

THIRD EDITION

SOCIAL THEORY

A READER: VOLUME II

*From Modern to
Contemporary Theory*

edited by

Roberta Garner &
Black Hawk Hancock

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SOCIAL THEORY

A READER

Continuity and Confrontation

Volume II: From Modern to Contemporary Theory

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Roberta Garner and Blaise Hawk-Harcock



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SOCIAL THEORY

For my family and in memory of my parents

– Roberta

With appreciation for the ongoing mentoring, support, and friendship of Chas Camic

– Black Hawk

PREFACE

The third edition marks a major departure from the previous editions: there are now two editors and substantially more theorists.

Here are the changes we have made:

We have added a chapter on race-ethnicity and post-colonial theory and substantially revised the chapter on gender and sexualities, which now includes a selection by Judith Butler, Angela Davis's reflections on intersectionality and praxis, and R.W. Connell's work on masculinities.

Philosophical traditions are discussed in order to show how the ideas affected social theory and the discipline of sociology; the selections by Kant and Nietzsche and the accompanying introductions as well as the discussion of the work of Hegel, Comte, and Adam Smith provide context and background to the contending perspectives in sociological theory.

The selection from Machiavelli was newly translated for this volume and will give readers a fresh look at this masterpiece.

Because of the powerful impact of Sigmund Freud's theories on the analysis of gender, the Frankfurt School, and contemporary cultural studies, we feature in the context of classical theory a selection from his lectures that delves into dreams, pathways to neurosis, the unconscious, and primary process thought.

We have included two pieces by Frankfurt School theorists beyond our original Walter Benjamin selection (one by Adorno and Horkheimer on the culture industry and one by Marcuse).

We have reorganized the "postwar perspectives" material as an overview of American hegemony and its critics, giving a stronger edge of contention to this chapter. It now includes selections from C. Wright Mills's *The Power Elite* and from Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*.

We sharpened the focus on the transition from postwar to contemporary theory with needed attention to four major theorists (Goffman, Foucault, Bourdieu, and Hall) who had appeared in earlier editions but were not strongly enough foregrounded there.

We added a number of theorists to the discussion of culture and media, including Raymond Williams, Dick Hebdige, Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, and Néstor Garcia Canclini.

We enhanced the selection of work by classical theorists, including Marx's writing on alienation from the early manuscripts, Durkheim on anomie and the social forces involved in categorical thought, and Weber on "inconvenient facts" as part of the vocation of science.

A number of new legacy pieces were added, such as George Ritzer's popular piece on McDonaldization and Theda Skocpol's timely, critical essay on the narrowing of civic life.

We added pedagogical materials for both students and instructors: These include study guides that provide key terms for each chapter and a number of questions to stimulate review, class discussion, and observation. The suggested readings were expanded and updated, and biographies of theorists were added to the introductions to each theorist's work.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The third edition would not have been possible without Anne Brackenbury at the University of Toronto Press and Karen Taylor. Anne continued to champion our project even as it expanded to gigantic dimensions. Karen was really a third editor—her role in the book was essential and the many tasks she accomplished are astounding, including improving our prose, checking our facts, adding pertinent information, and turning a huge unwieldy object in cyberspace into an actual book. Beate Schwirtlich supervised the entire complicated production process, and Ashley Rayner and Jessie Coffey handled the permissions admirably.

We want to thank our chair, Julie Artis, and our colleagues who make scholarship at DePaul fun and rewarding as well as our students who enabled us to sharpen our formulations and test our pedagogical strategies. Valerie Paulson was—as always—a key person in making our dreams come true, and Joshua Covell deserves a heartfelt thanks for his willingness to help at all times—and especially during our Christmas 2012 crunch.

We appreciate the support of the contemporary authors who contributed their current biographies.

READING THEORY: A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In the following pages, we will read the words and ideas of social theorists. We will find continuity: a number of themes appear repeatedly, and certain questions continue to be asked. The answers may change with time and circumstances, but the questions persist. Social theorists also confront and challenge each other's ideas. Theory grows and develops as a result of this controversy. Disagreements force theorists to sharpen their thinking, to look for new empirical evidence, and to discard ideas that don't work.

This reader is organized around continuity and confrontation among ideas. "Continuity" involves the revisiting and rethinking of theories and theoretical questions. "Confrontation" means the growth of theories through disagreement and controversies among theorists.

We will reflect on the relationship between theories and empirical reality, the world of experience and everyday life. Theories are claims that there are patterns in the empirical world; theorists invent concepts that help us to see these patterns. The concepts point to key features of the empirical world. Theorists not only chart the real world, they also try to explain the patterns they see. As social reality changes, theories have to be revised or discarded.

Although theorists challenge each other, it is usually difficult to confirm or disprove a theory. Theories are interpretations of reality; they are not research hypotheses that can be tested with empirical data.

Theorists not only chart and explain social reality; often, they also question it. Many theorists take a "negative-critical" view of social institutions. They do not believe that this is the best of all possible worlds: they point to injustices and inequalities among human beings and hope that their ideas can contribute to ending this state of affairs. Controversies among theorists are not only about ways of interpreting reality but also about prospects for changing it.

Several metaphors are often used to talk about theories. They are said to be constructed or built: theorists make theoretical frameworks, constructions of concepts that are connected to each other. A second commonly used metaphor is visual: theories are perspectives or points of view that focus on some aspect of social reality.

A third metaphor portrays theory as a flowing, changing river, with a mainstream and more controversial countercurrents. The mainstream is formed by ideas that are widely accepted among intellectuals at major universities and publishing houses; the countercurrents are formed by critical and dissenting scholars. Historically, the mainstream has usually been non-Marxist and the major countercurrent Marxist. There are times when the currents are sharply separated, as in the 1950s, and other times—such as the end of the twentieth century—when they swirl together. Even when they were separate, they were fluid currents, not watertight pipelines. It is a good idea not to think of sociological traditions as completely rigid, distinct systems of ideas; theories have always influenced each other.

Overall, the entire enterprise of theory results in a complex and ever-changing set of overlapping as well as contested ideas. Theorists borrow from each other, recontextualize other theorists' concepts in new frameworks, adapt theory to new empirical and political issues, and challenge each other. A number of questions appear in many theories and form points of connection.

1. What is the nature of modern society, and to what extent is capitalism its key characteristic?
2. How are different types of institutions connected to each other in societies? More specifically, what is the impact of technology, the economy, and culture on each other and on other institutions?
3. How can we best picture the interplay of micro and macro levels of action? By "micro" we mean individual actions and small-scale interactions, and by "macro" we mean institutions at the level of societies, nations, and the global system.
4. What is the mix of agency (purposeful human action) and structure (constraining limits) in outcomes? To what extent do human beings "make their own history" individually and collectively, and to what extent is it "made for them" by circumstances inherited from the past?
5. What is the mix of class (economic position) and status (other bases of identity such as racial or ethnic group, gender, and religion) in individual and collective outcomes? How are identities formed? How do identities become the basis of collective action?
6. How do human beings construct social reality?

The works selected here illustrate different ways of thinking about these questions. Some are down to earth and address everyday life while others are very abstract. They come from both the mainstream of academic sociology and the countercurrents. The reader is divided into five parts. Each corresponds to a distinct period in the history of social thought. These differ from each other in terms of the themes and problems addressed by social theory, the styles of doing theory, the methods of research, and the countries where social theorists worked. The placement of the selections allows the reader to see how theories confront each other and how they change historically.

The introductions to each period, type of theory, and individual theorist point out these connections. Biographies of the individual theorists are touched on briefly; longer accounts can be found in many other places (see the suggested readings at the end of each chapter). In any case, a reading of ideas should never be reduced to the reported facts of an individual's life. Knowing facts (but which facts?) about a person may help us to understand why certain intellectual puzzles appeared in her or his imagination, but ideas take on a life of their own and outlive the individual. Religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, social class, and psychological states may be factors in the development of these ideas, but they do not explain them. Yet marginality of one kind or another gives a critical edge to a theorist's work, shattering the comfortable taken-for-grantedness in which majorities live their lives; all theorizing is an attack on taken-for-grantedness, and, in that respect, it comes easier to minorities.

It is important to keep in mind that individuals change in the course of their lives, so the writings of a theorist's youth are often different from those of old age. As the maturing and aging process and the historical circumstances change, so do the ideas. Sometimes, hope is replaced by pessimism, especially when old age coincides with historical disasters, as with several of our theorists and World War I. Even in the happiest historical conditions, old age may bring about a sense of limited possibilities, replacing the boundless optimism and

freedom of youth, so it may tilt a theorist's work more toward structural determination and away from a focus on autonomy and meaningful action.

Not just writers but readers change, as does what is going on outside the texts being written and read—the context. The historical conditions change, so the texts and what we make of them do not remain the same. To read Marx after the collapse of the Berlin Wall is to encounter a different Marx than when the same passages were read in the 1960s. When we reread these theorists in the future, we will encounter new perspectives from which to look at our world.

BIOGRAPHIES

We wanted our biographies of theorists to spark reflection on how individuals start “theorizing”—an unnatural activity for most people. In many cases, experiences as an outsider of one kind or another motivate a questioning stance toward society. At the same time, we wanted to avoid any reductionist explanations in which a single factor (such as ethnicity or sexuality) is identified as impelling an individual to become a theorist or as shaping the kind of theory the individual produced.

Our longer interpretive bios in which we explore these questions and reveal personal information are necessarily confined to individuals about whom we feel free to write and for whom sources such as a published biography, memoirs, or autobiography are available. They would be inappropriate for living theorists whose privacy has to be respected. In these longer interpretive biographies, we discuss the social and historical contexts of the theoretical achievements—the institutions and practices that shaped the lives of the theorists—because these are different from the milieu in which contemporary theory is formed.

For theorists whose major work was accomplished in the years after World War II, we prepared shorter biographies focused on their ideas, intellectual formation, and professional careers. Many of these theorists were academics whose lives were not altogether different from those of contemporary theorists; details of schooling and cultural institutions need to be explained, especially for theorists working outside of North America, but the general context was similar to university and intellectual life today.

When contact information was readily available for the living theorists, we contacted them and asked for a brief biography, encouraging them to touch on their intellectual formation and current interests, and a large number of them responded. For individuals who did not send us their own statements, we compiled a brief summary of their education, current employment, and major works.

The reader may note several patterns and trends in these biographies. Most of the contemporary theorists and many of the twentieth-century theorists held academic appointments. Many theorists born before the middle of the twentieth century enjoyed affluent and privileged circumstances in their childhoods and youth. Working-class backgrounds, such as those of Immanuel Kant, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Antonio Gramsci, are rare in the earlier period, but they become more common as doors opened to talent after World War II. Especially in the earlier period, theorists' fathers (and sometimes their mothers) were professionals: lawyers, more rarely doctors, and quite frequently clergy. These backgrounds not only provided them with the money, leisure, and university educations that enabled them to become intellectuals in an era when few individuals enjoyed these opportunities but also set the foundation for their reflections on the human condition and—in the case of the law and the clergy—for the way they saw human beings constructing a universe of meaning.

Many theorists experienced themselves as outsiders, and ethnicity, sexuality, and region of identification are among the reasons for this outsider feeling. It was sometimes the

tension between their comfortable, privileged backgrounds and their “outsider” status that enabled them to question conventional, taken-for-granted views of social arrangements. With few exceptions (for example, the two men who died under fascism and Nazism—Antonio Gramsci and Walter Benjamin), theorists usually led tranquil lives and lived into old age.

LEARNING AIDS

Each chapter concludes with a list of key terms, which serves as a quick review guide. This list is followed by a number of questions and exercises that encourage review, discussion, reflection, and observation. These learning aids include a large range of different types of questions and exercises.

Two key skills are emphasized:

1. Summarizing theories and theoretical arguments, which means being able to boil them down into a few key terms and bullet points. This operation means “cutting away the fat” and making the theoretical ideas easy to remember—making them portable so that you do not have to rely on a text to look at but can carry them around in your own mind.
2. Visualizing examples from history and from contemporary everyday life to illustrate the theories—turning these often very abstract thoughts into a series of vivid pictures like illustrations in a book or a video played in the movie theatre of your own head. For example, when Marx and Engels use the word “proletariat,” you can call up images of nineteenth-century English factories, with looms or spinning machines tended by hundreds of workers, many of them children; or you can call up similar images of apparel factories in Bangladesh today. These pictures help to make a very broad and abstract term more concrete and enable us to see what the term means about human experiences. This skill involves being able to “conjure up” concrete everyday life experiences. Often looking at history books with pictures as well as at photo and video images of today’s news helps to develop this skill.

Study questions ask you to summarize the material, to express a theoretical argument in a concise summary of the main ideas using key terms as needed but stating the ideas in your own original words and sentences. There is a narrow window here between plagiarism (just copying the theorist’s words) and veering too far away from the theorist’s thoughts in your own restatement.

Discussion questions ask you to compare and contrast theorists or to come up with your own contemporary examples to illustrate theories and concepts.

Reflection questions ask you to think about your own experiences and values, to apply the theories and concepts to your own ideas and actions.

Exercises ask you to do something to produce empirical examples, such as interview friends, look at behaviours in various settings, or analyze media products. They ask for a systematic recording of what you observe.

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**PART
IV**

TRANSITIONS AND CHANGES
