

# Constructing Social Research Objects

*Constructionism in Research Practice*

*Edited by*

Håkon Leiulfstrud and Peter Sohlberg



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## Living Theory

### *Reflections on Four Decades of Teaching Social Theory*

*Michael Burawoy*

It's January 1977.<sup>1</sup> I've won the lottery. Through a series of unlikely events, I've landed a job at Berkeley—a dream come true. It was an exciting time in sociology and especially at Berkeley, the flagship campus of what was claimed to be the greatest public university in the world. The campus hosted 29,000 students, 1,200 faculty. In 1964, Mario Savio, leader of the Free Speech Movement, in a famous speech, had assailed the university's bureaucratic machine, calling on the students “to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels ... upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop!” Clark Kerr, the President of the University of California, mastermind of the master-plan for free college education for all who desired it—today in tatters—was fired by then Governor Reagan for not putting out the fire. Indeed, the Free Speech Movement inaugurated a decade of political turmoil on campus, with sociology one of its epi-centres.

When I arrived, the department was still in shell shock, dispersed in fragments. Neil Smelser, then department Chair, had determined that I should teach the required one-quarter course in social theory—never mind the B's and C's I'd gotten for my papers in social theory at the University of Chicago. Was he punishing me or the students? It wasn't clear. Whatever you want, Professor Smelser, I'm at your service. When I asked Art Stinchcombe, why he had ‘incomprehensibly’ (or so I thought) moved from Berkeley to the University of Chicago, he told me that he couldn't stand teaching Berkeley undergraduates, who looked on so bored and uninterested. At Chicago he wouldn't have to teach any undergraduates. As for my new colleagues at Berkeley, they never seemed to talk about teaching. They just complained that undergraduates didn't know anything and were not interested in knowing anything.

Not knowing much myself I didn't know what to expect. With some trepidation I diligently prepared for the course, blessed with two wonderful teaching

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1 This chapter was stimulated by a seminar organized by Johan Fredrik Rye at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology at Trondheim. I'm especially grateful to Johan for his interrogation of the way I teach forcing me to reflect and conceptualise what it is that I do.

assistants. That January, I walked into the classroom of some 60 students, scattered among the seats, and gazed up at their fresh and nonchalant faces. I told them I was new to teaching, never even been an undergraduate in the US. I was going to tell them about social theory from the perspective of the division of labour. I then had the presence of mind to ask them what they thought was the meaning of ‘division of labour’. As the seconds ticked away and they found the silence unbearable, someone proffered an answer, and then someone else, and soon they were competing for my attention. And, as they say, the rest is history.

Mario Savio’s words were prophetic. Today, over the 43 years I’ve been teaching the university has been transformed—it stutters from one financial crisis to the next, it is now a revenue seeking machine, not least through increasing student fees; it has a bloated administration trying to run the university as though it were a private corporation. With 43,000 students, the campus is bursting at the seams and the costs of attendance are soaring. Students are paying more for less. My theory classes are no longer 60 students but anywhere between 200 and 300; they come from very different backgrounds; so far, the number of teaching assistants has grown proportionately but it’s not clear how long that will last. The required theory course has also grown, not just in size but also in length, from one quarter to two quarters to two semesters. Yet, at the chalk face—I still use chalk—things are much the same as I scramble for student attention, competing with the internet rather than newspapers, cajoling them into studying difficult texts between their extensive subsistence labours and the demands of other courses. I like to think that social theory lives on as strongly as ever, but I do face new challenges, in particular a healthy scepticism toward the menu of canonical thinkers.

## 1 Living Theory

What should we do with those “dead white men” of the 19th century—Marx, Weber, and Durkheim—whose work we teach as the “classics” and whom we regard as the ‘founders’ of sociology? Sociology is unusual in our continual embrace of founding figures. As Arthur Stinchcombe (1982) reminds us, they inspire us to raise profound questions, to provide exemplary research, to offer models of theoretical thinking, to bring unity to our fragmented discipline, to help to define our identity. If we do need them, can they be brought back from the dead? Can they be resuscitated? Can we turn them into living theory? In this chapter I will suggest a way of doing this, what I call the ‘ethnographic approach’ to the teaching of theory that I contrast with the ‘survey approach’.

There are two meanings to 'living theory', two ways to make theory live. On the one hand, one can make 'theory' live by giving it new energy in the way we read and reconstruct those original texts. Teaching social theory is a relation to old texts, and that relationship has to change as we face new historical challenges in the present. What makes a work classic or canonical is the way it transcends its own time. Yes, Adam Smith refers to '10,000 naked savages' but his ideas about the division of labour and the market still capture the imagination of so many. Yes, Émile Durkheim talks about the relative brain size of men and women, but his understanding of how the division of labour can lead to solidarity still inspires our thinking. Yes, Marx and Engels overlook the divisive forces of race and gender in the formation of the working class, but still their writing on capitalism endures. Not only does the reading and rereading of canonical texts bring new insights and new life to old works but the relation *among* these canonical texts also changes. The canon as a set of relations is itself a living entity.

But there is a second meaning of 'living theory'. Our relation to theory gives new energy to old texts, but in so doing it gives us new energy. As we make theories live, so we inhabit them and give ourselves new lives. This is the difference between *making theory live* and *living in theory*. We are all theorists, we all have cognitive maps of the world, that's how we live in the world. That is the double meaning of common sense—a shared theory but one that we don't think about because and despite dictating our lives. Being explicit about theory offers us new ways of living in the world. Adam Smith tells us that specialisation is good, we are not destined from birth to occupy a certain place, but we can change that place, and if we are diligent, whether we are janitors or entrepreneurs everyone will benefit through the sharing of a 'universal opulence'. Many still believe this. Marx, on the other hand, attunes us to a very different notion of the world in which we live—instead of universal opulence he thinks the division of labour leads to the polarisation of wealth and poverty based on an account of capitalism, its dynamics, and its possible supersession. Durkheim, on the other hand, is less interested in the economic consequences of the division of labour and instead focuses on the conditions under which the division of labour gives rise to solidarity. Adopting a theory is like picking up a new language; it leads us to think differently but also behave differently. So, theory has a life of its own but also propels our own lives.

Well, you might say, this is all very well in 'theory' but what about 'in practice'? In the remainder of this chapter I will try to elaborate the meaning of living theory through teaching social theory to undergraduates. My practice has become 'common sense' as it has evolved intuitively and spontaneously

over 40 years, but now I attempt to make it explicit, turning that practice into theory—a theory of practice.

By convention, teaching comes in two stripes. There is the lecture format in which pearls of wisdom pour from the orator into empty, waiting minds as opposed to the dialogic format which works through the active participation of the student. These are less hard and fast types and more a continuum between extremes. Paulo Freire (1970) famously distinguished between a banking model in which knowledge is ingested and accumulated and problem-oriented education that embarks from the lived experience of student. I lean toward the latter, only I don't join the lives of my students as Freire did, but try to bring their lives into the classroom by putting them into conversation with great texts. A tall order, indeed. In reflecting on what I have been doing for the last 43 years, I revise and elaborate Freire's model by distinguishing between the more conventional 'survey' approach to teaching social theory and what I call the 'ethnographic' approach.

## 2 The Survey Approach

I began teaching social theory as a survey of so-called, collectively-agreed-upon great theorists. That's how social theory is generally taught. One "great" theorist follows another, usually chronologically; the dilemma and debate are not about how to teach but what to teach—which theorists to teach, which to include, and by the same token which to exclude. Inevitably, in my first attempts I introduced far too many candidates as I hopped from one theorist to the next. This survey approach offers students a broad panorama of the mountain range. Different instructors will paint different panoramas, but a distant mountain range it remains. It is useful for students to catch a glimpse of the mountain range to be conquered, an enticing invitation to the nooks and crannies, the escarpments and ravines of each mountain. But that's for a later time that usually never comes.

The survey approach has its drawbacks. I use the word 'survey' in the technical sense as it derives from the methodology of survey research. It involves collecting excerpts from different theories or from secondary summaries, assembled in textbooks. They are treated as discrete data points, a sample from the population of possible theories, a population of great works understood as such by convention. The idea is to be inclusive and representative. If the first question is how to draw the sample of theories, the second question is how to classify them: conflict theory vs. consensus theory, macro-sociology vs. micro sociology, structure vs. agency are three popular classifications.

As in the social survey, this approach suffers from a double decontextualization: the theories are severed from their historical production and they are also separated from one another as though they are independent entities. The dialogue between context and theorist and between successive theorists is muted. Students are easily overwhelmed by both the scope and the decontextualization, that can be overcome by substituting superficial summaries for the original theories. They may capture the mountain range, but they don't experience the gruelling climb up the mountain or enjoy the stupendous view from the top.

If the text-book survey is flawed, then what are the alternatives? There are, of course, modifications of the survey giving it a more interpretive slant. First, theory and theorists are brought into a relationship with one another by examining the world in which they lived. However, if it is to be more than an introductory background that places theory and theorist in their lives and times, this approach requires a lot from the student: command of a sophisticated theory of knowledge as well as a knowledge of history. Done properly, this can be a slippery slope away from the survey to the study of a single theorist lying at the intersection of history and biography.

A second modification of the survey is to select excerpts from great thinkers of the past, based less on a representative sample and more on the teacher's own theoretical vision. In their monumental two-volume *Theories of Society*, for example, Talcott Parsons and his colleagues (1961) compiled a compendium of excerpts, interpreted as steppingstones to his own theory. Theorists are connected to one another in a teleological manner, culminating in the architectonics of structural functionalism.

These more interpretive approaches break from the survey approach in two contradictory directions: the first underlines the singularity of theories as the production of specific contexts while the second strips away the context and instead draws theories together around a common theme or project. But it's still a survey.

When all is said and done, the survey approach assumes a unique reading of a text that has classical status whose rudiments the student has to "learn". If there is context it is usually relegated to some historical background. The student digests the theory and absorbs its content. Students are then supposed to regurgitate the theory in examinations calling for summaries that are right or wrong. It assumes that the student is a passive recipient into whom knowledge is poured. The students are not living theory, nor does theory live.

Over time dissatisfaction with the survey approach led me to an alternative ethnographic approach. Here the central feature is dialogue. Rather than empty vessels, students come to class as actors in a collective drama—they

re-enact their own lives through theory. They do this not through passively imbibing texts but by actively building theory in a collective project orchestrated by the teacher. Students not only build theories out of their separate parts, but they build relations between theories, what one might call a theoretical tradition, actively comparing theories to one another and to their own common sense. As they actively participate in building, students enter into the theory as though it were a language to be spoken, and a new common sense arises through their engagement with the world. They are not observers of a distant mountain range but participants in the making and following of cognitive maps of the world around them. They become theorists of their own lives. In their hands, those dead white men come alive as they live in and through theory. In the remainder of this chapter I elaborate the ethnographic approach to theory.

### 3 Building Theory

In opposition to the survey, the ethnographic method focuses on a series of carefully chosen *extracts* from the original texts of each theorist, extracts that students can manageably study in the allotted time—from a few paragraphs to 10 or more pages per class, depending on their difficulty. That's easier said than done as it is always tempting to assign more than students can absorb. These extracts are like pieces of a jig-saw puzzle that are slowly assembled in the course of a dialogue between teacher and taught. Like the ethnographer's field notes, the extracts are read and reread as they are put into relation with previous extracts (from the same theorist). Each extract is interpreted in the light of what came before and is later re-interpreted in the light of what follows. Slowly but surely, piece by piece, we create a picture of the whole—a picture that is dependent on the original extracts chosen by the teacher.

Once the theoretical architecture is built, we subject it to systematic critique, what I call 'ransacking'. Just as ethnography advances through crises in the field, so theory advances through the challenges it faces, both external anomalies and internal contradictions. External anomalies, misfits between theory and data, derive from historical analysis, but, just as important, from the lived experiences of the students themselves. When the world surprises theory—when the division of labour does not give rise to universal opulence, when the working class is not revolutionary—we are led back to contradictions, false assumptions, erroneous logic. Excavating the text reveals the contradictions. Thus, at one point, Smith says the division of labour leads to innovation, at another (subsidiary) point to stupefaction; at one point, Marx says

class struggle is the grave digger of capitalism, at another (subsidiary) point its saviour.

Great theories harbour great contradictions that feed their continued relevance and animate debate. The point, therefore, is not to use anomalies and contradictions to dismiss a given theory, but rather to try to resolve them through *reconstructing* the theory on its own terms, that is on the basis of its core assumptions rather than by adding arbitrary postulates. The goal is to refute the refutation. Students gradually master this technique of reconstructive critique, coming up with their own imaginative solutions. This is building theory.

#### 4 Enacting Theory

The ethnographic method has its performative side. If surveying social theory calls for the formal lecture, the commanding authority of a great intellect that impresses and inspires with its lofty message, making a compelling case for each theorist, the ethnographic method calls on the teacher to step down from the lectern and join the students. Pedagogy is organized on the basis of student participation, which follows its own rules, especially important when student enrolments get into the hundreds. All dialogue in the classroom is limited to the text in hand, which students are required to bring to class. But later, at certain points other theorists (but only those who have been assigned in the course) and the personal experiences of students can be invoked. Before the class begins, I write out the questions and reading for next time as well as the plan for the day. I begin the class by summarising where I think we are, where we have come from, and where I hope we are going. We then launch into a collective discussion structured by the questions that were raised in the previous class, always in reference to the text in hand.

Thus, the classes are conducted Socratic-style in which a presumptively known answer is elicited from students through an expanding discussion based on specific quotations from the text, often represented visually in the form of an accumulating diagram on the board—yes, so far, I've resisted PowerPoint. This allows anyone to participate without unduly advantaging those who claim to have prior knowledge of theory. This is education for all, not just those well-endowed with cultural capital. When someone hesitantly sticks up his or her hand for the first time, it is up to me to affirm the student's contribution. That can often call for a certain agility in bringing the student's contribution into line with the on-going discussion. Compulsive-participants are given participation quotas. In principle, any student can contest what the

instructor says, which the students invariably do. Indeed, they discover flaws in my arguments, give alternative interpretations of the texts, and in the second semester, they often have me on the ropes as I vainly try to defend each theorist in turn. The presumptively known end point is never reached; having learned how to think theoretically, students have collectively taken the course in new directions. Uncertainty of outcome draws students into creative engagement.

The lecture hall becomes a theatre of participation in which the students become actors with names, real or fictitious, developing their own characters as the plot unfolds. Students become orators as they are called on to read from Marx or Lenin, from Durkheim or Weber, from Beauvoir or Patricia Hill Collins, thereby injecting life into complex texts. Elaborate symbolic incentives—such as affirmation through awarding BBs (Bloody Brilliant)—and public humiliation when rules are violated (students not bringing their books to class) induce but also set limits on participation. The drama is intensified as the class develops its own idioms and customs. I explain to them that Social Theory (ST) is a powerful drug that can be imbibed anywhere, disrupting their lives, turning them in directions the students never anticipated. Student worlds tangle with the evolving conversations within and among theories.

## 5 Engaging the World

Social theory is difficult. It's not an assemblage of facts. Each theory is a language unto itself that can be learned only with discipline and practice. One learns by speaking, by applying theory to the everyday. To facilitate engagement with the world, but also to make comparison among theories feasible, we need to find a key concept that will orient the course and guide the selection of extracts. I have tried a number of key concepts but have always returned to the idea of the division of labour, because, in principle, it is simple, because the concept is at the heart of so much social theory, because everyone is familiar with it and has participated in the division of labour whether at work, in the classroom, in the sports team, or in the home, and because I was interested in it, being a sociologist of work. If 19th century social theory can shed light on this everyday phenomenon, then living theory can advance. A set of orienting questions, then, drive the course, questions that derive from Adam Smith's apparently simple theory of the division of labour:

- What is the division of labour? What are its different forms?
- What are the origins, mechanisms of development and future of the division of labour?
- What are the conditions of existence of the division of labour?

- What are the consequences of the division of labour (a) for individuals and (b) for society as a whole?

With these questions students can easily tie theory to their daily lives, further encouraged by teaching assistants. Apart from the ‘lectures’ twice a week, there are also discussion sections, 20 students in size, meeting twice a week for 50 minutes, and led by devoted and creative graduate students. That’s where the real learning takes place. They are there to make theory live in the day-to-day world, but also to impose the discipline of reading, writing, and thinking. Along with one-page reading memos due every week, each semester students have to write a ‘theory in action’ paper (one thousand words) that puts a theorist to work on a current event or their own experiences. Mid-term and final exams are a series of 750-word take-home papers (once again less is more) that challenge them to put theorists into conversation with each other over some empirical phenomenon or an application of a theory to current events as described in an article from a newspaper or magazine.

At the end of the first semester, I try to broaden their historical imagination by supplying students with a series of short but pointed journalistic pieces on a single concrete episode of attempted social change—the revolutions of Cuba, Russia, and Nicaragua or liberation struggles in South Africa, Palestine, and the United States. They are asked to examine the event in question through the successive lens of Marx, Lenin, Gramsci, and Fanon, each sketch being no more than 750 words. They have to be clear in order to be concise and they have to be concise in order to be clear.

At the end of the second semester, the course culminates in a 20-minute oral examination with the students’ teaching assistant in which each student has to create a vision of social theory by reconstructing the entire course as a conversation among the theorists. They create their own jigsaw with the pieces at their disposal. They bring images, pictures, drawings in a poster presentation. In preparing for the oral they demonstrate how theories can become part of their mindsets that they will take with them into their future lives.

The success of the course depends on the devotion of the teaching assistants, all PhD students in the department. The labour of preparation, of delivery, of consultation, of grading generally takes more than the 20 hours for which they are paid. My goal is to develop their commitment to a joint project that I lay out in a manual I have created over the years. At the end of every week, on Thursday evenings, we meet for two hours in my office to discuss administrative issues, to dissect texts that they have poured over, to normalise the grading of student papers, to discuss problematic students, but above all to exchange ideas of teaching techniques, what works, what doesn’t. This continues in a more informal way when I take them out to dinner. Their sense of

vocation as future teachers has already been instilled before they begin and hardly requires these rituals of solidarity, but it is my recognition of how integral they are to the teaching project.<sup>2</sup>

## 6 Connecting Theories

The Socratic method presumes I have it all worked out. The final goal is all worked out, but in getting there we take false turns, follow unusual digressions, deal with unexpected disruptions, such as strikes, that become theatrical opportunities for living theory. I take the class out onto the picket line where armed with a megaphone we proceed to conduct a discussion of how our theorist will assess the situation, sometimes with interruptions and contributions from the assembled strikers. Still, despite and through these diversions I do have a vision of where we are going even if it is not always clear how we are going to get there.

To be specific. The course begins with Adam Smith's famous celebration of the division of labour. Critical interrogation of those early pages in *The Wealth of Nations* leads to three key but unexamined questions concerning the division of labour: Marxism's question of *exploitation*: who controls the surplus produced by increased productivity? Durkheim's question of *solidarity*: can self-interest hold society together? Weber, Foucault, and Beauvoir call attention to the question of *domination*: what's its form and how is it sustained? Accordingly, the first semester shows how Marxism is a living tradition that develops successively from Marx and Engels to Lenin to Gramsci and to Fanon, each theorist working off anomalies and contradictions found in previous theorists and highlighted by specific historical challenges. Specifically, the deconstruction of the genius of Marx and Engels gives rise to three shortcomings in their account of the division of labour: an undeveloped theory of the state, a flawed theory of class struggle and a largely absent theory of transition. These shortcomings are tackled, in turn by Lenin, Gramsci, and Fanon, each making contributions and, by the same token, leaving us with new problems.

You might call this an internal dialogue of theory reconstruction as opposed to an external dialogue of critique that takes place in the second semester where Durkheim faces off against Marx, Weber against Lenin, Foucault against Gramsci, and Beauvoir against Fanon. These critical dialogues do not lead to

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<sup>2</sup> Teaching assistants have written essays describing how they have taught this course, including a recently published article. See Herring, Rosaldo, Seim and Shestakofsky (2016).

the conquest of one theorist over another or a progressive theoretical tradition, but to the clarification of what makes each of them so special, viz., their assumptions about human beings that allow them to conceive of society, their vision of history that allows them to project an alternative future (or the dangers of doing so), their explanation of social reproduction that allows them to understand social change, and their innovative methodology that allows them to put their theory to work in empirical studies.

We end with feminist theory—and we read MacKinnon and Collins after Beauvoir to obtain an intimation of a feminist tradition—not only to follow a chronology, not only to develop a critique of classical theory for overlooking gender, but to bring theory home, forcing students to reflect on their own lives and their own place in the (gendered) division of labour. Feminism turns the theory of the division of labour back on the theorist, calling attention to the social location of the theorists we studied. Classical theory constitutes the theorist as manufacturing theory from outside society, which, as feminists insist, is an impossible place to inhabit. Marx, Durkheim, and Weber were part of the society they studied—the theorist cannot be separated from the world they study, but nor can the student.

As the conclusion to the course, feminism is the most vivid expression of the significance of social theory, namely, to question the entrenched common sense we develop as participants in the world, to underline the presence of theory not only in disembodied texts but also in our embodied lives. In denaturalizing our lives and challenging common sense, social theory shows that the world need not be the way it is and explores what it would mean to inhabit a better world. In their different ways it is the utopian impulse that motivates and inspires social theory, infusing energy and meaning into the substantive fields of sociology. In the age of the internet, distance learning, and on-line courses, in the face of the degradation of higher education, it is especially important to uphold the idea of living theory: living with theory, living in theory, and even living for theory.

## 7 Teaching Theory: Living or Dying?

In trying to elucidate my pedagogy, I'm in danger of freezing it, and once frozen it cannot live, it can only die. The course has begun to atrophy. While trying to resuscitate those dead white men, I have myself become old if not yet dead. A certain ritualism has entered the theatre; students are playing along without really being engaged. The distance between myself and students has grown. Passions forged in the 1970s are out of tune with the present. How many

students were even born when I began teaching in 1977? And it's not just a matter of age but it's a matter of class and race. My increasing salary, after all, is made possible by their increasing fees.

I've become complacent, if not arrogant, and, perish the thought, perhaps even condescending. The intense anxiety that suffused my performance in the early decades has ebbed away. No longer is there impatience when students don't do the reading. I remain calm, coaxing them rather than scolding them. My provocations and humiliations secure attention; they no longer incite guilt, but more likely resentment. I watch my evaluations as I've never watched them before—the numbers sink if ever so slightly, and complaints creep in about minor matters, concealing a rising distrust. Without trust all teaching collapses but especially the ethnographic method.

I've changed, but students have also changed. 40 years ago, I would gaze out onto a sea of whiteness, but today students are far more diverse, from different countries, from different races, from different genders and sexualities, from different ages. Single mothers, undocumented students, formerly incarcerated students announce their presence with aplomb. They challenge me to make the course relevant. Now over half the students have transferred from two-year community colleges—for them arriving in the big Cal is exciting, mesmerising, but daunting. They are determined to meet the challenge, but the challenges take their toll, emotionally, physically, and materially.

Students are paying for their education as they never did. If tuition was about \$630 a year when I began, it is now \$16,000. Many don't pay because their family income is less than \$80,000 a year but still, they face escalating costs of attendance as rents hit the roof. Students double up, triple up, some are homeless, and many have become commuters, have moved out to distant places where rents are less. It means that students work longer hours in their jobs and take out loans. They want to get out quickly; so, they take more courses than they should—all to enter an ever more precarious labour market—and from there to support children, siblings, and parents also trying to make their way in the world. Yet still they manage to pay attention, come to class, do their assignments, cajoled into taking theory seriously by overworked and underpaid, but devoted teaching assistants.

When the field site becomes repetitive and predictable, it's time for the ethnographer to intervene, disturb the relations around them. So, it is with teaching. For too long I have insisted on competing for their attention with my body and my soul—no quizzes, no roll call, just me and the text and of course the looming papers. I'm devoted to the white chalk and the black board, furiously drawing pictures that unfold with theories. I'm one of the last. It's time to move on, to succumb to the digital world in which my students live, to draw

on PowerPoint to bring a new dimension to teaching. Where the blackboard was an extension of myself, the screen will now be a third person competing for attention. Students will no longer have to squint and puzzle over what I've drawn in the distance, the PowerPoint will be in their faces. But it projects an air of predictability. We will all know that the PowerPoint has decided where we are going and how we are going to get there. From the hidden laws of classroom anarchy, we move to the planned economy. Still the best plans can be subverted.

But that's the form, but what about the content? For almost 20 years, the content of the course has remained static. I had designed a jig-saw puzzle which we slowly put together, manufacturing the pieces as we go, carefully laying them in relation to each other until we came up with the final picture that students express in their extraordinary posters. I loved that final picture, its aesthetics, its logic, but it belies the idea of living theory. The point of a jig-saw puzzle is that the end is predetermined, at least to me if not to the students. We have to put it into motion if theory is to really live.

Students are always asking why we don't read this or that theorist—especially when they learn what my colleagues are teaching in their theory courses. In the survey approach you can simply add another theorist, no big deal, but in the ethnographic approach adding another theorist requires re-evaluating and reassembling the whole. I can't just add another piece without rejigging the whole, revising the picture. So, under pressure from students, instead of adding another piece, I add an elective third semester for those who are addicted to theory. With 30 committed students, I devote myself to a single topic (theory of pedagogy, theory of the university) or to a single theorist (C. Wright Mills, Pierre Bourdieu, and most recently W.E.B. Du Bois).

It is long overdue to redesign the jig-saw puzzle, giving W.E.B. Du Bois a central place. He is an endlessly fascinating sociologist, for so long excluded from academia—both he and his writing—for whom race is central but not to the exclusion of class and gender. In contrast to Marx, Weber, and Durkheim he is from and writes about the US, but in global colours. His writing is often poetic as well as sociological and historical, challenging the theorist to construct analytical frames, concepts out of his lyrical prose. Putting him in dialogue with Marx, Weber, and Durkheim illuminates the different stages of his own life just as the way he places himself in the world he is analysing recalls the contributions of feminists. It takes, at least, an African American to breathe new life into the 19th century masters from Europe. With the help of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim his history speaks directly to students.

Whether I can recapture the students by revamping the course, or whether they are lost forever remains to be seen. But at least I have recovered the

anxiety that is *sine qua non* of teaching, the excitement of learning along with those I am teaching. Whether successful or not in reversing my failings, those failings should not be used to indict living theory—a real utopia in a sea of degradation.

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