

INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL THEORY CONSORTIUM 2018

**MODERNITY BETWEEN THE DAMAGED
LIFE AND THE SANE SOCIETY:
SOCIAL THEORY
IN THE AGE OF URGENCY**

**LOYOLA UNIVERSITY, CHICAGO
CORBOY LAW CENTER (CLC)
25 E Pearson St, Chicago, IL 60611**

---- Abstracts¹ ----

¹ For Adnan Selimovic and Michael Thompson's contributions to THE FUTURE OF THE FUTURE(S) session, see under James Block.

A Reconstruction of Nancy Fraser's Approach to Global Justice

Marzouq Alnusf, Philosophy Department, Northwestern University

Over the last 15 years, Nancy Fraser has been developing a unique approach to global justice that is closely related to an analysis of capitalism. This is the first paper to reconstruct and explain in one place her approach by tackling all 25 of her relevant publications, in addition to the secondary literature on the topic. My argument is that Fraser's approach consists of two complementary parts that can be coherently integrated. The first part operates on the traditional domain of justice and its main component is Fraser's post-Westphalian theory of democratic justice. The second part of Fraser's approach to global justice operates on the domain of capitalism and its main component is her neo-Polanyian conception of capitalism. Explaining clearly what each part consists of and how the parts fit together results in a critical approach to global justice, which in turn has the potential to offer a philosophic framework for conceptualizing various contemporary global challenges, including inequality, democratization, social justice and collective action.

Dialectic of Dominance: Authoritarianism(s) and the 2012 Election

Chris Altamura

This paper critically interrogates the role of authoritarianism in the 2012 United States Presidential Election. While recent studies have consistently demonstrated the importance of authoritarianism with respect to the 2016 election, much less is known about if, and how, authoritarianism affected the 2012 election. Beyond simply asking *if* authoritarianism matters, there is a strong focus throughout this paper on exactly *what dimension* of authoritarianism matters, and *how* it matters. This focus on the multidimensionality of authoritarianism is in stride with an emerging recognition among scholars that authoritarianism's facets can sometimes differ quite dramatically from one another in their effects. It was hypothesized that the wish for a domineering leader (i.e. authoritarian aggression), right-wing authoritarianism (i.e. authoritarian aggression and submission), and social dominance orientation (i.e. authoritarian dominance and anti-egalitarianism) would correlate with harsh, prejudiced attitudes toward Obama, and, therefore, would be predictive of voting against Obama. It was also hypothesized that, once the preceding dimensions of authoritarianism were accounted for, the wish for a disciplined child (i.e. authoritarian submission) would be insignificant with respect to its effect on prejudice, and the vote. Using data from the American National Election Survey, a series of ordinary least squares and logistic regressions were conducted for white respondents. The regression analyses confirmed the hypotheses regarding various measures of authoritarian aggression and submission in some areas, and disconfirmed them in other areas. With respect to social dominance orientation, however, the analyses emphatically and consistently confirmed the hypotheses. The significance and implications of these findings are discussed, and some possible future directions for research are offered.

The Culture Industry - Consideration, Corroboration and Continuation

Mark Amiradakis - University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

It can be averred that it was the first generation of Critical Theorists who were among the first to investigate (amongst other things) the impact that modern communication technologies were having on contemporary society. It was thus the early theorists of the Frankfurt School that effectively managed to stress and highlight the importance that the critical researcher (still) needs to place upon the development of mass communication technologies and how it is that such phenomena are fundamentally altering the very nature of contemporary society, culture and the individuals operating therein.

This is a pointer that is clearly worthy of consideration within our current context as we are now faced with the emergence of an array of unprecedented phenomena - which in some way all touch upon the merger of 21st century capitalism and digital communicational technologies - such as techno-capitalism, cyber-surveillance, fake news and post-truth (to name but a few). The emergence of the aforementioned phenomena therefore highlights how it would be both beneficial and necessary to go back to the original arguments put forward by the Critical Theorists in order to gain a firm grasp of the impact that mass communicational technologies are having upon contemporary society.

The approaches that will therefore need to be considered in order for this outcome to be effectively achieved include the critical exploration of Horkheimer and Adorno's (1947) influential and pessimistic Culture Industry critique as explicated within *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, along Marcuse's wary evaluation of the new technologies of control as delineated within *One-Dimensional Man*. These arguments will then provide us with a critical base from which the modern technologies of broadcasting and communication can be evaluated. However, they will not serve as the only theoretical basis from which these phenomena are to be explored.

Thus, in true dialectical fashion (and in keeping with the original spirit of Critical Theory), the skeptical views outlined above will be countered and supplemented with the works of Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer. These differing views will be both considered and incorporated as it is these theorists who see something somewhat different and possible residing (in potentia) within the various mediums of mass communication that were available at the time of their writings. Such a dialectically laden and juxtaposed reconstruction of the positions alluded to above, will (hopefully), highlight how it is that these views need to be seriously considered within the 21st century and reworked into the digital domains of social networking and interaction if one is to gain a critical, constructive and comprehensive understanding of the phenomena in question.

Adorno on the Forgotten Socio-Economic Conditions of Authoritarianism

Fabian Arzuaga, University of Chicago

In light of the recent surge of right-wing populism in European and American politics, renewed attention has been given to the psycho-social dimensions of authoritarianism. Nearly all recent empirical studies of authoritarianism pay citational tribute to Adorno et. al.'s *Authoritarian Personality* [1950], yet few heed one of the work's key insights: that while the predisposition to authoritarian thinking can be traced to the psychological conditions of childhood upbringing, the formation of personality is "profoundly influenced by economic and social factors." Indeed, Adorno went on to more fully theorize how socio-economic conditions specific to capitalist modernity work to proliferate the psychic pre-conditions of authoritarian personalities. Quite different from recent attempts to measure the connection between authoritarianism and more or less transient economic conditions, Adorno's work theoretically and empirically examines the profound psychic effects of the abstract and objective domination specific to the deep structure of capitalist society. Giving the impression that our economic order exists as an immense and unalterable cosmos, such conditions have only become more pervasive in our contemporary neoliberal order. In fact, so powerfully entrenched is this "anonymous totality of social processes," the predilection for authoritarian thinking has been increasingly assumed to be constitutive of human psychology as such rather than as a potential outcome of alienated social relations. In this paper, I argue that unless we can critically grasp the ways in which these deep structural compulsions profoundly influence individual psychic development, we can neither adequately understand the resurgence of authoritarianism in liberal democracies, nor can we effectively teach ourselves how to recognize and resist the attempts by propaganda to exploit these authoritarian tendencies. I argue that Adorno's oft-overlooked contributions to the matter can help us with both these tasks.

The Cost of Activism and the Wages of Sacrifice: Self- Love, Selfish Love, and the Sane Society in Turbulent Times

Claude Barbre, Chicago School of Professional Psychology; Chicago Center for Psychoanalysis

“Radical and Reactionary live together as in an unhappy marriage, molded by each other,” writes the Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer, “But we who are their children must break loose. Every problem cries in its own language. Go like a bloodhound where the truth has trampled.” But how can social activists inhabit the spaces where truth has trampled, as well as where social injustice has destructively tread, if their work is not awakened to, and mindful of, self-care? Thomas Merton wrote that “there is a pervasive form of contemporary violence to which the idealist fighting for peace by nonviolent methods most easily succumbs: activism and overwork” -- warning that “to allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is to succumb to violence,” where the activism “destroys one’s own inner capacity for peace because it destroys the fruitfulness of one’s own work, and because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful” (Merton, 1966). In addition, Todd Gitlin wrote that “The work of civic engagement is the living out of the democratic commitment to govern ourselves” (Gitlin, 2006, p. 139). This lived civic engagement and the activity of citizenry entails sacrifice in that it entails a willingness to embrace unanticipated relationships we do not choose. Democracy, then, demands a citizenly participation in self-government. Citizens must question the prevailing powers as well as the counterpowers that inform society, and this means dissent, or as Gitlin says well, “Dissent—vigorous, thoughtful, difficult, indispensable—Dissent against the grain, including the grain of the prevailing dissent...refusing to take conventional wisdom for granted... is the intellectuals’ calling.” It is also the domain and calling of activism. In this presentation we will explore the impact on individuals who live out the call of activism and dissent. We will explore the psychological stresses on activists such as the emotional strains of despair, depression, and insidious trauma—especially in terms of psychological and physical health and self-care. In doing so, we will apply the psychosocial theories of Erich Fromm—in particular his writing on the distinction between self-love and selfishness in the sane society. As Barry Dante says, “Organizing saves people’s lives, but we also don’t do a good job of saving the lives of people who are organizing” (Dante, 2015). This presentation will examine such explicit costs to activism, and the more implicit, nonvisible forces on individuals who participate in civic dissent and sacrifice.

Silicon Imaginary: Intelligence and Ideology in Silicon Valley

Thomas F. Bechtold

Dystopian images from scientific and technical fields have very real functionalities in technocratic neo-reactionaries and the politically ambivalent technicians of AI. The image of intelligence—*as* human or post-human—animates modes of knowing and knowers in their appropriations of history, existence, and culture, specifically discourses of historical development, existential risk, and in the reflexive possibilities of language itself.

This paper examines distinctions in knowledge derived from discursive explanations and understanding. The former refers to the use of reductive techniques of reasoning that appear in discourse; scientific explanations, economic fundamentalism, and ‘free-speech’ fundamentalism. The latter, which is important to the reflexive dimension of critical theory insofar as *critique* remains a kernel of theorizing, is mandated to turn back upon itself in seeking *understanding* in forms of conjoint intelligence and a shared receptivity. This paper seeks to theorize these distinctions in knowledge and the partitioning of knowers, by exploring ideological techniques that advance reductive modes of explanation through processes of speech and writing, and, undermine shared modes of hearing and reading.

21st century ideology also makes use of technologies that further reduce knowledge and explain away social phenomena by refracting discourse through mediums that enhance the *form* of discourse over its respective *content*. The reformulation of discourse through social media admits advanced forms of interpellation and misrecognition—often through non-human intelligences—that serve authoritarian and technocratic forms of political economy. The cultural development and historical consciousness of Silicon Valley provides a crucial trajectory for this 21st century ideology and the strategic deployment of explanatory discourse in neo-reactionary and libertarian political discourses.

YOUTH ACTIVISM AND THE REAWAKENING OF RADICAL THEORY

Jim Block

Radical social theory has long been in the dark in its search for a transformative fulcrum. As with Oedipus, a failure to engage the new has left this fulcrum staring us in the face all along. In a post-industrial world, where the most important product societies produce is not goods but their members, the key part of the production process, the post-industrial proletariat, the victims and conscripted worker bees of these societies is not the manufacturers of goods but the younger generations. For that reason, the emancipatory project – now imagined to be beyond the horizon – is as close as the engagement of children and youth in their own liberation and the liberation of us all.

The implications of the current rise of youth activism are therefore compelling. As this dynamic escalates and the false privileges and faux-authority of older generations are punctured, the dynamic of social change will escalate. In order to mobilize the transformative energies of the young, and to help them locate their aspirations in historical perspective, social theory has a powerful constructive role to play. It must suggest how and why generational privilege has come to be the last – though rapidly declining – form of legitimate authority as well as how older generations can help to level the playing field in the rearing and empowering of the young. It must also suggest what lies beyond generational privilege in the search for and experimentation in a common and collective emancipation. To this end, it is called to proffer an incipient vision of this collaborative society of equals, what I will borrowing from Rousseau and Piercy, Bourne and Whitman, call a community of authors.

THE FUTURE OF THE FUTURE(S): A ROUNDTABLE ON THINKING TRANSFORMATION

James Block, Adnan Selimovic, Michael Thompson

For many thinkers in opposition to the present order, the engine of history and change has ground to a halt, mirroring the very logic of decline infusing that order itself. For the most transformational thinkers of the Frankfurt School, who lived through and endured the collapse of the European empire and the mid-course unraveling of the American empire, it was critical to pose a way of thinking futurity that invited the theory and praxis of transformation. Recent discourse in critical theory has called into question the concept of “progress” as well as the rationality that was embraced by nineteenth and twentieth-century thinkers including that of the Frankfurt School. This roundtable will debate and discuss the implications of these ideas for thinking about the future and the idea of social transformation.

Their invitation to a new vision of historical movement involved two preconditions: a) the decay of the existing order – with its hollowing out of claims of systemic legitimacy – offers an unparalleled opportunity for and openness to transformation, the very *raison d’être* of radical theory and practice, so long as the apprehensions and dislocations, what Fromm called the *fear of freedom* and Marcuse the temptations to *one-dimensionality*, which dampen the capacity to re-envision can be faced; and b) the paths to be pursued lie neither in simple opposition, the photographic negative, of existing defects nor in appropriating the mantle of power and promise, however veiled or unintentional, of the dominant narratives. The contribution of Frankfurt School transformation then distinguished between objective conditions and psychosocial readiness. In becoming master political psychologists, Marcuse and Fromm sought to disinter the deeper felt needs and possibilities stifled and misdirected by the earlier regimes, and to utilize them as a fulcrum for reshaping the objective social realities and everyday social practice toward futures more just and self-actualizing.

How do we, at this later and more urgent time in the decline of Western coherence and ultimately dominance, frame the logic of these paths toward the future in light of the possibilities and cautions they enunciated? Refusing to ally ourselves with claims that liberalism and neoliberalism have monopolized the discourses of change, insisting that the power to remake history and society is the underlying felt need that mobilizes efforts at change throughout the world, we want to consider in conversation the framing conditions for discourses of transformative thought and praxis.

Jim Block:

What is both of great developmental potential and yet frightening in a period of transformation is to acknowledge, expose to vulnerability, those “deeper felt needs and possibilities” rendered illegitimate, inexpressible, even non-existent, within the existing paradigm. As social transformers we must bring to light and consciousness this dimension. Marcuse called it *eros*, Rousseau *genuine self-love* and *full development of selfhood*, potentialities arrested and diverted by the liberal system. I would build upon these, utilizing the work of Fromm and Kohut, to explore the conjunction of self-love and self-development in the creation of a legitimately self-authoring individual. The implications of this post-liberal principle of authority will be discussed both in terms of a new understanding of the individual and the creation of a ‘community of authors’ (filling out Rousseau’s brief sketch at the end of Book IV of *Emile*) as the fullest realization of collective life.

Michael Thomson:

The need for an genuinely autonomous self can only come about, Rousseau seems to be saying, from what we can call an “expanded subjectivity”: that is a kind of thinking, a kind of moral framework which is capable of including others into its sphere of concern. The expanded self, as I will call it, is one whose possibility Rousseau sees as emerging in the present but will be the determination of any future form of individuality and community. Liberal society, capitalism, the defective modernity we inhabit is characterized by the negation of this capacity. The institutions and norms of our society continue to atomize and dominate; Rousseau’s vision for an emancipated future articulates the idea of the “expanded self” as the groundwork for all future forms of social, cultural and political life. A form of consciousness that begins from our existence within an interdependent, cooperative community of equals and for our own genuine, free individuality as grounded in that civic reality.

Adnan Selimovic:

To give freedom by freedom is the universal law. Freedom must give way to more freedom, the only rightful repression is one that enables freedom from blossoming in its heterodox, multivalent, non-identical and unexpected ways (Marcuse 1972).

What if we personalized our theories of what’s happening, if we re-plugged our contradictory and complex selves into the world we have come to understand abstractly? Would we be able to escape the trap of dissipation, of being distracted? Is it still possible for us to sidestep oppositional logics that force us to pick sides? Can we demand the resolution of antagonistic relation between society and its batches of humanity?

What will it take for each one of us to feel comfortable to risk our own plots and reach across the stratified, coalesced borders? To embrace responsibility across the lines of subjectivity, identity, class, and even generationality?

One starting point is to take seriously the Frankfurt School proposition that it is in the capacity for ambivalence that consciousness elevates desire to emancipatory transgression. We should strive to stay close to the story of self-consciousness hiding behind the veil of history, sociality, as well as the desire for transformation. What if we re-began from universal experience—the history of consciousness as seen through the prism where youth is a class, a caste that endures the weight of history only to finally embrace its own event horizon in so-called adulthood.

As conventional categories become empty vessels, we must find new ways of protecting our ability to speak to our collective experience. Consciousness is not a given, nor is it a constant, one-dimensional experience. Instead, it embodies the promise that we don’t have to choose between any one cluster of history’s victims and survivors, that in the most real ways, we are all on the same side of history—the baby boomers, the hippies, the yuppies, the millennials, as well as the alt-right bros.

Populist Protest and the Legitimation Crisis of Neoliberalism and Authoritarian Capitalism

Alessandro Bonanno * and *Robert J. Antonio* **

Dwelling on the populist protest symbolized by the election of Trump, Brexit and similar instances world-wide, the paper argues that not only neoliberalism is experiencing a legitimation crisis, but also that the emergence of right-wing populism animates possibilities for *Authoritarian Capitalism*. This form of capitalism retains neoliberal policies but eliminates liberal democracy. It follows past examples that fused neoliberalism with fascism such as the case of Hayek avidly support of the Pinochet fascist regime in Chile. Accordingly, the unmet promises of neoliberal globalization and this regime's mounting contradictions (i.e., polarizing inequality, environmental crisis, escalating violence) promote the neoliberal view that democracy is problematic as it always limits the market through the promotion of redistributive and social justice policies. In this contest, the neoliberal view that liberal democracy should be scuttled for a more authoritarian approach gains traction. This new type of authoritarianism includes new and advanced forms of repression (i.e., distorted cyber communication, fake news, enhanced surveillance, etc.) that make opposition difficult. This emerging situation creates new challenges for the divided left. However, this does not diminish the seriousness of the current conditions of capitalism and the urgency and importance of opposing the authoritarian threat.

* Department of Sociology, Sam Houston State University. soc_aab@shsu.edu

** Department of Sociology, University of Kansas. Anto@ku.edu

Why so Disparaging? A Recalculation of the Value of Utopian Thought in Political Thought

Brittany Page Brake

Utopianism encompasses political and social ideas and possible plans that seek to improve socio-political issues, as well as distress. While many question what utopianism means and or how it is defined, it is obvious in the political and historical literature that there has never been a single definition; but rather hundreds of variations of definitions and interpretations from authors across disciplines and ages. Yet, for the lack of a distinct definition, forms of egalitarianism, blueprints to reform governments and their institutions, established senses of justice, and the endless pursuit to preserve art and culture, are consistent reoccurring themes in various utopian texts. Moreover, while the constructive element in utopianism is inherent, there are vehement interpretations that insist the discipline of political science and the citizens it examines, renounce utopian recommendations for the political world.

Negative attitudes framed, and expressed, about utopian texts by myriad authors within political science, such as Karl Popper, Karl Marx, and others, as well as those throughout American culture, is met with contention. If recent social and political commentary is to remain steadfast in its accusation that utopian works are exclusively a source of entertaining fantasy and not to be taken seriously, then this author inquires the reasons for which hundreds of utopian communities continue to be created, built, and inhabited throughout the United States.

It appears, then, there are multiple-sides to the utopian story. For example, one facet of the story looks as if the place of utopias in American politics are ridiculous and juvenile, while another facet depicts utopias in a more useful and profound way. Therefore, even as utopianism presents itself as conducive to improving government and society, in this paper I question and analyze what warrants authors to continue to formally dismiss utopianism from serious discussions about politics? More specifically, what perceived features do utopian works exert which invoke writers to describe and categorize utopianism in a pejorative manner? And who determines which texts are utopian?

Hysteria and Personal Identity

© 2017 *Jerome Braun* All Rights Reserved

This “think piece” aims to generate discussion, starting with discussion of psychoanalytic ideas on the structuring of the sense of self. I start with the work of Sigmund Freud and going on to the work of later theorists dealing with the sense of self and the nature of the ego. I go on to distinguish between individualistic and collectivistic cultures and narcissistic and authoritarian personalities, and how they differ so as to emphasize how culture and personality influence each other. There is discussion of the relation between social relationships and the formation of societies. Evolution of individualistic societies into narcissistic societies, and authoritarianism and narcissism as sources of social identity, are discussed, within the context of understanding hysteria as being a primordial basis for individual identity because it is the result of elementary processes of socialization within the family, and in analogous manner into fulfilling social roles within social groupings

Key Words: Authoritarian Personalities; Culture and Personality; Narcissistic Personalities; Political Evolution

Reading race, class, and gender as integrated theory

Rose M. Brewer

A body of left feminist thought articulates that the theorization of race, class and gender should be conceptualized as an integrated whole. This paper looks carefully at theorists Joy James, Angela Davis, Evelyn Glenn, Lise Vogel, and Johnna Brenner and explores the questions: Why an integrated theory? What are the critical tenets that run through this thought? how does this theory advance emancipatory struggles? Racial and gender violence? How have leading left feminists articulated this thought? Davis and James are steeped in an intersectional analysis. Glenn articulates relationality. Vogel and Brenner think through socialist feminism. Among these thinkers, what are the points of demarcation? Commonalities? Relationalities? Glenn, for example, robustly asserts the idea of relationality, focusing on those interrelated histories which cannot be written strictly as comparative narratives. Race, for example is called into being simultaneously around the making of whiteness and the othering of “nonwhites.” This fundamental ideological rationalization for exploitation and violence takes on a number of dimensions. In short, for all the theorists explored, race, class, and gender are called into being in deep relationality. The paper interrogates these ideas further and examines the case for reading race, class, and gender as integrated theory. At the center of the analysis is the question of political change and transformational possibilities of such theorization. The paper has implications for understanding the persistent problem of violence, race and gender.

Failures of Consciousness and the Commodity Aesthetic under Consumer Capital

William H. Burr

In the face of abject poverty, ecological degradation, and growing resource scarcity, capitalism remains firmly lodged within the minds of many in the West, and increasingly across all corners of the globe, as the only viable system of production and distribution. For those who aspire to a more equitable existence and sustainable world, the enduring question is: “Why has capitalism been allowed to continue?” Given the assumption that people are self-aware, maybe not rational, but at the very least self-aware (though perhaps some more than others), how has capitalism not only been allowed to continue, but to expand globally? A self-aware people would surely witness the deep injustice and mass inequality that results and reject such a system. However, the proletarian revolution promised by Marx has yet to materialize. One attempt at an explanation envisions “subjectivity transformed to seek willing, if not somewhat gratifying, assent,” (Langman 1993:22). This theory postulates that cultural tropes are created and deployed in order to manufacture and maintain “willing assent” to capital (Langman 2017). As increasingly frequent crises of capitalism shake the dominant cultural tropes, the assumptions undergirding the theory of culturally constructed “willing assent” are called into question. “Cultural traditions have their own, vulnerable, conditions of reproduction. They remain “living” as long as they take shape in an unplanned, nature-like manner, or are shaped with hermeneutic consciousness,” (Habermas 1973 [1975]:70). Culture is delicate, but durable. It is fragile, but volatile. Culture, and cultural traditions in particular, must be enacted and reproduced. While the role of culture in shaping human social action is beyond reproach, the function of hegemonic cultural ideals in propping up the capitalist system of material relations is but one element of a larger story.

The Murder of God: Man, Meaning and Modernity

Helen-Mary Cawood, University of the Free State, South Africa

In Max Horkheimer's inaugural lecture at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, in 1931, titled *'The State of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research'*, he highlights the shortcomings of both the modern social sciences and philosophy (social philosophy/theory) in dealing with the relationship between human beings both as individuals and as members of communities within contemporary society. He argues that social theory should have as its central point of research the "fate of human beings, insofar as they are parts of a community, and not mere individuals. It [critical social theory] concerns itself above all with the social life of people: state, law, economy, religion, in short, with the entire material and spiritual culture of humanity".

Social theory should thus deal with mediations, intersections and interconnections between the different realms of the social life of a human being. In particular, Horkheimer emphasizes three areas which need to be identified, described, critiqued and developed, namely "which interconnections exist in a definite social group, in a definite period of time and in a definite country, between *the role of this group in the economic process, the transformation of the psychic structures of its individual members, and the totality of the system that affects and produces its thoughts and mechanism*". .

Catherine Pickstock, a proponent of Radical Orthodoxy, provides a liturgical critique of modernity which arguably has shades of Horkheimer at its centre when she argues that it is only through the liturgical patterns which govern traditional communities that resistances to bureaucratic capitalist norms can be found. The basis of her critique of and cure for modernity is therefore a reinterpretation of traditional liturgical practices, can construct an immanent critique of society. Amy Allen likewise emphasises that within the paradigm of critical social theory (which recognises itself as a product of and arising from modern social thinking but has at its roots a commitment to immanent critique of these very conditions), the distinctiveness of critical theory as a social critique of modernity requires it to find an open dialectical tension between the analysis of modernity as being in the grips of power as 'false consciousness', on the one hand, and having a clear foundation of normativity and rationality to which to appeal to on the other hand.

It thus is argued in this paper that in attempting to provide a critical social theory of contemporary modern communities, such as the commercialization of sports fandom through the creation of a 'Nostalgia Industry, it is possible to combine dialectical materialism, an immanent critique which is found at the heart of traditional Critical Theory, with a form of liturgical critique, which is profoundly anti-modern and which points to liturgical patterns as a way of disrupting modern attention economies (with reference to Bernard Stiegler).

Through the work on ritual by Emile Durkheim, the notion of Gnosticism by Eric Voegelin, and the dialectic of freedom by Erich Fromm, this paper will focus on different aspects of human culture, namely the social, the spiritual and the psychological. It is hoped to show that, echoing Horkheimer, it is necessary to view the vicissitudes of modern human life through understanding the mediations and interactions between the individual and the community, particularly in the context of practices, rituals, traditions and liturgies.

These three analyses (social, psychological, spiritual) will be used to form the foundation for a critical approach to the problem of the compulsive conformity and submission of the modern individual to an established system of order, in order to feel a sense of belonging and to escape from feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness. This forms the basic epistemological and investigatory model upon which the phenomenon of modern fandom in sport, which is increasingly propelled by advances in technology, will be explored.

The Future of Social Protest: When symbolism, rhetoric, and discourse are not enough

Carlton Clark, PhD, the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

On February 14, 2018, a mass shooting was committed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Seventeen people were killed and seventeen more were wounded. A protest in the form of a National School Walkout occurred on March 14. This was the first major student-led gun-law-reform protest. This seventeen-minute walkout (in honor of the 17 victims) was a symbolic act that gained media attention, but the long-term efficacy of this kind of symbolism is uncertain. In other words, symbolism or symbolic action, as a kind of discourse, has definite limits.

Symbolism belongs to the larger category of discourse, and discourse alone is not enough. Since 1970s, thinkers in the humanities and social sciences have been very concerned with discourse, and this trend is known as the discursive turn. Going under labels such as the cultural turn, the critical turn, the linguistic turn, the rhetorical turn, and the discursive turn, these projects have, in various ways, analyzed the ways in which individuals and collectives “construct meaning.” This trend was a turn away from the centuries-long project of discovering “natural laws” or filling in gaps in humanity’s understanding of objective reality. But for about the last 20 years, there has been growing dissatisfaction with the discursive turn. Critics maintain that the various forms of the discursive turn have, as it were, put all their eggs in the discourse basket. More recent “turns,” such as the speculative turn, the materialist turn (e.g., speculative realism, speculative materialism, objective-oriented ontology, object-oriented philosophy, new materialism, material rhetoric), the environmental turn, and the affective turn have questioned the primacy of discourse. However, some of these newer turns may be described as extensions, refinements, or corrections of the discursive turn, not wholesale rejections. In this proposed paper, I will offer social systems theory, as developed principally by Niklas Luhmann, as another alternative to, or perhaps refinement of, the discursive turn.

Applying social systems theory, I propose to analyze the efficacy of discourse, rhetoric, and symbolism in producing desired social change. Luhmann describes contemporary society as organized by function systems—the economic system, the legal system, the political system, the education system, the science system, the mass media, the art system, and so on. Each function system uses its own symbolically generalized communication medium. For the economy this medium is money; for politics, power, for science, truth; for law, legal norms.

Regarding the gun issue, we have tried truth, emotion, and various kinds of rhetoric to change people’s hearts and minds. But I will argue that money, as the medium of the economy, should be targeted, principally by boycotting manufacturers and retailers of assault weapons, along with business with ties to the National Rifle Association. This effort, using the hashtag #boycottNRA, has been quite affective. Dick’s Sporting Goods has announced it is immediately ending its sales of military-style semi-automatic rifles and is requiring all customers to be older than 21 to buy a firearm at its stores. Additionally, the company no longer will sell high-capacity magazines. Walmart, which ended sales of modern sporting rifles such as AR-15s in 2015, has announced that it is raising the minimum age for purchasing firearms and ammunition from 18 to 21. The company notes that it does not sell bump stocks, high-capacity magazines, and similar accessories. Additionally, many companies have cut ties with the NRA.

A second tactic would be to target the education system through an actual school walkout or strike, rather than one seventeen-minute symbolic walkout. The March 14, school walkout was a very limited and tightly controlled protest. If students would actually walk out and stay out of school, or if this was not feasible, drop their pencils and refuse to do any schoolwork, until gun laws were changed, that would likely gain the attention of the education system, as well as politics and the economy, as these systems are tightly coupled to the education system. I would directly target the political system because this system works very slowly and, in the United States, politics has been thoroughly corrupted by corporate money. It is better to go directly to the money.

Dialectic of Anxiety: Socioanalysis and the Damaged Life

Joel Crombez

Anxiety is reaching epidemic proportions in American society. Mainstream psychology has followed the biomedical approach for the diagnosis and treatment of this affect, seeing it as a negative phenomenon that interferes with the operations of a functional life orchestrated by instrumental reason. Sociology has either left anxiety to psychology, or has treated it in a similarly reified manner that ignores how the condition of anxiety crosses the psychosocial divide by linking its public causes to personal effects (Cavalletto, 2016; Wilkinson, 1999). If our thoughts are the result of being programmed by the logic of capital, then the ability to recognize how the effects of that coding both produce anxiety and structure our thoughts on it requires a recoding of our minds. Socioanalysis is a method and theory for this recoding, which places the analyst in the position of an experimental vanguard who, in committing to the recoding of their own mind, must embody the painful contradiction of living in a society to which their thoughts do not align. Understanding the dialectic of anxiety is the precondition for working through the contradiction of embracing a state of pure anxiety as a necessary path to reclaiming the potential of anxiety as a socially beneficial affect.

Representation as Intervention: Re-thinking Performativity in a Post-Crisis World

Dean Curran, University of Calgary

From Callon's (1998) classic analysis of economics making economic life to the 2007–8 Financial Crisis, sociological analyses of finance flourished under the aegis of "performativity". The "performativity turn" has importantly highlighted how economic theory shapes economic practices. Nevertheless, this paper argues that performativity's conflation of economic theory and its objects of analysis has led the sociology of finance into a theoretical and empirical *cul-de-sac*, in which it is caught between the need to identify the interaction of economics and its objects, but also to recognize economic processes that are not identified by economic models themselves. This paper proposes to resolve this dilemma by proposing an account of *representation as intervention* that retains the critical impulse of exploring how economic models *reshape* economic life without conflating theories and their objects. This account of representation as intervention allows for the exploration of the interaction of science and its objects, while also leaving space to explore the systemic inadequacies of economic modelling to its phenomena.

Slow Violence and Negative Dialectics in the Age of Ecological Urgency

Nikhil Deb, University of Tennessee- Knoxville

Most earlier environmental sociologists (in the US) argued that the founding fathers of sociology—namely Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim—disappointedly distanced themselves from environmental issues, affiliating classical sociological theorists with anthropocentric, or what they call “Human Exceptionalism,” paradigm. An increasing body of scholarly works, however, refute such ‘inadequate’ analysis of the works of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. Although many serious, contemporary works in sociology offer us useful insights into environmental issues, the ways in which (1) the dynamic of capitalist modernity render invisible the slow-passing consequences of social and environmental harms and (2) critical theory does enlighten our sociological examination of planetary environmental problems remain highly understudied. To offer a critical examination of the above points, I argue that environmental theories should underpin (1) Rob Nixon’s notion of “Slow Violence,” to grasp the disproportionate, invisible impact of environmental problems on marginalized populations across the world, especially in poor countries and (2) the insights of critical theorists, especially of Adorno, to unravel the causes and consequences of many environmental issues that are looming on the horizon. I develop this paper in the following steps. First, I critically examine all major political economic approaches in environmental sociology such as metabolic rift, treadmill of production, treadmill of destruction, world-systems, and world-ecology. Second, I expound on the notion of slow violence, violence that continues over time and space and obscures the violence because it is inflicted on those who do not have the power to publicize it. Third, I offer an inquisitive invitation to Adorno’s critical theory, demonstrating the ways in which it speaks to today’s planetary ecological crisis. I conclude this essay with a brief discussion of potential avenues for scholars theorizing environmental problems underlining political economic forces in the age of ecological urgency.

MAGA and the Masses: The Socio-historical Roots of Trumpism

Tony Allen Feldmann, University of Kansas

Trump's presidential candidacy and electoral victory shocked many Americans. Many Americans are stunned both that such an unapologetically crass, offensive, and narcissistic individual was elected to the highest office and that Trump garnered unwavering support from millions of Americans. Trump's supporters appear undeterred by his many scandals, constant lying, and unprofessional behavior. In fact, what many Americans view as Trump's worst behavior is celebrated by his followers. At times, the views of Trump supporters so radically differ from that of other Americans that they seem to be experiencing an alternative reality. Discussions of the emergence of a post-fact politics where truth no longer matters have arisen, and often these discussions point to the internet and social media being the primary factors behind the rise of Trumpism. Is Trumpism really the product of Twitter and Facebook? Or do the roots of Trumpism run deeper? I will argue that Trumpism is not an aberrant phenomenon brought about by social media. Rather, it is a resurgence of American right-wing populism. Although Trumpism does introduce new elements into this form of populism (e.g. trolling, Islamophobia, etc.), its core features (xenophobia, ethnocentrism, producerism, authoritarianism, and demonology) mirror those of past right-wing populist movements in the US. Furthermore, I argue that the resurgence of right-wing populism is a both a reaction to the crisis of neoliberalism and the success of progressive movements.

Towards an Ethics of Vulnerable Agency

Hille Haker, Loyola University Chicago

In this paper, I will propose a threefold concept of 'vulnerable agency' that will serve as a lens to interpret the necessity to be open to the world in and through one's experiences, the affectability and susceptibility to be harmed as well as the acknowledgment that one can harm others, and the elevated vulnerabilities in structures of injustices. I will demonstrate what is at stake in feminist social ethics that is grounded in experiences of moral injury and injustice, claiming, however, that it is a basic concept for any ethics.

Jay Bernstein, in "Torture and Dignity" (2015), argues that it is not just bodily injury but *moral* injury that may damage a person's trust in the world. Reading Jean Améry's *At the Mind's Limit* (1966), and Susan Brison's *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self* (2002), Bernstein interprets dignity as intertwined with recognition theory, placing trust in its center.

For Bernstein, trust is also the condition for practical reason. "Trust ... is the social presupposition, the basic structure of mutual recognition, on the basis of which moral and legal rules can arise and be socially effective." (Bernstein, 241)

The ethics of vulnerable agency takes these insights a step further, aligning it to Erich Fromm's analysis of the destructive character and the capability to freedom. Vulnerable agency serves as an important correction to recognition theory, which is ultimately taken as a self-centered theory, with little space for the agent's own destructive potentials. In contrast, the ethics of vulnerable agency addresses the inter-agents affectability on the basis of their ontological, moral, and structural vulnerabilities. In my paper, I will show the ramifications of this concept for moral theory and social practices.

Literature:

J. Bernstein: *Torture and Dignity*, 2015

J. Améry: *At the Mind's Limit*, 1966

S. Brison: *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self*, 2002

E. Fromm: *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, 1973

Adornoian Sociology and Trump in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election

Jeffrey A. Halley and Timothy Haverda²

Abstract

There has been a burgeoning interest in the sociology of the Frankfurt School as well as the oeuvre of Theodor W. Adorno since the election campaign of Donald Trump. The work of the Frankfurt School has to some extent been revisited and reworked in making sense of contemporary socio-political phenomena. The objectives of this study are to both illustrate the continued importance of Adorno and to provide an important theoretical framework in making sense Donald Trump's 2016 campaign. Using Adorno's understudied discourse analysis of the radio addresses of Martin Luther Thomas – a far-right, anti-Semitic, and Christian “demagogue” in California during the 1950s – we extract a variety of rhetorical devices that Adorno uses to characterize Thomas and his discourse. Then, using data from Trump at the primary and presidential debates, as well as his presidential announcement speech inaugural address, we analyze Trump's discourse using these same rhetorical devices. We find that many of the rhetorical devices outlined by Adorno are applicable to Trump, particularly those devices which self-characterize the speaker (in this case Trump). However, theological or religious devices play a smaller influence on Trump's discourse. This study hopes to provide a useful sociological framework in making sense of contemporary far-right politics. Future directions for critical theory may benefit through a comparative discourse study of leading far-right demagogues.

² Department of Sociology, University of Texas, 1 UTSA Circle, San Antonio, TX 78249, USA.

Email: timothy.haverda@utsa.edu

Email: jeffrey.halley@utsa.edu

From Affirmative Mind to Rational Madness

Eugene Halton, University of Notre Dame

D. H. Lawrence saw the historical rise of reflective consciousness, not as a new and progressive activation of “axial” cognitive capacities, as did Karl Jaspers later and more recently Robert Bellah, but rather as a tragic cleaving from cosmos. Based on his observations of indigenous peoples, he proposed a “primal way of consciousness,” which he termed *affirmative mind*, as a human birthright and dormant key to a renewal of civilization. It is a way of “being in touch,” through “the unquestioning way of affirmation, and movement from affirmation to affirmation by way of image,” in contrast to questioning critical consciousness. Lawrence locked on to what, in current discussions, is being called “the new animism,” a relational ontology. This paper traces the polarities between affirmative mind and reflective consciousness in the context of human history.

The relative devaluation of affirmative mind in the modern era can be taken not only as a product of rationalization, in Max Weber’s sense, but as one of the costs of what Lewis Mumford termed “the myth of the machine,” an empowering of the rational, mechanical, and quantitative as determinants of reality, and disempowering of humane capacities such as wonder, spontaneous intelligence, empathy, and the qualitative as though merely subjective or illusory.

The mechanical mythos is the automatic side of life overgeneralized and projected onto the totality of life. As such, it is the death not only of sustainable living but also of the spontaneity that is in life itself, including the living and affirming spontaneity that is the human soul. The continued over-expansion of the rational-mechanical matrix beyond limit, in the guises of progress, power, and profit, progressively involves the elimination of life. I argue that the quest for Knowledge Unlimited as an aspect of this power-bent civilization is sure *rational madness*, a cold murderous rage that is the logical end of systemically infantilized, nominalized consciousness. Reactivating affirmative mind as an evolutionary birthright of the human capacity for projective spontaneous intelligence suggests a way out of the rational madness.

Alternative Facts and the Enemy of the State: Can there be a Politics of Truth in the Trump Era?

Black Hawk Hancock, Associate Professor, DePaul University

Mark Wodziak, Instructor, DePaul University

Following Michel Foucault's work, what is the status of truth, knowledge, and power in the Trump era of "alternative facts" where "fake news media" is "the enemy of the people"? In answering this question through an assessment of news media, this paper explores Foucault's concepts of power/knowledge and the constitutive role they play in constituting "truth" in the public sphere. Since facts are never self-evident, knowledge is always a process of production in the interests of a group situated within a social system of power relations. Facts are resources that are linked together—articulated— within specific social contexts for particular ideologies, politics, and practices. As a result, the paper explores the construction of facts, how facts are inserted into discourses and discursive formations, which become power/knowledge regimes through the following questions: How do we parse claims to truth in a post-truth era? How do we differentiate claims to factual evidence in the post-fact era? How can facts and "alternative facts" coexist? These questions provide a springboard to examine the realm of news media as the conduit through which information is circulated to communicate, interpret, explain, and critique the world around us, as well as to examine the function, value, and effects of power that truth produces.

Relearning liberation: Critical theory in our time and place

Nancy Weiss Hanrahan and Sarah Amsler, George Mason University

How can critical theory help us to articulate the nature of domination in twenty-first century capitalism, and to expand our horizons of possibility for liberation and alternative futures at a moment of apparent impasse? In this essay, we explore how critical theorists across three generations in the European Frankfurt School tradition articulated the 'struggles and wishes' of their age and place, and reflect on the contextual limits and enduring relevance of their negative, utopian, democratic and ethical methods. We then turn to developments of this work in the Latin American tradition, which articulate critical theorizing as a transformative praxis within the material construction of dignified communitarian life, and ask what we might learn about how to theorize our own dominations and liberations through this critical methodology.

Has “the culture industry” been refuted? Ontogenesis and the instrumental orientation toward culture

Todd Hedrick, Michigan State University

Despite being probably the best-known part of the work most centrally associated with first generation critical theory —Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*—“the culture industry” has not been well understood and is frequently dismissed for its seemingly hyperbolic contention that modern subjects have become “nodes of conventional reaction”, wholly conditioned by products of mass production and the imperatives of exchange society. Although this paper remains agnostic on the question of how literally we should take such characterizations by the authors, and acknowledges that the culture industry certainly requires updating in light of social and technological changes over the intervening 75 years, it maintains that at least some of the culture industry’s core holdings have not been refuted by the arguments brought against them by subsequent waves of critical theory (i.e., Habermas and Honneth), and remain troubling as ever.

In the course of offering a more ambivalent take on the emancipatory potentials of modernity than Horkheimer and Adorno’s, Habermas argues that, since socialization in a linguistic form of life equips persons to raise validity claims across the full gamut of types of practical discourse, it is unlikely that the logic of exchange society could overwrite the internal structure of practical discourse to such an extent where cultural domains are remade in the image of commodity exchange. Honneth, for his part, holds that the culture industry is based on a Freudian model of ego formation that treats the ego as the result of a disciplinary imposition, which, according to Honneth, subsequent developments in object relations psychoanalysis have to a large extent abandoned, in favor of a model emphasizing ego’s formation in an intersubjective give-and-take of mutual recognition.

Neither of these arguments, I argue, obviate what I take to be the deepest point from the culture industry, namely, that modern subjects have an increasingly instrumental orientation toward culture (including what we might call political culture), both in terms of treating it as instinctually gratifying entertainment *and* a means of securing (through judgements of taste and preference) a seemingly solid ego identity. The paper develops this point by showing how it flows (in a way commentators have not appreciated) from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*’s previous excursus, “Odysseus, or Myth and Enlightenment”: there, the authors illustrate how Odysseus’ story models the ontogenetic journey from nature to subject, as Odysseus becomes a self-directing ego by extricating himself from the dominion of given forces (“mythical powers”), warding off the primal fear of losing his ego by reverting back to nature. In the course of this development, the subject develops a half-serious orientation to the claims of mythic power: serious, insofar as Odysseus must submit to the mythic powers and render them their due, but unserious insofar as his real purpose in doing so is to navigate through them in pursuit of his own interests. This half-serious attitude, both submissive and instrumentally assertive, comes into full bloom, the paper argues, in a social environment in which subjects are constantly set upon, from very early on, by the “schema” of mass culture and its imperative to construct an ego identity out of culturally given tropes and identifications. This gives credence to Adorno’s contention that it is increasingly difficult for subjects to experience through culture anything outside, as it were, of their self. Such credence is merely qualified, should we feel compelled to modify the Freudian account of ego formation that initially undergirded the culture industry, as both Honneth and Habermas recommend. The paper closes by arguing that this contention of the culture industry is of great help making sense of observable trends concerning defensive reactions to threats to identity, and the fungibility of political beliefs and moral commitments that render persons manipulable.

A Micro-logical Critique of Gendered Micro-Finance: Recognition and the Subordination Paradox

David Ingram, Loyola University, Philosophy

Recent recognition theory (Honneth, Fraser, et. al.) confirms that different kinds of recognition may be harmful or beneficial for developing different aspects of agency depending on social context. I argue that micro-finance often places women in the uncomfortable position of sacrificing political recognition and feminist agency for the sake of gaining social recognition and welfare agency.

[Reference: *World Crisis and Underdevelopment: A Critical Theory of Poverty, Agency, and Coercion* (Cambridge UP, 2018).]

Concept and Sensation in Auditory Culture: The Emancipated Spectator in Simulated Utopia

Whitney Johnson, University of Chicago

An aesthetic controversy in the quickly emerging discipline of sound art concerns the ethical implications of conceptual and “ambient” practices. Some consider that politically salient conceptual frameworks are necessary for art to transform culture beyond the boundaries of narrowly defined fields. Others insist that formal or “ambient” works lacking a conceptual basis might offer audiences the opportunity to build their own meaningful contexts for what they encounter. Jacques Rancière’s three-part framework of the stultifying pedagogue, ignorant schoolmaster, and emancipated spectator point toward a new possibility for art audiences to escape the mediating dictum of a text and to experience the freedom of sensory perception, judgment, and valuation. The bodily nature of sonic perception for Rancière’s emancipated spectator points to the expanded political potential of an ambient sensorium, a simulated utopia where social bodies make their meanings through these encounters.

Rancière’s theory of the political is also in conversation with Habermas’ rational structure of the linguistification of the sacred. Critiquing Durkheim’s understanding of solidarity through the aesthetic realm of the “sacred,” Habermas theorizes language as the means to transform the belief in sacredness into a new shared meaning of value. As (post)modern societies have become increasingly individuated from prior states of collective consciousness, spoken and textual language are necessary to determine consensus about these concrete values. In pursuit of the good life of happiness and well being, Mead claims that social subjects individuate themselves as distinctive, singular, and peculiar, ascribing less to shared notions of the sacred. What may have been communicated through sacred symbols of the collective consciousness in the past now must be rendered legible through logical language.

Yet Rancière imagines another way to engage in political discourse over “the good” without the aid of a mediating text. Bodies perceive and judge sound and sight differently, and absent a textual “third” mediation this bodily autonomy can become the site of both Meadian self-determination and a discourse of shared norms and values. In the case of sound art, bodies must inhabit the gallery or museum space in order to experience the sensorium, but purely conceptual work does not similarly require sensory engagement. A conceptual, linguistic statement transports readily from the gallery wall to the social media news feed, but ambient sound requires physical engagement to become valuable. Concepts transmit fluidly through critical discourse, but embodied encounters with sound do not. Furthermore, where art-critical texts have been able to capture the value of conceptual sound art on reduced terms, they have failed to do so with the ambient work in sound. Though the history of visual art has tended to value the authorial hand or the conceptual mind of the artist, sound art may allow audiences to contribute a broad spectrum of values to the hierarchies of cultural economy through ethically engaged aesthetic communities. Perhaps this relationship between sensation and meaning is fertile ground for cultivating Fromm’s “sane society,” not only in the rarefied environments of galleries and museums but in public and private space, as well.

The Return of the Fragmented Subject: Critical Realism, False Ontology, and the Regression of Social Theory

Reha Kadakal, Assistant Professor of Sociology, California State University Channel Islands

In the Fall 2016 issue, the ASA Theory Section newsletter *Perspectives* published an introductory article titled "What is Critical Realism?" Co-authored by a number of sociologists and social theorist whose areas of individual work span the discipline, the article outlines a paradigm of knowledge that claims to be an alternative to positivist, interpretivist and constructivist standpoints in social sciences.

At the heart of Critical Realism lies what its proponents call "ontological realism," the assertion that reality exists independently of human knowledge. Building on Bhaskar's work in philosophy of science and the debates in analytic philosophy, the goal of Critical Realism, accordingly, is to bring ontology into study of reality for the purposes of a "normative agenda for social science." More specifically, for its advocates, Critical Realism culminates in 'ethical naturalism' that would establish the factual basis of values, and, hence, the normative dimension of knowledge.

In this paper, I will critically engage Critical Realism both as a paradigm of knowledge and as a form of normative standpoint. Building on Lukács' work and Hegel's thought, I will show that Critical Realism's ontological account leads to a misreading of both the nature of knowledge as well as the nature of reality. Rather than overcoming the subjectivity-objectivity dichotomy and its ontological, epistemological and ethical manifestations, such ontology, I will argue, ossifies the fragmented subject and the antithesis of the subject and the object. Notwithstanding its view against positivist, postmodernist and constructivist paradigms, the ontology of Critical Realism expresses the reified structure of consciousness and not an alternative to it. Such ontology could only culminate, I will maintain, in conservative form of thought and in 'heterogeneous series positions' for which the true ontology of the reality and knowledge remains beyond reach.

Luhmann's Theory of Society and the Social Crisis of Labor

Anthony J. Knowles, UT-Knoxville

The emergence of advanced communications technology, robotics, and artificial intelligence in recent decades has spurred renewed inquiry into the potential of wide reaching technological unemployment that could lead to a crisis for society. While Marxian scholars have described the historical dynamics of capitalism that may lead to these potentially disastrous contradictory developments, much less has been said about how various social systems and institutions respond and adapt to these unfolding contradictory dynamics. This paper proposes that a Luhmannian systems theory approach may be able to illuminate the social processes that social systems use to adapt and evolve to this crisis. What Luhmann describes as the social processes of self-description and narrowly focused forms of communication are what make the underlying forces that animate the developing crisis of labor remain invisible to these social systems. The crisis of labor can be described as the history of how of these economic systems and institutions are continuously unable to live up to their own self-description due to internally contradictory dynamics that largely remain hidden from view from the economic systems, as well as other social systems. This occurs primarily because this contradictory dynamic is not fully understood, not recognized as immanent to the system, and is not widely communicated amongst the various social systems. Nonetheless, social systems must respond to the surface manifestations of the crisis, including outsourcing, automation, and the rise of precarious labor forces and superfluous populations. The crisis of labor is ultimately a specifically *social* crisis because is contingently born from the contradictory dynamics of the capitalist system, yet continues to be exacerbated, or is at best managed, because of the failure of social systems to communicate the underlying causes of its own unraveling.

Capital Irrepressible: On the Political Economy and Political Psychology of Trumpism

Dan Krier

(Note: This talk is based upon an article coauthored with Tony Smith (Iowa State University) and Mark P. Worrell (SUNY Cortland))

This talk analyzes the rise of ethno-nationalist politics (Trumpism in the U.S.) as a complex symptom of derangement in the capitalist order. In terms of Marxist political economy, Trumpism indicates an *overexertion* phase of capital accumulation, characterized by massive debt, extreme inequalities, and domination by patrimonial oligarchy. These concentrated powers of capital exploited structural weaknesses of parliamentary governance to hijack sovereignty, investing it in a *rump democracy*. Though Trumpism shines with apparent charismatic and traditional authority, beneath its surface lies power generated and sustained by extra-legal, technologically-enabled *dark bureaucracy* that digitally interpolates subjects of bespoke ideology.

Taking More by Returning Less: Productivity and Exploitation in Capitalism

Theodore Lai

Critiques of capitalism equate the waged worker with the field slave by describing exploitation as afflictions present in both systems. Both receive the bare minimum to stay alive, and both are made to obey the will of their benefactors. Since both experience similar conditions, it may appear that capitalism is no different from slavery. Such an argument is often met with indignation, since it depicts workers as no different from slaves. Apologists for capitalism argue that the worker's labor is different from the slave because it is *moderate* and *free*. Yet a closer look reveals that they are indeed different, but not for the reasons we intuitively hold. Paradoxically, a different portrait of suffering emerges in waged work *because* of the ostensibly benevolent qualities of capitalism that the apologist recurses to. The very traits of capitalism that appear to emancipate the worker and differentiate her from the slave – the development of labor-saving machinery and the worker's economic agency – are in fact the very conditions that increase her exploitation *vis a vis* the slave.

Moderation and freedom subjects the worker to a different form of abuse because they exponentially accelerate the production of commodities and cheapen the worker's subsistence, allowing worker exploitation to increase in a way that slave exploitation cannot. This insight leads us to clarify capitalism as a system that exercises exploitation not simply by taking more, but *also* by returning less. To draw out the nuance of capitalist exploitation, we cannot remain wedded to a focus on the surplus value appropriated by the capitalist, but must also pay attention to what is received by the worker. Wage exploitation is therefore a particular economic phenomenon that cannot be found in slave societies, making capitalist exploitation its own creature. Observing this difference will shed further light on the particular forms of wrong in modern-day capitalism and bring greater support to the tradition of *kapitalkritik*.

Toward a Normal Sociology: Rectifying Paradigms of Social Justice

Robert Leonard, UT-Knoxville

In my short sociological life, there seem to be two running jokes within the discipline: (1) if you get 10 sociologists in a room you will get 10 different definitions about whatever you want to be defined and (2) a bad time for society is a good time to be a sociologist. This humor has real roots in the reality of sociology. We spend a considerable amount of time debating over definitions and race to give our surface-level analysis on the most recent injustices. The reality of the matter is that despite sociology's efforts, class, gender, and race relations are not remarkably better than they were 50 years ago. Our concern for the environment is growing but the degree to which we degrade the environment is not improving. In an era of fake news where social science is "gobbledygook," we should be concerned with the legitimacy and reputation of our discipline. Our inability to resolve injustice or even to think about injustice with a notion of commonality, rather than serve as job security, might drive sociology to extinction.

Invoking Thomas Kuhn's famous framework for normal science, this paper recommends a central dogma for sociology that is rooted in social justice and emancipation. This paper briefly illustrates the lack of a central paradigm in sociology and argues that if such a paradigm were to exist then social justice (or resolving social injustices) should be the focal point. Next, I highlight the insufficiencies of existing social justice paradigms to resolve domination from capitalism, patriarchy, and racism. I conclude by offering my initial conceptualization of a single adequate paradigm for sociology that focuses on resolving social injustices. I argue that such a paradigm must require reflexivity upon the discipline of sociology, treat oppressions as historically specific, and consistently seek to address the underlying logic and contradictions of modern society. Therefore, social justice is impossible without critical theory.

Beyond Pessimism: Politicizing Adorno in our Contemporary Moment

Christina LoTempio, Northwestern University

Political theorists frequently reject the political value of Theodor Adorno's work, claiming his work is too pessimistic to offer any real political contribution. His work, these critics claim, provides diagnoses of problems without any solutions. It seems that Adornian pessimism precludes the possibility of any recovery or response to these diagnoses. This paper contends that Adorno's work in no way precludes the possibility of addressing these diagnoses, and in fact provides a rich political and cultural commentary of particular interest in our contemporary political moment.

Having experienced first-hand the horrors of National Socialism, Adorno wrote consistently to address what he saw as the constant threat of fascism, always lurking two steps behind, on the other side of any door, just out of sight. Whether we refer to our current political threat as the "crisis of democracy," "rise of populism," "neoliberalism," "late capitalism," etc., Adorno's work assumed this threat long before the recent trend towards illiberalism in Europe and the United States. In fact, Adorno locates the seeds of this recent turn in the downfall of fascism in the 1940s and the response of western- and particularly U.S.-culture.

This paper suggests that by tracing the roots of illiberal ideas and institutions from the present moment through the work of Adorno, we gain valuable insight to our political reality. For example, we can consider the vast income disparity of our present in relation to decades of pervasive capitalist exploitation, as identified by Adorno almost eighty years ago. How might this, when considered alongside an increasing entanglement of political and economic power, as well as a growing lack of cultural individuality, contribute to our understanding of this trend toward illiberal policies and elected officials? How might a return to Adorno's social diagnoses and problematizations allow us to better comprehend the depth of our current dilemma? Further, how can such a return help us answer that ever-pressing question: what can be done?

Through close exegetical readings of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *Minima Moralia*, and *Negative Dialectics*, the paper proposes to answer these questions, simultaneously demonstrating Adorno's own politicality throughout his work and thought. It considers the current dilemma of troubling illiberal tendencies in the United States and Europe, not as a "recent trend," but rather as a crisis subtly germinating for quite some time.

The “Difficult Path” of Revolution: Karl Marx via Rosa Luxemburg

Sarah Macmillan, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh

Hannah Arendt (though a conservative) and Gillian Rose each found a virtual comrade/camaraderie in their predecessor and fellow Jewish woman social theorist, Rosa Luxemburg. In honor of the bicentennial of Karl Marx’s birth, this paper channels the spirit of “early” Marx via Luxemburg’s writings and activism. It offers a conversation between Luxemburg and Marx, and their discussions of ideology and praxis. Luxemburg’s work reflects the tensions of what Gillian Rose addressed as “the broken middle.”

The broken middle describes the situation of humans within the contradiction between the immanence of the world and the (im)possibility of the philosopher’s revolutionary ideas. This not only captures a Marxian critique of *ideology as potential alienation from reality*, but also embraces the “difficulty” of revolution and suggests the need for constant, grounded adjustments. This is what Kate Schick’s discussion of Rose and Luxemburg (2012) describes as an ethic of a “good enough” justice. Rose and Arendt admired (early) Marx and Luxemburg for their appreciation of this sense of the problem of ideology, given the experiential *aporia* of revolutionary praxis. In Gillian Rose’s description from *The Broken Middle* (1992):

“[Luxemburg’s] authorship is the difficult path [*aporia*] of the repeated recognition of mediators, which *prevents any fixing of the outcome* of the previous ‘daily’ and ‘struggle’.”

The spirit of Marx’s early texts and the *Manifesto* (that of the sensuous, *Realen*) was enacted in Luxemburg’s relentless ability to problematize, individualize, and thus concretize the revolutionary process. As Arendt suggested in *Men in Dark Times*, “what mattered most in [Rosa Luxemburg’s] view was reality, in all its wonderful and all its frightful aspects, even more than revolution itself.” *Praxis* is the challenging pathway of “ideas” in dialectic with the quotidian, “difficult” path of reality. Luxemburg, perhaps in a “feminine” way (P. Hudis 2017), “lived” rather than “proclaimed” the philosophy of the revolutionary.

Resuming Critical Theory: Why Engaging the Problem of Decommodification is the Condition for Creating a Renewed Humanistic (and Spiritual) Left

Anthony Mansueto

There can be very little doubt that for those working in the humanistic tradition, whether liberal, democratic, or communist, the present period is a dark one indeed. Technological progress, far from emancipating humanity from the realm of necessity and opening up the door to the realm of freedom seems to offer hope, if at all, only of a transhuman (actually posthuman) future in which the the ideals of rational autonomy, creativity, and solidarity give way to what can at best be described as an ideal of unlimited (but emulated) experience.

This situation is further complicated by the fact that most critiques of the hegemonic technocratic ideal operate within the irrationalist/identarian paradigm established by Heidegger, and which defines much of both the Left and Right ends of the current political spectrum, including the ecologist/anarchoprimitivist and identarian Left, as well as the ethnonationalist (also identarian) Right.

Why would this be, given the elaboration during the last century by the Frankfurt School and allied thinkers (Lukacs, Fromm) of a powerful critique of both instrumental rationality and identarian irrationalism? The answer is not hard to find. What made the Frankfurt School and related critiques so powerful was the fact that almost alone within the Marxist tradition, this school rooted itself first and foremost in Marx's analysis of the alienation, which derives from the commodification of labor power under capitalism. This in turn provided a vantage point from which to elaborate further critiques of fascism (e.g. Lukacs' *Assault on Reason* and Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*) and of the hegemonic consumerism of advanced capitalist society (Fromm's critique of the "marketing orientation" and Marcuse's critique of the *One Dimensional Man*).

But this way is not sufficient to define a path forward for humanism. The difficulty with these critiques is three-fold. First, historic socialism has failed to make progress with respect to the goal of transcending commodification, and Marxist economic theory has not even clearly thematized the problem. This has relegated the hope of decommodification to the realm of the utopian or post-apocalyptic. Second, what was almost certainly *Marx's* understanding of the principal condition for decommodification --transcending material scarcity-- turns out to be fraught with problems. Not only is there the danger that the artificial intelligence this would likely require might displace rather than liberating humanity; there is the very serious moral question of whether or not transcending scarcity on the basis of such an artificial intelligence would not amount to the reconstitution of slavery. Finally, it was clearly Marx's own expectation that communism, understood as transcending commodification, would not only unleash human creativity, but would do so in a way which was effectively theotic. This is, after all, the implication of "transcending the contradiction between Being and Essence," in the context of a philosophical tradition for which God is precisely that being whose essence is *to be*.

This paper will chart a way beyond these contradictions. First, it corrects Marx's excess in claiming that communism is actually theotic and articulates more accurately the relationship between communism and humanity's desire to be God. This will rearticulate the already close connection between humanistic socialism and the religious left in a way which takes seriously Marx's critique of religion, the "return of religion" and the current neosecular turn. Second, it analyzes the material --and the spiritual-- conditions for decommodification and suggests a way forward that does not recreate the ancient nexus between slavery and freedom. Finally, it analyzes why historic socialism was unable to even broach the problem of decommodification and suggests a strategic, operational and tactical orientation appropriate to the current global situation.

Finally, the paper will explain why the dominant critiques of our civilization inspired by Heidegger are fundamentally reactionary, even when they imagine that they lean Left, and explain both the roots of this error on the part of the (post)humanistic intelligentsia and the conditions for correcting it.

Self-determination, Foreign Land Acquisitions, and the Ontology of Political Communities

Torsten Menge, Assistant Professor in Residence, Northwestern University in Qatar

Collective self-determination is considered to be a fundamental political value. A number of liberal political theorists have appealed to this idea to justify a right of states to exclude would-be immigrants. But the idea of self-determination faces a difficult question: Who legitimately constitutes the people? When we speak of peoples or political communities, we usually have in mind a relatively clearly bounded group of people attached to a particular piece of land. My goal in this paper is to challenge this ontology of political communities and to show how an alternative ontology can shift the starting point for normative debates about self-determination and the right to exclude. I do that by discussing the recent surge of foreign land acquisitions (the “global land rush”). While this is not a completely new development, the recent growth in acquisitions has led to devastating expulsions of people and local economies and to environmental destruction. I use this example to argue that an adequate political ontology needs to take seriously the global material infrastructures that are controlled by powerful countries and that play an important role in their economic, social, and political lives. Through these structures, those who affected by foreign land acquisitions are involved and have a stake in the political decisions of the responsible community. Extending Ayelet Shachar’s notion of a *jus nexi*, I argue that they should not be understood as outsiders who can be legitimately denied membership status.

Disease and Madness as Gender Allegories in *I Am Legend* Remakes

Jeremiah Morelock, Boston College

Amid present day political tensions and popular anxieties about pandemic disease, the story *I am Legend* has particular resonance. It has become somewhat a legend itself, starting out as a short novel in 1954, and being remade as a film four times, most recently in 2007. I examine the film adaptations of the story and their evolution over time. The basic premise is as follows. A disease has killed or transformed seemingly all of the human population except for one isolated man: an immune medical scientist. The man eventually stumbles across a woman who has not been infected, and discovers that she is connected to a colony of survivors. He fights to save her and to reverse the pandemic. He is perhaps successful, but is killed in the process. I give each of the film remakes a subversive reading centered on gender and combining ideas from Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*, Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*. I interpret the twin threats of disease and madness in the films as allegories for the loss of individuality to a stronger, enveloping force or primal horde (for Kristeva, the abject feminine). Over time, the lead female – who is tied to the madness and death of the protagonist – takes on more honored roles; yet diseased Others and encroaching madness become more threatening. I argue this reveals a growing intensity concerning an ambivalent fear/attraction to authoritarianism.

The Artisan Economy and the New Spirit of Capitalism

Kirstin Munro

Assistant Professor of Economics and Finance

St John's University, New York

An explosion of interest in artisan craft and food products seems to have coincided with the most recent global financial crisis (Jakob 2013). The rustic charm of nostalgic handmade crafts and foods provides an appealing consumer diversion from the harsh economic reality of belt-tightening austerity regimes following a decades-long process of deindustrialization (Luckman 2013). And the prospect of making a living selling handmade items as a self-employed "creative" offers an attractive alternative to unemployment or increasingly precarious and poorly remunerated employment in service occupations (Jakob 2013; Matchar 2013).

Beyond its popular appeal, this "artisan economy" of small-scale craft and food producers has also been lauded as a liberatory and ethical alternative to contemporary capitalism (Heying 2010; Matthaei 2015: 15), what Heying (2010: 41) calls "a path of resistance in a globalizing world, a path that is immediately accessible to individuals and communities who are looking for alternative futures."

However, available evidence points to a very different story (Heying, Marotta, and Cummings 2016). The pecuniary benefits of the artisan economy appear to accrue to venture capitalists, stockholders, financial institutions, and a minority of artisan business owners, while the majority seem to be barely scraping by.

Boltanski and Chiapello ([1999] 2005a) provide a possible explanation for the enduring commitment to capitalism of people who appear to not be benefiting very much from it. They use a qualitative thematic analysis of management textbooks to argue for the importance of a legitimizing moral framework, what they call a "spirit," that justifies and perpetuates the amoral, unfair, and unjust process of capitalist accumulation. By comparing textbooks published from 1959 to 1969 and 1989 to 1994, Boltanski and Chiapello demonstrate how French capitalism overcame its 1968 crisis of legitimacy by co-opting the avant-garde's "artistic critique" of the alienating, dominating, and inauthentic effects of mid-twentieth-century capitalism. This co-option leads to the emergence of a new accumulation regime and corresponding new justificatory spirit that were granted newfound legitimacy on the basis of the moral precepts of creativity, autonomy, authenticity, and liberation.

Following Boltanski and Chiapello ([1999] 2005a), we conduct an analysis of how the ideas of autonomy, creativity, authenticity, and liberation are defined in advice manuals for small artisan business owners. This reveals that the new spirit of capitalism has spread from large capitalist firms to the 'artistical economy' co-opting the very social strata that would have been purveyors of the artistic critique of capitalism that the new spirit coopted, namely, the counterculture and self-styled "creatives," thus further legitimizing capitalism post-2008.

The End of Progress? Habermas's Theory of Social Norms and the Question of Social Evolution

Keunchang Oh, Department of Philosophy, Purdue University, USA

For Habermas, social norms should be based on communicative rationality, which aims at mutual understanding and consensus in the shared background of the lifeworld. Against his view, one might ask whether it is too idealistic because the uses of power, ideology, and domination in our social life disrupt consensus. Though he critiques ideology as systematically distorted communication in his earlier works and as the colonization of the lifeworld in his later works, it is not clear whether he succeeds in explaining how socially harmful norms are reproduced and can be criticized.

In this paper, to determine whether Habermas succeeds, I will consider how his theory of social norms is connected to his theory of social evolution. To this end, I first consider the importance of learning in his theory of both social norms and social evolution, looking at Piaget's developmental psychology. I show that the rationalization of the lifeworld is key to understanding the process of social evolution. I argue that the evolution of normative structures, along with Habermas's distinction between work and interaction, is indispensable to his transformation of Marx's historical materialism.

In *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, following David Owen's earlier suggestion³, Amy Allen critiques Habermas's eurocentrism in his teleological theory of social evolution, which is dependent upon a problematic conception of progress.⁴ Engaging with Allen's view, I analyze an important distinction between the developmental logic and the developmental dynamics in Habermas's theory of social evolution. Drawing on this distinction, I propose that Habermas may argue for a normative critique which is neither foundational nor relativist. Unlike Allen, I claim that Habermas's theory is problematic in that he underestimates the importance of the developmental dynamics despite his emphasis on the importance of empirical and social scientific inquiry. Furthermore, the fact that every generation must learn cultural information demands another distinction between ontogenesis and phylogenesis, which destabilizes Habermas's assumption of the homology between them in the stages of moral development. Unlike cumulative culture at the level of phylogenesis, each individual has to undergo a kind of non-cumulative learning. Furthermore, individual learning always occurs in a social context. Given these observations, I employ the notion of the developmental dynamics to discuss why harmful ideologies such as racism persist. The problem is that Habermas conceives the learning process too narrowly. I discuss several ways in which learning processes and rational deliberation can be distorted and biased. I thus conclude that developmental logic as the rationalization of the lifeworld is not the same as a directional learning process as such.

Keywords: Habermas, Social Norms, Social Evolution, Eurocentrism, LearningT

³ David Owen, *Between Reason and History: Habermas and the Idea of Progress*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.

⁴ Amy Allen, *The End of Progress*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

The United States of Trump Corp: When a Personal Brand Becomes President

Steven Panageotou, PhD, UT-Knoxville

On January 20, 2017, the American people, through the electoral college, elected their first personal brand to be the President of the United States of America. Materialized in a body of pale-orange skin with a blonde combover, the governing style of President Trump Corp is anything but human. His human body is only the conduit through which President Trump Corp pursues the supreme goal of the personal brand—maximization of symbolic capital at the expense of all else. This presentation will illuminate the historical rise of personal brands, what constitutes personal brand logic, and what happens when a personal brand is elected to the highest office in the United States.

Beyond the Crisis of Democracy: Capitalist Expropriation of the Political

David Purucker University of Oregon - Sociology

In her "Legitimation Crisis: On the Political Contradictions of Financialized Capitalism"*, Nancy Fraser proposes that the global crisis of democracy is rooted not in the present dysfunctional neoliberal political order, but is rather the product of a tendency within capitalism to undermine its own political conditions of survival. Following Fraser, I argue that this tendency should be conceived as a particular kind of expropriation, Marx's 'exchange without equivalent'. First, I will review some major recent advances in the critique of capitalism, focusing especially on the revival of expropriation as a key explanatory concept. I will discuss how capitalism's history can be understood as a dialectical struggle over the ratio of global expropriation of labor, social reproductive work, tributary societies, ecology, and especially of public/political power. Then, I will explore recent trends in public power - including the rise of neofascism, austerity, the inability to organize a coherent response to ecological crisis, barbarism directed towards migrants, and the hollowing-out of liberal institutions and ideology - in terms of this general trend of capitalism to expropriate its own political supports. Finally, I will offer some comments on resolution and transformation, and suggest that 'politicization' may be the decisive factor mediating between Marcuse's 'damaged life' and Fromm's 'sane society'. This paper and presentation will be a useful summary of some important recent marxist theorizing, and will emphasize Fraser's work as instrumental in advancing dialogue between contemporary marxist and critical social theory. *Fraser, Nancy. "Legitimation Crisis? On the Political Contradictions of Financialized Capitalism." *Critical Historical Studies* 2015 (Fall): 157–89. Thank you for your consideration.

On late modern urgency for sociological knowledge

Ilaria Riccioni, Free University of Bozen

With the essay *Knowledge for what?* Lynd in 1939 was posing American sociological critique the crucial issue of sociological knowledge and research. Today the same question can be asked regarding sociological knowledge as well as the concept of knowledge *tout court*. The sociological concept of knowledge meant as the acquisition of meaning and sense of reality empirically grounded as well as social constructions seems to be an old issue without a consequence on contemporary society. Furthermore, if understanding modernity implied a concept of education, and tool acquisitions for a socially active life, in late modernity the issue of knowledge is reduced to a hyper-specialization demand. If hyper-specialization can foster research in mathematics and physics, not the same can be said for social research, which seems to have become a residual knowledge. In this sense, sociology seems to lag behind economy and aesthetics in the explanation of emergent social issues.

In other words sociology seems to be losing quickly the inner sense of its existence losing primarily its collective functions. This paper intends to take into account three main issues regarding sociological knowledge and its importance in late modernity societies:

1. In late modernity there has been a progressive transformation of the concept of knowledge into that of information: the bond between experience and formation is lacking in a Simmelian sense, as well as the bond between knowledge and experience, and that between the individual and social knowledge as well.
2. Is there still a social function of sociological knowledge?
3. What are the social consequences of the growing distance between sociological research and most urgent and crucial social issues?

I will go through some classical theories such as Pareto non-logical actions, Simmel theory of differentiation and social culture, up to new theories regarding the present social role of sociology such as Hartmut Rosa with the concept of alienation and resonance, as well as the theories of Ferrarotti about sociology as a participated knowledge, which implies the idea of a processual science that needs to endlessly query itself in order to remain in dialogue with social realities and collective meanings.

The Kerner Commission, White Supremacy, and Lingering Democratic Dystopia

Mary Ryan, ASPECT, Virginia Tech

This paper examines overt forms of military violence practiced by the state to better understand democratic dystopia in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. I am especially interested in the way the President Johnson-appointed National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (commonly called the Kerner Commission, after its chairperson Otto Kerner) in 1967-68 responded to hundreds of “race riots” across the country, sparked—in almost every case—by police brutality. I look at the lack of riot training, the professionalization of community police, the use of statewide police units as well as federal military equipment to control the riots, and, in Detroit, the use of the National Guard. Together, I assess how these actions foretell the emergence of a Garrison State with permanent military and police occupation in communities of color. After the legendary federal civil rights policies and Supreme Court cases in the 1950s and earlier 1960s, the exertion of federal and state violence against civilians warrants investigation into how the federal government exerts continued domination by any means necessary. Kerner documents also examined the reasons the riots occurred. Here, it becomes clear that the riots acted for many as a pathway to regain moral authenticity in democratic society, a way to stake a claim in Daniel Gillion’s cycle outlined in his continuum of information theory. Rioters were negotiating with elected officials. I look at how grammar and racial coding shifted in policy responses and government reports, not just in Kerner, but in the years that followed, ensuring whiteness remains preserved in the federal government. I use this ability to see like a white supremacist state to better understand contemporary democratic challenges in the United States federal government which compel questions of citizenry, identity, and culpability in the face of dystopia.

Viable Alternative to an Insane Society: What's Standing in the Way?

David Schweickart, Loyola University Chicago

Our current system is insane. With climate-change-fueled extinction looming, why are we not doing what needs to be done? There does exist, after all, an economically-viable alternative that does not require exponential growth for stability, and has clear mechanisms for doing the kind of comprehensive long-range planning necessary to implement the technologies already in existence that could take us off fossil fuels without generating massive social dislocation. In a democratic society, this could be done. Unfortunately, at present, our “democracy is in chains.” This presentation will lay out the basic structures of a viable alternative, as well as the structures (here in the United States) that block our doing what needs to be done.

YOUTH OF THE WORLD UNITE! YOUTH POLITICS AND THE DYNAMIC OF TRANSFORMATION

Adnan Selimovic

What are the possibilities for transformative youth politics? What is political to youth? What are the grounds for a genuine youth politics? What lessons are to be drawn from Occupy Wallstreet and post-Parkland youth activism?

Trumpism and the Dystopian Social Matrix

Francis Shor is a Professor Emeritus of History at Wayne State University

Following the insights of Russell Jacoby and Tom Moylan that construe contemporary dystopias as the realization of oppressive developments in society, this paper will explore how Trumpism reflects what Naomi Klein calls the “logical end point” of such developments. In order to identify the specific contours of these dystopian tendencies, I will highlight three overlapping domains – the socio-economic, the socio-cultural, and the socio-psychological – and the social theories that inform each of those domains. For the socio-economic the paper will utilize the perspectives of David Harvey on “vulture capitalism” and Paul Kennedy on “vampire capitalism.” Bleeding into the socio-cultural domain the oppressive conditions of neoliberalism will be underscored through the work of Zygmunt Bauman (“liquid modernity”), Guy Debord (“the society of the spectacle”) and Henry Giroux. Finally, the socio-psychological domain, dominated by fear and resentment, especially racial in its composition, will be investigated. The overlap of the three domains creates a dystopian social matrix that grounds Trumpism as a political project even while it gives rise to a resistance that portends its own utopian political horizons.

Rediscovering the Utopic Vision: The Necessity of Returning from Fantasies of Mars and Renewing Faith in the Human Project on Earth.

Sam Signorelli

Youth today seem all too willing to accept the frightening possibilities of technological and political dystopia while simultaneously rejecting suggestions of the utopic imagination. This contradiction of the imagination reveals where the perimeters of acceptable rationality have staked its fence posts and limited the potential for radical social change. How can we move toward visions which lie beyond these stakes? What do we risk, what must we abandon, psychologically or otherwise, in order to cross the boundary of "rational futurism"?

Presently, visions of the future appear to many in one of two forms: abandonment of the Earth and interplanetary colonization, led by the technological elite, or the apocalyptic collapse of civilization entirely. How can we renew our faith in a vision for the future that isn't dependent on the power of the technocratic, neoliberal elite nor the nihilistic despair engendered by one-dimensional rationality? In critiquing these visions of the future and their underlying psychological origins, I hope to offer suggestions for (re)discovering an alternative track, a vision for a non-repressive, non-despairing future toward which we can collectively work.

An alternative track may already be emerging within the youth-led movement that has arisen in the aftermath of the Parkland, Florida school shooting. Do the organizing efforts of young people that we have seen around the country in the past few months represent a shift toward a more hopeful vision of the future? What is the future these young people believe in and where does it stand in relation to the future accepted by those who don't share in their vision? Finally, how can we support the cultivation and articulation of this vision without risking co-option of its direction?

Platform as “Estranged Labor” — Social Capital-ism, Influencers, and Mediated Communities as Agents of Public Opinion Crystallization

William Sipling, University of St. Thomas (MN)

“Platform building,” the sphere-of-influence-generation strategy of modern computer-mediated communication, has conceived marketers, journalists, public office holders, activists, and “influencers” who vie for the finite resource of the attention of “the many.” This paper considers the role of the “estranged worker” who engages in the “alienated labor” of the multi-level-marketing-like folkways required for the existence of such influencers, examining the effects of industrialized social capital-ism as the pervading force shaping the opinions of those who opt-in to influence-generation media. The subject is examined in relation to the role of social media, 21st century American politics, and the advertising/marketing industry as a whole. The specific material this paper will cover is a combination of critical and conflict theory as a lens to view advertising, and specifically advertising in the “age of mechanical reproduction,” utilizing the works of Bernays, Marx, Graebner, Lippmann, and Benjamin.

Rethinking Social Roles: Conflict and Modern Life

Lisa Smyth, Sociology, Queen's University Belfast

How can we explain the complexity of modern social experience? This paper argues that rethinking the concept of social roles through the lens of neo-pragmatist and critical theory allows the connections between agents and normative structures to be more fully grasped. A neo-pragmatist critique of the recent tendency in sociology to focus on identities and social positions rather than roles is advanced, arguing that this overlooks the normative expectations and relations of authority embedded in social institutions, as they are encountered by agents. Consequently, the evaluative quality of role performance is obscured, namely that process whereby agents respond to perceived normative expectations and authority relations through their interpretations, enactments and reconfigurations of specific roles.

Secondly, the paper examines the non-determined character of the role concept, arguing that a critical, non-behaviourist conception of social roles will allow for a focus on complex and conflicting norms and interests characteristic of modern social institutions. The paper argues that rethinking the concept of a role in these terms offers a promising route to both analysing status struggles under conditions of complexity and uncertainty, and theorising wider processes of social change.

Reflections from a Damaged Religion: Critique from the Culture Industry to the Christian Question

Josiah Solis, Religion, Claremont Graduate University.

“Religion is on sale again, as it were.” – Adorno

When one speaks of critical and social theory, “religion” is not often uttered in the same breath. Especially since Marx, theoretical critique has tended to ignore religion with an assumption that it would eventually disappear. Yet, with the failure of the secularization thesis and the rise of religious violence, a return to the criticism of religion – assuming that Marx did not complete it – perhaps has never been more important. When it comes to the Frankfurt School, religion occupies a unique place in the thought of Theodor W. Adorno in particular. From his early work on Kierkegaard, to his final project of *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno continually returns to themes that directly derive from religion. Warren S. Goldstein claims that religion is the subtext for the entire Frankfurt School, while Robert Hullot-Kentor goes as far as arguing that “theology penetrates every word” of Adorno’s work. This forces the question: how does Adorno understand religion, and to what end should critical and social theory concern itself with religion today?

I contented that critical theory needs to urgently, and rigorously, consider the question of religion yet again. In particular, critical theory needs to address what Gil Anidjar has called the “Christian question.” To demonstrate why the question of religion should be urgently considered, one need not look beyond the now infamous statistic that 81% of white evangelicals voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election. While this did not surprise those who have studied evangelicalism with some rigor, the media, and even parts of the academy, stood with awe at this supposed phenomenon. Evangelical support for a man who Cornel West has called a “gangster in character and neo-fascist in content” is not an enigma, but actually the logical conclusion to what damaged religious life looks like under late capitalism.

This purpose of this paper is to address the question of damaged life by analyzing Christianity, with American Evangelicalism as a subset, as a damaged religion. The paper will be organized into three parts: first, I will broadly address the role that religion plays in the work of Adorno. Second, I will analyze modern evangelicalism and its relation to the “Culture Industry” as diagnosed by Adorno, arguing that American Evangelism epitomizes what Adorno detested in the Culture Industry. Third, I will broaden the critique to Christianity as whole, placing Adorno in dialogue with the “Christian question” as defined by Anidjar. Anidjar calls for urgent critical reflection regarding “Christianity and its uninterrogated definition as a religion.” What might it mean to consider that Christianity, in creating “religion”, might *not* be a religion, or perhaps it might be the only one? These questions demonstrate the crucial role that religion should play in critical and social theory today.

Global Climate Change, Ideology Critique, and the Environment-Society Problematic

Alexander M. Stoner, Department of Sociology, Salisbury University, Salisbury, USA

What makes Global Climate Change (GCC) a “perfect storm” for the world-system? In sum, the problem is *global* (affluent nations or the affluent within these nations have undue power/advantage), *intergenerational* (current generation has asymmetric power over the prospects of future generations), *cross-species and natural* (other species and nature itself have limited power), and *theoretical* (existing theories are underdeveloped in key respects). Existing institutions and moral and political theories are inadequate to address the issue. There is also a very strong temptation to pass the buck on to the future, the poor, and nature. A central question for the sociology of GCC, which seeks to confront related issues, is: how might critical knowledge of history generate insight into the possibility of a more rational environment-society relationship? This article attempts to address this question by considering the contributions of Marxian critical theory. In particular, the article delimits theoretical considerations of two interconnected processes: temporality (the pace of socioecological change) and ideology.

Keywords: Anthropocene, climate change, critical theory, dialectics, environmental sociology, Marxism

Herbert Marcuse, Radical Subjectivity, and Climate Breakdown: Toward a New Ecological Politics

Michael J. Sukhov

At this critical historical moment, critical theorists, sociologists, scholars and activists, as well as other engaged intellectuals concerned about the future of humanity and other sentient life on Earth, need a more adequate theory and practice of radical subjectivity if we are to assist in meeting the urgent geopolitical, moral, and existential challenges our species currently faces. This essay argues that the concept of radical subjectivity that Herbert Marcuse developed throughout his work can assist us in the development of a such a theory and practice that could contribute to the mobilization of contemporary social movements seeking to address the interrelated global crises represented by climate disruption, the increasing dangers of nuclear war, social and economic equality, and racism. A critical appropriation of Marcuse's conception of radical subjectivity can enable us to link our deepest needs and desires as human beings with the capacities of our reason to address the sources of these problems at their roots. Marcuse's concept also has important implications for identifying the steps that need to be taken, individually as well as collectively, to adequately address the multiple dimensions of these crises. Marcuse's conception of radical subjectivity, when adequately revised and, to a certain extent, reformulated to include more recent insights about the nature of subjectivity and political agency in the contemporary era, can make it possible to ground the urgent political necessity of addressing global climate change and related issues in our deepest personal, moral, and political convictions and motivations.

The Internalization of Social Fracture: Tracing the ISR's Critical Research on Authoritarianism

Daniel Sullivan, Dept. of Psychology, University of Arizona

From his first days as director of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research (ISR), Max Horkheimer (1931/1993) called for a critical approach to research through which philosophy would be “capable of giving particular studies animating impulses, and at the same time [remain] open enough to let itself be influenced and changed by these concrete studies” (p. 10). Yet voices both sympathetic and hostile claim that the first inner circle of scholars of the ISR, or “early Frankfurt School,” were never able to achieve this aim and reconcile their divergent interests in philosophy and empirical research (Bronner, 2004; Lichtblau, 2015). In recent protest, some have observed that Horkheimer, Adorno, Pollock, and others were “research-active” until nearly the end of their careers (Demirović, 2017; Perrin & Olick, 2011; Rensmann, 2017). Such protests have not corrected a situation in contemporary social psychology in which *The Authoritarian Personality* is treated as a flawed historical relic and the group's other studies are entirely ignored (e.g., Cottam et al., 2016).

There are several arguments to the effect that the ISR failed to productively synthesize philosophy and research, and these reflect the wide historical reception of the ISR across disciplines. In contemporary social psychology, the influential *Authoritarian Personality* is now framed as having been too narrowly focused on dispositional factors and exploited as a straw man against the “advances” in the field made by the more situational and experimental perspective of Milgram and Zimbardo (e.g., Benjamin & Simpson, 2009). Among political scientists, the argument has been made since the first published critique of *AP* (Christie & Jahoda, 1954), down to more recent polemics (Martin, 2001), that the ISR were misguided in their methodology because they refused to produce “value-neutral” research. Those who have engaged with the Frankfurt School most carefully often reach similar conclusions via more historiographical argument. For instance, it has been repeatedly claimed (Abromeit, 2011; Wiggershaus, 1994) that the inner circle, and Horkheimer in particular, largely lost interest in empirical research after the 1940s as they retreated into pessimistic philosophy. Finally, Jürgen Habermas (leader of the “second generation” of the Frankfurt School) claimed that Horkheimer and Adorno's philosophical analysis of the “end of the individual” in modernity led them to a form of psychological behaviorism that compromised the value of their empirical works (Habermas, 1979).

Each of these critiques – the personality reductionism argument, the value neutrality argument, the “exhaustion of empiricism” thesis, and the “end of the individual” thesis – doubtless has some merit. However, I also believe that all have been grossly exaggerated, leading to premature negative closure on the question of the usefulness and success of the ISR's unique critical research on authoritarianism. I contend that this situation stems from a failure across disciplines to seriously and systematically engage with the ISR's idiosyncratic empirical works, as well as the nuanced philosophy of science supporting them (articulated by Horkheimer in the 1930s and Adorno in the 1950s/60s).

As a corrective attempt, this article has two specific goals: (1) Outlining the ISR's method of critical research by drawing together several of their methodological and epistemological writings, and (2) Demonstrating how the ISR exemplified this method in their productive program of research (spanning 1930-1950) on authoritarian psychology in society. This second goal will be accomplished by showing how the “three-wave” empirical program (Kramer, 2011) – consisting of the 1930s study of the Weimar working class, the 1940s Berkeley studies on authoritarianism, and the 1950s *Gruppenexperiment* in West Germany – paralleled simultaneous developments in the theorizing of Horkheimer.

Importantly, my aim is not to thoroughly debunk conventional narratives surrounding the Frankfurt School, nor to provide a historical exegesis of the lines of influence between particular texts, nor to address the complicated issue of authorship among the various members of the early ISR. I hope instead to show that a theory of the transformation of the individual-societal relationship in the first half of the 20th Century, and corresponding methods for testing it, are available in the empirical reports and methodological writings of the ISR. It is a theory of how individuals progressively internalized a false consciousness that smoothed over tensions endemic to “late liberal” or administrative-consumerist society. My analysis does not belie the claim that the early Frankfurt School became increasingly pessimistic over the decades. But it does seek to demonstrate that this pessimism both influenced and *was grounded in* their critical research to a greater degree than previously acknowledged.

Thought in a Time of Academic Cholera

Stephen Turner, University of South Florida

This paper discusses the effect of the failed projects of professionalization in the humanist and social science disciplines in the postwar period and their present status, and considers the status quo ante the Academic Revolution, to search for a viable model for the vocation of thought in the present. It is suggested that the professionalization of intellectual life damaged the value of learning as such, and that a return to the notion of learning, and learning for its own sake, is the only plausible option in the face of the present cruel situation of aspiring academics.

Towards a Lefebvrian Theory of the Racialization of Space

Steven Tuttle, Loyola University Chicago

Comparisons of state responses to Hurricane Harvey in Texas and Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, as well as uneven responses between the wards of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, are likely to identify a glaring racial component in the treatment of these places. In the past few years, we have also seen renewed debates over the presence of monuments to members of the Civil War Confederacy displayed in public places. All the while, racial residential segregation remains a fact of contemporary social life in the United States, the Movement for Black Lives drew our attention to the treatment of communities of color by law enforcement, ethnic communities are marketed as tourist destinations, and partisan political debates over immigration brought increased attention to Muslim and Latino communities. These examples, in addition to the vast sociological literatures on related phenomena, point to ways in which race plays a significant role in the perceptions and treatment of physical spaces and the people who live within them. Yet, as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2015:80, 82) recently argued, sociological theorizations regarding the racialization of space remain underdeveloped. That is to say, although urban sociologists and race scholars have been attentive to issues of race and space for over 100 years (see DuBois 1903; Park 1950; Park and Burgess 1925/1967; Myrdal 1944) a transportable and multifaceted theory of the racialization of space has yet to emerge.

This paper attempts to fill this gap in the literature. I develop a theory integrating racialization theory (Omi and Winant 1994; Bonilla-Silva 1997, 2001, 2013; Feagin 2013) and Lefebvre's (1991) trialectic theory of the production of space. This theory highlights how powerful actors and institutions, ideologies and media imagery, and lived practice may conduct and constitute "racial projects" in the production of space in the context of societies in which race plays a determinative role. Further elaborating a Marxian framework, Lefebvre's identification of dialectical relationships between physical, mental, and social space provides a more nuanced theory of the production of, and contests over, space than those advancing a narrower use-exchange value dichotomy (see Gottdiener 1985 for discussion). Lefebvre's initial conceptualization of the triadic model is an explicit elaboration of Marx's theory of capital. Informed by a structural theory of capitalism, the production of space is understood as cause and consequence of the hierarchical organization of social and material life. Yet, sociologists are generally well aware that economic class is not the only hierarchical ordering of groups of individuals in society. Bonilla-Silva (1997, 2001) explicitly argues against the location of race and racism as a function of economic class dominance. His theory of racialization based on a conception of "racialized social systems" identifies ways in which economic, political, social and ideological levels of society are "partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races" (Bonilla-Silva 1997:469). Racialization is thus embedded in other structurations, such as class and gender, but proceeds autonomously in the hierarchical social ordering of racial groups. If racial structures are understood as both a means of allocating and maintaining racial privileges and disadvantages, and in relation to ideologies, stereotypical imagery, and discriminatory institutional and interpersonal discriminatory behaviors (see also Golash-Boza 2016), a theory of the production of space proceeding from racialization theory is thus attentive to how racial ideologies, stereotypes, behaviors, and public policies contribute to the ascription of race on space as they do on groups and individual bodies and identities.

The integration of racialization theory and Lefebvrian spatial analysis entails locating spatial practices, representations of space, and representational space within a racialized social system. Within a society partially structured by race, many of the physical spaces produced by state and economic actors are thus inherently racialized, as identified in the literatures on the origins and persistence of racial segregation. Similarly, the images, symbols, stereotypes, and assumptions regarding those living in segregated places thus further contribute to the racialization of these places as cause and consequence of their, real or imagined, demographic attributes. Finally, a variety of behaviors and interpersonal practices also contribute to the racialization of space including the white avoidance of minority spaces, the discomfort experienced by many members of racial and ethnic minority groups as they traverse white spaces, and a variety of practices undertaken as means of neighborhood defense (Anderson 2012, 2015). Studies of racial residential segregation and residential preferences consistently point to ways in which the inscription of space with race exists perceptually and in a dialectical relationship with both micro and macro-level practices (whether or not one might visit or move into a community and the origins and maintenance of such spaces by state and economic institutions) (see Hirsch 1983; Wilson 1987; Massey and Denton 1993; Emerson, et al. 2001; Krysan and Bader 2007, 2009; Krysan, et al. 2009; Sampson and Sharkey 2008). The legacy and persistence of racial segregation (physical space) creates and stems from stereotypical perceptions and imagery (mental space), and both create and stem from the real activities of acting individuals and institutions (social practice). Physical, mental, and social space is thus inscribed with race through racial projects at each point and are part and parcel of structural racial inequality.

This paper makes a unique theoretical contribution to the urban sociology and race and ethnicity literatures by consolidating significant findings from these literatures and offering a framework capable of explaining phenomena at micro and macro levels as well as emancipatory movements for racial justice and the development and use of spaces of racial/ethnic solidarity and support (see also hooks 1990; Soja 1996; Tatum 1997; Hunter, et al. 2016).