

Abstracts

Siamak Movahedi

From the Editor: Can Social Theory Be Liberating?

Abstract: Having been invited to present the opening statement to the first annual meeting of the Social Theory Forum, I found the title, Liberating Social Theory, paradoxical, speaking to some tension between the function of a theory as a restrictive mode of interpretation or perception of the world and its alleged function as liberating. It then occurred to me that a systematic reading, an exploration or excavation of the title as a text may exhibit its instability and conceptual tension which is behind the idea of deconstruction. This was behind titling my presentation: Can a Theory be liberating? And by liberation I am referring to epistemological liberation, the fantasy of “seeing” the world the way it is rather than in a bracketed form. This may then entail the old radical phenomenological proposal of engaging with the world on the basis of no theory, no memory, and no desire.

Samuel Zalanga

Teaching and Learning Social Theory to Advance Social Transformation: Some Insights, Implications, and Practical Suggestions from Paulo Freire

Abstract: This paper examines the contribution of Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to the discussion on human liberation and emancipation. The first part of the paper briefly analyzes the social context of Latin America in general, where Freire’s ideas were initially nurtured. The second part of the paper is divided into several parts, each examining an aspect of Freire’s ideas in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The third part of the paper identifies several contemporary social theoretical themes from Freire’s book that are relevant for critical discussion on strategies for social liberation from the structures of domination and oppression. The paper concludes with a Freirean call for humility and courage as we collectively and collaboratively work together to transform society for the better.

Jonathan Martin

Freire vs. Marx: The Tension Between Liberating Pedagogy and Student Alienation

Abstract: In this paper I describe the tension between Freirean concept of pedagogy and Marxist concept of alienation in the U.S. educational context, with special reference to my own experience teaching at a working class state college in Massachusetts. Subsequently, I discuss other Marxian ideas that can be useful in theorizing a way out of the alienation trap. Specifically, I explain how the notion of revolutionary agency set forth by Marx and especially the complex conceptions of revolutionary strategy and popular political consciousness developed by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci suggest that the alienation pitfall may not be as serious as we might think. I refer to my teaching experiences to illustrate and corroborate this point.

Esther Kingston-Mann

Teaching, Learning, Diversity: Just Don’t Call It Epistemology

Abstract: There is much to consider in the richness of the student responses I reflect upon in this paper to explore issues of teaching, learning and diversity. As I see it, these student insights suggest that the practice of epistemological analysis may well lower the unfairly high intellectual price of admission to the world of academe. It helps to bring marginal knowledges to light as alternatives that enrich our understanding, our sense of possibility and our capacity for problem-solving. Equally important for the academic survival and success of diverse students, an exposure to epistemological thinking can significantly reduce the traditional pressure to renounce marginalized cultural histories in order to take one’s place as an educated person.

Bart Bonikowski

Questioning Pedagogy: Reflections on the Critical Theory of Curriculum

Abstract: Since the classic studies carried out in the 1960s by Blau and Duncan (1967) and James Coleman (1968), sociologists of stratification have made considerable strides in explaining the complex processes that produce inequalities in educational access, achievement, and attainment among different social groups. The strong emphasis on rigorous empiricism that has characterized this tradition has made its findings relevant not only for academics, but also for educational planners and government policymakers. However, in its preoccupation with educational inputs and outputs, most stratification research has ignored a fundamental feature of American education: the curriculum. By treating schools as black boxes that mass-produce competitive candidates for the labor market, mainstream sociology of education has failed to acknowledge the political, economic, and organizational factors that shape the curriculum toward specific, and often problematic, objectives. To uncritically accept these objectives as legitimate is to miss a crucial element of the power dynamics that contribute to the very inequalities that concern stratification scholars. This paper examines an alternative paradigm, the critical theory of curriculum, and suggest ways of reconciling some of its claims with the mainstream sociology of educational stratification.

Estelle Disch

Helping Students Make Sense of Mills' Sociological Imagination

Abstract: C. Wright Mills is one of my favorite sociological theorists and one whose work relates very easily to all of the courses that I teach. His definition of a sociological imagination connects nicely to all students' lives, once they can grasp his ideas. The key ideas of Mills that I like most to teach include the link between biography and history and the difference between personal troubles and public issues. Moving from text to students' understanding, however, is no simple task. To me, Mills' ideas seem relatively easy and straightforward, once his extraneous words are filtered out. To students, however, the ideas are very challenging. I attribute the difficulty that students have with Mills to three things: (1) His writing style is dense, repetitive, and at times difficult; (2) Students are not very conscious of the larger historical trends that affect their lives; and (3) The distinction between a personal trouble and a public issue can seem confusing. In this paper I describe the pedagogical strategies that I use to address each of these difficulties.

Tim Sieber

Commentary: Staying True to Freirean Praxis as well as Theory

Abstract: The papers presented on the first panel cover a lot of ground in application of social theory, especially Freirean, to questions of teaching and learning. They include both theoretical reflections that place educational theory in its own broader social and historical context, and also practice-based accounts from reflective practitioners in higher education's teaching trenches, who have been seeking to use, find, or test theory in practice. In this commentary I address mostly the practice implications in education. Some consensus emerges in the papers around what we should be doing in practice as educators—many of them drawn from Freire or coincident with his vision—that can especially be seen in Kingston-Mann's, Disch's and Martin's presentations, but that are illuminated as well in Zalanga's and Banikowski's more theoretical papers.

Rika Yonemura

Critical Pedagogy of Writing: Evaluation of Possibilities and Limitations in the Context of Authoritarian Japan

Abstract: This paper draws on the Marxist pedagogy of a writing movement (tsuzurikata) in Japan in the 1930s and 40s. By analyzing the discursive resonance between Marxist critical pedagogical and self-revitalization of rural Japan under the military regime, the paper argues that the rise of the Japanese authoritarian military regime was a concomitant process with the discursive practices to produce the autonomous, self-disciplining self. This process involved the displacement of the cultural sphere of "self" into the political sphere, which consequently aided the state control and mobilization of the volunteering individual. I argue that tsuzurikata pedagogy emerged at the very intersection between the yearning of the autonomous self and the emergence of a new type of state power which was parasitic on the autonomy of the self. Pedagogy of writing sought to find an alternative form of political subjectivity intimately contextualized in the immediacy of everyday life, but was consequently appropriated and submerged in the state mobilization in the total war system.

Khaldoun Samman

Toward a Non-Essentialist Pedagogy of "Islam"

Abstract: Edward Said's work captured well the problem with much of what we teach about Islam. We conceptualize the Islamic world as if it were a separate, clearly identifiable civilization that we can teach on its own without a systematic analysis of the larger world within which it is both integrated and incorporated. Rather, in the spirit of Said I argue in this paper that populations are not formed in isolation, that their connections with other populations and with

the larger currents of world history require our attention. To ignore these connections is to treat societies and cultures like “billiard balls,” to use a term Eric Wolf coined in his masterful book, *Europe and the People without History* (1982). I believe that what I call an historical-relational pedagogy offers us the opportunity to “decolonize” knowledge itself and to teach our students to think both critically and creatively about Islam and the world in which we live. It is our best bet for producing the critical mass required for processing our essentialist-saturated media and classrooms.

Kelli Joseph

Marx, Arendt and Habermas on Common Interests and Public Action: Reflections on the Modern Indian State

Abstract: In their writings, Karl Marx, Hannah Arendt, and Jürgen Habermas explore the potential for human fulfillment and human freedom in the political realm of the modern world. Describing the historical circumstances making this space unique, Marx, Arendt, and Habermas focus on public action as the key to the creation and realization of communal human interests. All three writers identified aspects of modern society that make such public political action more difficult. The economic system of capitalism has profoundly altered our understanding of political and social life. Marx recognized this and began a dialogue about human freedom under such a system, to which Arendt and Habermas have responded. Their theories address problems within modern Western societies and responses to their writing have assessed the relevance of their work within other parts of the world. The purpose of this paper is to assess aspects of each of their theories and to critically assess the relevance of their ideas about the historical development of the public realm within the democratic state of India.

Leor Alcalay

A Synergistic Curriculum for the Distressed: Mediating the Accommodation of Diverse Students into Academia

Abstract: Over the past two decades I have developed a methodology (Alcalay, 1996) for teaching the acquisition of a non-native language that has emerged from my own idiosyncratic melding of theories of language, mind, and learning with my instructional classroom experiences. I have named this methodology KECCA: Kaleidoscopic, Eclectic, Communicative, Cognitive, Architectonic. What I conclude from a revisitation of this method in my paper is that I am at the stage where I need to expand the sphere of my pedagogy beyond my classroom. Just as I have sought to bring contemporary communicative technologies into my classroom in order to stimulate the SLA process of my students, to engage them in real world semiotic systems through mechanisms such as email, web-based learning, learner dictionary CDs, and news magazines, so too can these technologies provide an avenue for the “ventilation” of my practice into a larger sphere of interest.

Rajini Srikanth

Commentary: Pedagogy and Praxis in the International Sphere

Abstract: What is common to all the presentations on the second panel is that they encourage attention to the particularities of diverse sociocultural and political spaces and caution against hasty and unexamined applications of compelling theories and practices that have proved their usefulness and value in specific contexts. For instance, Freirean and Marxist pedagogy and Habermasian notions of civil society—while inspirational and potentially transformative—and grand narratives of modernism versus anti-modernism—while offering a convenient method of cataloging the complexities of diverse cultures—may come into conflict with the specific structural realities of the locations charted by the panelists. These locations include Japan in the 1920s and 1930s; post-independence India (newly liberated from British Rule); Quincy, MA, where recently arrived immigrants to the United States attempt to become culturally adept so as to leverage their chances for economic success; Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde in the colonial period under Portuguese rule; and Islamic societies in the Middle East and Asia in the current historical period. These essays require that we look closely at the realities on the ground before we succumb to the seduction of generalized liberatory praxes or world-explaining theories.

Emily Margulies

The Sociology of Why I Smoke: Theoretical Reflections on a Deadly Habit

Abstract: Exercising my sociological imagination and reflecting on various sociological theories, In this paper I explore how society has played a huge role in my decision to smoke and coupled with my subconscious mind it has also fostered the habit throughout my life. It bothers me that I have acquired a pastime that inflicts such harm onto my person. It bothers me that the habit is so strongly internalized that even after analyzing smoking and cigarettes using every theory of sociology and some other helpful references I am unable to throw my pack in the garbage. This paper has opened my eyes to the social forces that are at work in our lives everyday and has made me more aware of the role society plays in my life. I also hope that others will begin to acknowledge the way their smoking is fostered and reinforced through society. The key to gaining control of this deadly habit is to see and treat it in its multidimensional form.

Haley Salinas

A Sociological Analysis of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland and With Her in Ourland

Abstract: In writing both *Herland* and *With Her in Ourland* as fiction novels instead of straight theoretical texts, Gilman's audience becomes vastly wider and more open to the ideas in the books. In her time fiction was much more acceptable for women to write than sociological theory or observation. Realizing this, Gilman deliberately planned the scene, plot, and characters of her works into a fictional utopian world that the reader could safely enjoy. Not only is Gilman's use of a utopia clever, but it becomes very effective as a vehicle to transport her feminist and socialist ideas to the reader. The society that Charlotte Perkins Gilman has created in *Herland* is so much of a fantasy that the reader must make a considerable leap from their reality. By changing, literally, *all* aspects of a society Gilman has made the reader aware of what exactly their society is like. Suddenly, the most mundane details, such as the usage of the phrase "he" to refer to both men and women are given attention and are cause for contemplation.

Milton L. Butts, Jr.

Oliver C. Cox on Caste, Class and Race: Theoretical and Policy Implications for a Color Blind Society

Abstract: My aim in this paper is to initiate a discussion about Dr. Oliver C. Cox, who in the course of his life (8/24/01-9/4/74) consistently challenged the prevailing views of race relations in the United States and in so doing was labeled a Marxist and marginalized for his radical views—which for all intents and purposes were right on point though not palatable for many. Those who have been in positions of power might give voice to and embrace a policy of color blindness, but Cox and others enable us to look behind that façade to see that if fundamental changes do not take place between those who have the power to buy and exploit the labor of others and those who have to sell their labor-power at the risk of being exploited then nothing has really changed. The basis for the status quo remains and power would still remain in the hands of those who impose the White anglo-standard in terms of institutions, opportunities, and life chances, and this is what Cox argued. He not only challenged the powers to be precise in how they used terms like caste, but also to be clear about the distinction between social and political class. Being clear about these distinctions helps move the discussion of race away from the issue of morality.

Glenn Jacobs

Charles Cooley: Traveler in the Inner and Social Worlds

Abstract: Cooley was engaged in knowing "men" and in knowing himself. In this respect, he was engaged in a way Freire professed to be but only as part of his larger agenda of societal transformation. Cooley was more modest and also devoted to the process of inner work and self-reflection and observation. Cooley offers us leads on how and why there is no *essential* conflict between the individual and society, inner and outer, the spiritual and material and values and facts. Cooley's genuine appreciation of the human condition, which he witnessed daily and documented in a personal journal kept for more than forty years and which is reflected in his published writing, is striking in its drive and capacity to get to the heart of what makes people what they are, chiefly through observing his place in all of this and his reflections on his own self and its development. This is what drove Cooley to advocate a radical qualitative methodology for sociology and to take a literary approach both in analyzing society and the self that both constitutes and is constituted by it and dwells within it. In this paper I discuss his methodology, actually his epistemology underlying a qualitative sociology, his work on his personal evolution, and then illustrate these matters by drawing examples from his "laboratory," that is, his journal, with selections from it concerning a trip made in 1904 to New York's Lower East Side Jewish community, the death of his daughter, and his own impending death in 1929. These mark Cooley as an ethnographer, and more trenchantly, an intellectual whose practice routinely comprised linking his intellect, his inner self and the world.

Mohamamd Tamdgidi

Freire Meets Gurdjieff and Rumi: Toward the Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Oppressive Selves

Abstract: In this paper, Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is revisited in order to critically reinvent his contributions to liberatory social theorizing and practice while noting the shortcomings of his approach. It is argued that Freire's pedagogy would more effectively serve liberatory praxis if the Newtonian sociological structure of his pedagogy is abandoned in favor of quantal sociological imaginations whereby the dialectics of oppression and liberation are conceived intrapersonally as well, as part of an open-ended, non-reductivist, and unpredictable pedagogical praxis that also takes into consideration the multiplicity of human selfhood on one hand and, on the other, the significant challenge posed by the human subconscious mind for the transcendence of oppressive human interactions within and without. The teaching of G. I. Gurdjieff, a Middle-Eastern mystic, is critically conferred to arrive at a quantal sociological reimagination of the Freireian pedagogical approach while using the occasion of the dialogue with Freire to highlight

and transcend the one-sided formulations implicit in Gurdjieff's own introspective theory and practice of liberatory human development. To illustrate, Rumi's "Song of the Reed" is recited as both liberating theory and practice engaging both the intra- as well as interpersonal dimensions of human sensuous, intellectual, and emotional centers.

Jorge Capetillo-Ponce

The Poet and the Educator: Notes For A Comparative Study on the Early Works of Octavio Paz and Paulo Freire

Abstract: This essay involves a brief sketch of the basic ideas of Octavio Paz and Paulo Freire, and a few notes at the end that can help us in the attempt of a comparative study of their early work (ideological traditions they draw upon; treatment of alienation and dialectics; treatment of colonialism and lack of originality; treatment of oppression and liberation; and contributions to a Latin American understanding of modernity). I focus on both thinkers' early work for three reasons. First, because *The Labyrinth of Solitude* and *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* are not only Paz's and Freire's most-widely-read works, but also because we find in these works a common theme: the analysis of alienation—even though from very different ideological perspectives. Second, in each text the reader can get acquainted with many of the central themes that each thinker would develop further in later years. And third, because during the early stages of their careers, when the *Labyrinth* and the *Pedagogy* were written, both Paz and Freire were interested in revolutionary causes. Freire kept this interest throughout his life, but for Paz the time he spent in Paris writing the *Labyrinth* coincided with an enthusiasm for the work of Marx and other classical writers of communism and socialism—as well as works from the anarchist and libertarian traditions—that waned in his later years.

Emmett Schaefer

Commentary: Transformation of the Self: Pedagogies from the Margin

Abstract: A central theme of the third panel has been the reclaiming of certain marginalized social theorists as theorists. Charles Cooley and Georg Simmel, essayists with a literary bent, have been deemed insufficiently "serious." Oliver Cox has been considered either too Black or too radical to be included in the pantheon of social theorists. Octavio Paz, classified as a "writer," a "man of letters," has seldom been recognized as a social scientist. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a lesbian socialist, found it so difficult to be taken seriously as a theorist that she turned to writing novels, a choice of medium of expression that has further contributed to her marginalization as a social theorist. G. I. Gurdjieff, an eastern mystic, and Jelalludin Rumi, a Sufi "ecstatic" poet, have presumably had nothing to offer "rational" Western science. Margulies, in her study of why she smokes, clearly felt the need to understand her habit at multiple levels, the least of which being the rational. In her attention to the subconscious and the emotional, as well as in her self-reflexivity, Margulies seems thoroughly modern (or more precisely, post-modern). In fact what characterizes many of the common themes in the panelists' presentations and in the theorists they've chosen to study, is postmodernism. And Freire himself, although the standard in some circles, is far from that in mainstream academic discourse. What emerges from listening to the marginal voices represented here is the broader aim of the panel to follow Friere's counsel to "re-invent" him for a new era, maintaining a Freirean "critical edge not just towards the world but also towards his own words."
