

11th Annual Meeting of the
International Social Theory Consortium

17-20 May, 2012
Flagler College, St. Augustine, Florida

**‘THEORY AND POLITICS:
BETWEEN THE GLOBALIZATION OF MODERNITY
AND STRUGGLES FOR FREEDOM AND CHANGE’**

CALL FOR PAPERS

The conference will focus on the tensions between two dimensions of social theory: as an academic discourse with analytical intent, and as a form of political action. In particular, our goal is to highlight the position of social theory between:

- *Theory construction*—as a social-scientific practice that is both normatively oriented and historically self-reflexive, i.e. willing and able to recognize its embeddedness in the social process; and
- *Progressive politics*—as it is inspired by the prospect of qualitative social change, and thus, oriented toward the transformation of the object of social theory.

In order to do so effectively, social theorists need to avoid detached, unengaged, ‘undialectical’ conceptions of our responsibility as confined to observation, along with forms of activism that lack reflexivity and awareness of the mediated nature of modern social life—as a result constituting political practice without theory. While social practice without theory is blind, social theory without practice is hollow.

Yet when and how does social practice truly require input from social theory? As Hegel’s employment of the image of the Owl of Minerva suggests, whose flight begins at dusk, does theory have a tendency to arrive on the scene too late...when the work of revolution-nary change already has been completed? Is it not that theories are becoming out-dated due to revolutionary change? Then again, is such critical self-constraint itself overly hasty?

Is social theory not in fact capable of providing a robust normative standard to evaluate the status and progress of revolutions and social change? Should it not aspire to critically accompany or reflect on social and historical change? If the relation between theory and politics is an open one, how do we need to reconfigure the relation between (social) theory and (progressive) action, especially after the financial crash of 2008 and following the Arab Spring? Are recent developments within the Western world indicators for another democratic Spring? Are claims and movements for economic justice and accountability, as they currently are being articulated in the US, in Europe, in Israel, and word-wide, signs of a new revolutionary spirit and indicators of a new cosmopolitan public sphere? Or could they be the opposite—symptoms of the decline of such center-pieces of modernity as democracy and individual autonomy? After all, the Arab Spring may not lead to greater democracy, but a resurgence of Islam. At the same time, theorists like Colin Crouch and John Keane warn that we may be going through the terminal phase of western democracy, whose inability to confront 21st-century challenges is becoming ever more apparent.

The conference poses such questions, in the framework of the overarching query about the relation between theory and politics—as provocative, open, challenging inspirations for a most diverse set of possible inquiries.

- Theoretical and meta-theoretical essays about theory and politics are as much part of this as cultural and critical inquiries into contexts of political action and agency;
- New developments fusing theoretical traditions are as much welcome as are works that analyze the conflicting interstices between concrete local actions and the larger theoretical and symbolic underpinnings of these movements;
- Works on the grounds of normative commitments are as much needed as empirical/discursive deconstructions of existing imaginaries and socio-political beliefs and assumptions.

Papers are invited that speak to the topic from:

- Classical & contemporary social theory: working with our inheritance
- Methodology of Critical Theory
- Literary methods and Social Theory
- The interpretive tradition, depth hermeneutics & analysis
- The performative aspects of public life
- Media power and image magic
- Psychoanalytic method and social theory
- Phenomenology, hermeneutics, and critical hermeneutics
- Epistemologies and philosophies of knowledge today
- Asian philosophies and methods
- Socrates, Plato, and working with the Greeks today
- Political anthropology and reflexive historical sociology

ORGANIZING COMMITTEE:

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Please submit abstracts by **March 1, 2012**
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