structures are inscribed. Third, it construes a much needed link from social suffering to creativity, and it reasserts the fact that social justice is not a lateral discussion that we can engage in after we have finished our important conversations about action – instead, it stands at the very core of the problem of action.

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*Raluca Soreanu*

## How to shape society? The social explanandum in Latour and Descola

“How to shape society” is a shared thematic of the new books of Latour and Descola. The latest issue of Latour leans on his main results in the sociology of science, so as to explain and question their consequences for the sociological method, reframed now as “associationism”. The book by Descola is framed around the problem of the relations between nature and culture, so as to question the results of structuralism and in order to provide proposals in the sociology of culture. Despite investigating different domains: science and technology, culture and anthropology, these two books come closer in their socio-anthropological visions and their methodologies, as the collectives of translation, on the one hand, and, as community and social classification, on the other.

A/ In his synthesizing analysis of scientific and social controversies, Latour identifies the associations and the connections that shape a specific knowledge and that then shape an idea of society. He envisions the social group as a collective who assemble some active mediators, involving translation and activation. In these collective processes, the actors have not been defined in advance. The repertoires of the actors have to be extended, including the mediating objects in a new “inter-objectivity”.

In this ‘extensive’ view, Latour formalizes three main tasks; these are the methodological principles intended to promote a “science of life together” (“la science du vivre ensemble”):

- 1) To display the repertoires of controversies by the associations.

2) To set up some practical arrangement, where these controversies can be stabilized.

3) To define the acceptable proceedings, so to gather a collective.

He develops both a reflexive and an epistemological argument: the collection of statement draws new connections; they also elaborate new theories of the meanings about these connections, such as in the theories of justification proposed by Boltanski and Thevenot. For Latour, this process of theorizing leads to a way of promoting a new empirical sociology, in order to then reconstruct the traces of the cognitive associations, even outside the locus of the accepted social standards. He recalls the argument of Tarde that it is necessary to differentiate the “explanans” (explication principles) from the “explanandum” (explanation proceedings). This linked sociology, based on the actor network methodology, raises large questions about how institutions are stabilized and the modes of social incorporation.

B/ The book by Descola proceeds in another domain: the anthropological analysis of the relations between nature and culture. Based on an extensive corpus, Descola reviews different purposive notions in the sociology of culture, such as disposition, habitus, ‘integrative scheme’. His discussion of the relations between the wild and the domestic domains questions the great divides that are usually taken to separate the natural, the cultural and the knowledge of them.

For Descola, the structuration of experience is framed by the schemas of practice, practices which combine the mode of identification and these - cognitive and social - relations inside a matrix. He states that:

“The mode of identification is not some kind of cultural patterning or locally relevant habitus, but various cognitive schemas that integrate this experience, in a selective structuration of the flux of perception and the relations with others, thereby framing resemblances and differences”.

Such a formula enables him to review in the same analytical schema the different anthro-

pological types of the relationship of culture and nature, such as animism, totemism, naturalism and analogy. Descola suggests that the stabilization of the relational system in a specific culture is subordinated to ontological realities, that is, to the intrinsic properties attributed to the existing (objects and people). He is then able to draw a table of the modes of identification, specifying the nexus between continuity and discontinuity, contiguity and resemblance.

In this epistemology, where the sociological notions proceed by drawing out the associations of the collective and the cultural classifications, Descola reproduces the reasoning of Latour on the institution of the collective:

“Away from a fundamentalism presupposition, the social results from a process of assembling, from the specific ontological “repartition“ between the objects and the subjects that each mode of identification is operating.”

Descola’s statement means that each cultural space has its own collective and its operation of classification; such as the hybrid collective produced by difference and complementarity in the system of totemism, or such as a mixture of inclusive and hierarchic collectives in analogy.

This anthropology, combining ontological classification and modes of identification in the representations of the collective, contributes to Descola’s envisioning a relative universalism. “Instead of presuming a universal subject, we (anthropologists) have to determine what may be universal in each mode of identification”. At the same time, he suggests: “We have to recognize the salience of the discontinuity of the things (objects and people) inside the mechanisms of their ‘apprehension’”. This ecology of the relations remains sensitive to the mode of attachment (belonging): “Like the mode of identification, the modes of relations are some integrative schemas, such as cognitive emotional structures that channel the production of the automatic inferences, make the orientation of the actions, and organize the expression of ideas and affects”.

From our discussion, we notice that the

same methodology is shared between Latour and Descola in terms of the composition of the social, each underlines the place of the collective in the constitution of the social. Descola is more attached to the fixation of the cultural values, i.e. the cultural anchoring that is evident in the disposition of being and the mode of identification. Latour focuses on the collectives of translation. He emphasizes the social proceedings of the associations and the transactions between connections and controversies. In response to the topic of 'how to shape society', Latour has to envision some new modes of social learning (and also imitation), such as in the case of the knowledge community, as well as supposing that there are some missing links in the mode of identification (the so called crisis of identity).

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*Gilles Verpraet*

### **Call for Nominations**

**Research Committee 16: Sociological Theory of the International Sociological Association**

**Best Junior Theorist Paper in Sociological Theory Award**

RC16 invites nominations for the Best Junior Theorist Paper in Sociological Theory Award, which will be awarded at the 2012 Mid-term conference of RC16, to be held in Trento, Italy, 28-29th June 2012. The award is granted to the best paper in sociological theory authored by one or more theorists submitted to the competition.

It is intended to provide motivation and recognition to a promising young scholar in the field of sociological theory, as well as to encourage growing graduate student interest and participation in the ISA and RC16.

The award consists of a certificate with a citation and the travel costs (up to a maximum of \$750) of the winner(s) to attend the mid-term conference of RC16. The winner(s) will present his/her (or their) joint work during a special session of the mid-term conference of RC16.

In order to be eligible for the award, the candidate(s) must be younger than 35 years. The submitted paper must have been published or accepted for publication no more than three years prior to its nomination or submission. Papers can only be authored by one or more young theorists; those co-authored with tenured faculty members at a degree granting institution are not eligible.

The paper can be in any of the three official languages of the ISA (English, French, and Spanish), to a maximum length of 10,000 words. The winner(s) must be a member (or members) of both the IS and RC16 at the time of receiving the award, and attend the mid-term conference of RC16 to accept the award.

Nominations and self-nominations are both encouraged. Please send (or have arranged to be sent) an electronic copy of the paper by November 30th, 2011 to [rc16juniorprize@soc.unitn.it](mailto:rc16juniorprize@soc.unitn.it) as well as to the members of the selection committee: Giampaolo Baiocchi ([gianpaolo\\_baiocchi@brown.edu](mailto:gianpaolo_baiocchi@brown.edu)), Sang-Jin Han ([hansjin@snu.ac.kr](mailto:hansjin@snu.ac.kr)) and Giuseppe Sciortino ([giuseppe.sciortino@unitn.it](mailto:giuseppe.sciortino@unitn.it)).