



17th Annual Conference of the International Social Theory Consortium

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

Chicago, Illinois, USA
May 17-19, 2018

Call for Papers

In the twenty-first century, it is becoming ever more apparent, at an accelerating pace and in an increasingly aggravating fashion, that the assumptions that informed social theorists in the humanities and in the social sciences about the principles underlying the modern world and social, political, and cultural change are highly problematic. On the one hand, this clearly is a consequence of exhaustion regarding the determination in many quarters and among many people after World War II, to prevent another world war. It is undeniable that today, the inclination that characterized the postwar era, to whatever extent, to approach areas of conflict in a more conciliatory fashion, is dissipating quickly. On the other hand, fear of the future is manifesting itself ever more clearly, and the horizon of excellent prospects appears to be narrowing precipitously. In this context, established and prevailing notions regarding progress must be scrutinized, and their importance and appeal to growing numbers of people questioned. In 1984, Habermas diagnosed symptoms of an “exhaustion of utopian energies.” Today, the kind of imaginary necessary for maintaining commitment (or even the ideations relating) to what may be referred to as “utopian impulse” is in short supply. At the same time, both in the natural and social sciences, and in mass culture generally, vision of dystopic future are proliferating.

Even though the representatives of the Frankfurt School version of critical theory have been accused of pessimism and a “deflationary” (disenchanted, sobering) impetus, the motivation behind both was an undeniable penchant for “inflation” (a determined commitment to the possibility of the future being better than the past). In recent renderings of critical theory, both the deflationary and the inflationary moments have (been) weakened to the point where the distinction between critical theory and traditional theory is difficult to discern.

This conference is dedicated to illuminating the larger nexus of issues surrounding the

condition of modernity (and especially persistent challenges relating to the study and the theory of modern societies) within the spectrum and the field of tensions between utopia and dystopia, with a special emphasis on circumstances in the United States. Theodor W. Adorno's perspective on the "damaged life" will serve as a perspective on critical theory that stressed the importance of "deflation" (as one end of the spectrum), while Erich Fromm's concept of the "sane society" will function as what remains the foremost effort to delineate, in "inflationary" fashion, a society in which the lives of individuals will not be fraught by the structural pathologies that have characterized modern societies to date (as the other end of the spectrum). Adorno and Fromm are especially well-suited as a frame since their versions of critical theory would have been inconceivable independently of their "American experience," respectively.

The ISTC continues its tradition of OPENNESS to papers on all topics that fall under the heading of social theory, broadly conceived, and encourages submissions in all areas and traditions of social theorizing.

For the 2018 annual conference, we especially encourage submissions that address the importance of categories and perspectives relating to utopia and dystopia, and to capitalism, culture and critique. Possible topics include:

- The Damaged Life in 21st Century Capitalism
- Visions of the Sane Society
- Strategies toward a Sane Society
- Ideology in the 21st Century
- The Eclipse of "Society"
- The Future of Emancipation
- Social Theory between Anthropology and Social Science
- Towards a Symptomology of "Trump"
- Rescuing Critical Theory from its Official Representatives
- Theorizing "Futurity"
- Political Economies of Race, Class, and Gender
- Postcolonial Capitalism and Critique
- Identity Politics and the Destruction of the Self
- "Resistance is Futile": Pros and Cons
- Posthumanism
- Utopia/Dystopia
- The End of Progress?
- Marxist Humanism
- Postone's *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* after 25 years
- Herbert Marcuse in the 21st century
- Critical theory and the contemporary self
- Recognition and Redistribution Revisited, Fraser vs Honneth after Trump
- Feminism Today: From #MeToo to All of Us
- The Next Financial Bubble to Burst
- Dow Jones Going up, Society Going Down?
- Authoritarian Populism: Reaction's Last Stand or Prelude to Neofascism?
- Wither Neoliberal Globalization?
- Basic Income: Between Ideology and Promise
- History Going into Reverse

Please email abstracts and/or proposals of sessions to hdahms@utk.edu no later than **15 March 2018**.

The conference will be hosted by Lauren Langman at Loyola University Chicago.

For more information contact either of the conference co-organizers:

Organizers:

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