Review Essay/Essai Rendu

Generating Disobedience: Does 21st Century Social Theory Rest on a 1960s Weltanschauung?

Alan Sica and **Stephen Turner**, eds., *The Disobedient Generation: Social Theorists in the Sixties*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005, 336 pp., $US 24.00 paperback (978-0-226-75625-7), $US 62.00 (978-0-226-75624-0)

While sociologists have long advocated the life-story method as a means for shedding light on social patterns, only rarely have they provided introspective commentary on their own lives. There are exceptions. Pitirim Sorokin, R.M. McIver, George Homans, and Charles Page, for instance, have written lucid and insightful memoirs about how their life experiences and their sociological practices have been mutually implicated. Others, such as Robert K. Merton and Talcott Parsons, have written about their careers as sociologists. Volumes such as *Authors of their Own Lives* (edited by Bennett Berger) and *Sociological Traditions from Generation to Generation* (edited by Merton and Matilda White Riley) have provided statements by sociologists about how their careers have developed, and *The American Sociologist* regularly publishes reflections by sociologists about their lives and careers.

The Disobedient Generation is distinguished from other autobiographical exercises by its focus on the extent to which a particular experience — coming of age in the 1960s — left its imprint on the sociological imagination. In this regard, the volume is very much in line with classical works in intellectual history that have sought to understand how major transformations such as capitalist industrialization, bureaucratization, and wars have left their marks on political and social thought. The editors selected a number of prominent social theorists to discuss how their experiences during the 1960s affected their sociological practice. Since the social-theory enterprise involves reflection on how knowledge and ideas intersect with broader patterns of power, inequality, and change

— in the classical tradition — the editors' decision to focus on this subset of sociologists makes a good deal of sense.

The editors have assembled a volume of essays written by a distinguished and internationally diverse set of thinkers: Andrew Abbott, Jeffrey C. Alexander, Michael Burawoy, Craig Calhoun, Patricia Hill Collins, Karen Scheers Cook, John A. Hall, Paolo Jedlowski, Hans Joas, Karin Knorr Cetina, Michel Maffesoli, William Outhwaite, Saskia Sassen, Laurent Thévenot, Bryan Turner, Stephen Turner, Steve Woolgar, and Erik Olin Wright. All were born between 1944 and 1952, thus entering sociology around the time of "the events of 1968," which have come to embody — for better or for worse — the political tumult and intellectual excitement of the entire decade. The editors evidently asked the contributors to evaluate themselves rather than society at large and to reflect upon how those events and the period immediately after affected their subsequent trajectories as scholars, citizens, and political/social commentators. The editors were particularly interested in whether anything like a "sixties" *Weltanschauung* still influences the way that scholars who were formed during this period make sense of the social world.

Alan Sica's introduction, "What has 1968 come to mean?" provides a compelling portrait of how the late 1960s and early 1970s have come to be understood in the United States. He gives particular attention to the events of 1968, which he believes have left a profound mark on the memories of those who lived through the period. Drawing largely on the periodical literature of the day, he demonstrates the extent to which the United States and other Western democracies were wracked by political turbulence, social conflict, and the clash of cultural sensibilities between generations. Sica quite astutely observes that the media of the day were not unreflective partisans of the status quo, but made an effort to call attention to the great disparities in wealth and power in the United States, a stance that arguably served to fuel the widespread discontent and rebellion. While highlighting aspects of how the events of 1968 were represented by the print media, Sica could have provided more detail about how the unrest on campuses besides Columbia was covered, and he might have discussed the significance of the draft (which loomed large in the accounts provided by a number of the male American contributors).

For all its strengths, Sica's introductory chapter is highly American-centric; he fails to recognize that the situation in the United States during the late 1960s and early 1970s could not be easily transposed onto what transpired elsewhere during the same period. Indeed, his account of events outside of the United States is quite limited and selective. While he mentions Daniel-Cohn Bendit in France, he fails to discuss key events

such as the Prague Spring, and notable expressions of student activism such as the "troubles at LSE" and the student movement of Berlin, led by the redoubtable Rudi Dutschke. This lack of attention to the varying circumstances within Europe makes for a lack of fit between the avowed claims of the volume (as expressed in the preface and the introduction), and a number of the statements provided by the European contributors, whose great variety of reactions defies the easy generalization that anything like a uniform "sixties outlook" marked this generation.

Sica's introduction leads one to expect that those whose memoirs have been included in the volume would have been right in the thick of late-sixties tumult, an experience that would mark them for life. For the most part, however, the contributors were remote from the front lines of conflict, and their experiences, for the most part, did not embody the turbulence, protest and difference to which Sica refers.

Scarcely heeding the editors' directives, some contributors' essays largely serve to chronicle their publications. Others examine the implications of the 1960s for sociology as a whole, saying little about themselves. At odds with Sica's emphasis on protest and confrontation centred on university campuses, some contributors subscribe to a much less politically charged notion of "disobedience" as challenging what was expected of them. This can be read as self-serving, as one's pursuit of individual success is rationalized by the example it provided to others of their background, and more than a few of the contributors appear to have already defined themselves as academics rather than activists during the late 1960s. Their experiences tended to be quite intellectualized, and translated into research rather than enduring protest.

The most insightful and compelling accounts are from contributors — Calhoun, Turner, and Collins, in particular — who discuss how their experiences in the sixties came to inform their subsequent intellectual practice. "My Back Pages" by Craig Calhoun provides the best account of what it was like to experience the cultural side of the sixties (which, as he points out, was actually much more pronounced in the 1970s). As well as the political and intellectual ferment, he emphasizes the centrality of sex, drugs, and rock and roll. For Calhoun, the period was characterized by "optimism, openness, and pleasure of exploration … self-discovery, communalism, and social experimentation … creativity and simply hope" (pp. 92–93). While Calhoun says little about how this turbulent period informed his social theory, one can infer from the joy and intensity with which he describes his experience that the sixties and seventies left an indelible mark upon him.

In contrast, in "High on Insubordination" Stephen Turner places his emergent approach to social theory at the centre of his narrative. His

superbly trenchant and revealing account chronicles his tribulations in dealing with the sociological establishment. Unlike most contributors, he seeks to demonstrate the extent to which the structure of sociology was bound up with the American elite system, echoing strongly Martin Nicolaus's provocative speech at the 1968 ASA meetings in Boston. He underscores how mainstream sociology excluded those who were disaffected from conventional positivism and how difficult the job market was in the 1970s for recent PhDs with an interest in social theory. Turner provides a richly detailed account of how his sociological interests were informed by his family background and circumstance, and charts in an impressive manner how his own theoretical interests developed in relation to his frustrations with mainstream sociology's largely positivist self-understanding and self-serving reading of the classics.

Patricia Hill Collins's experience of the 1960s involved, as she put it, "negotiating the contradictions" of being one of the very few blacks at a liberal university (Brandeis), where she confronted the complex politics of race and class. Her situation allowed her to connect with the university labour force, who were all but invisible to her fellow students. Collins's experience of the sixties was only obliquely related to the protests against the Viet Nam War (which she argues were suffused with the standpoint of white middle-class youth), and much more bound up with the ongoing struggle for civil rights. Hence, the murder of Martin Luther King was fundamental for her experience of the sixties, distinguishing her from most of the other contributors.

In line with Collins's reflections, some European contributors examine how their experience of the 1960s era was shaped by issues of class and restricted mobility. John A. Hall, Bryan Turner, Hans Joas, and Michel Maffesoli all emphasize their humble origins and the upward mobility they achieved through education in that decade. Feeling that the student leadership largely came from bourgeois backgrounds, some found it difficult to identify with and become involved in the student revolts. A number of the European contributors did not appear to experience the events of the 1960s in a gut-wrenching and traumatic manner, as they did not have to deal directly with the Viet Nam War and the draft. Moreover, while the American contributors have a tendency to focus on themselves, several of the Europeans give more attention to how their lives were bound up with broader changes. For instance, Paolo Jedlowski sees the decade after 1968 in Italy as marked by intense collective action and the emancipation of everyday life. He also acknowledges the importance of feminism, one of the few male contributors to do so. Along the same lines, Michel Maffesoli sees a cultural transformation of

the everyday resulting not only from 1960s nonconformism and polytheism, but from the widespread adherence to situationalism.

Some of those who lived in a variety of international milieux during this period provide particularly insightful accounts. Karin Knorr Cetina uses her experience in Vienna during the 1960s and 1970s as a point of reference for reflecting upon academic institutional life in Berkeley and Bielefeld. Her rich and nuanced analysis of the contradictions and tensions of Viennese culture — as they were played out at both the University of Vienna and the Vienna Institute for Advanced Studies — illustrates the extent to which the global sixties movement was mediated at the local level, resulting in a bewildering amalgam of the old and the new. While her account of Berkeley is more fleeting and impressionistic, it serves to illustrate the enormous cultural divide between central Europe and the United States West Coast. Knorr Cetina's trenchant account of how various aspects of 1960s rebellion came to be expressed in the organizational structure of the University of Bielefeld demonstrates how democratic impulses were largely thwarted by traditional German "distrust of people," resulting in a complicated and bureaucratized administrative system that gave little scope for the reasoned deliberations of autonomous individuals. While Knorr Cetina's comparative commentary on the three milieux is certainly instructive, her own perspective remains elusive. Little is revealed about how her obvious sympathies with nonconformity and rebelliousness informed her studies of the sociology of science.

Saskia Sassen's account reveals a similar compartmentalization between political concerns and academic life. However, in contrast to Knorr Cetina, her political concerns are not just mentioned in passing; they are at the center of a compelling narrative that chronicles her activism from her teenage years in Rome to her current involvement with digital media activism. Her reflexive and densely textured account gives the sense that the sixties and seventies never ended for her, as she managed to find ways to remain politically and artistically involved right up to the present. The durability of her activism stands in sharp contrast to some of the other contributors, who suggest that their moving away from radical politics and counterculture was part of a normal process of maturation. Indeed, rather than exploring what the activism of the sixties and seventies meant to them, they seem much more comfortable discussing how their research interests have evolved, what their major publications have contributed, and which academic networks most formed them. Sassen's chapter is a refreshing departure from this style of autobiographical commentary. At the rare points that she makes mention of her academic career, she reveals a striking ambivalence about the value and signifi-

cance of this part of her life. While she discusses her intellectual trajectory with passion and intensity, she quite consciously eschews using her academic work as a point of reference, choosing instead to frame her discussion in terms of the personal underpinnings of her lifelong political engagement.

In contrast to both Knorr Cetina and Sassen, Michael Buroway's chapter "Antinomian Marxist" is premised on an almost seamless interplay between political engagement and academic work. The ferment of the 1960s and 1970s in American and European universities does not figure prominently in Buroway's account. Rather, his growing sense that "research detached from politics is a purely scholastic matter" (p. 52) was largely fuelled by his direct engagement with the process of capitalist production in the 1960s in Zambia and the 1970s in Chicago, followed by similar stints in Hungary and the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Drawing on his participant-observation experiences, Burawoy sought to both refashion Marxist theory and transform academic life. Given the overtly practical thrust of his activities, it is not surprising that his academic trajectory was not entirely smooth, but was marked by clashes with the old regime at Berkeley, who in their efforts to defend a "politically free" academy sought to deny him tenure. That Buroway won this battle, and was eventually elected President of the American Sociological Association perhaps can be seen as testimony to the long-term impact of 1960s radicalism on the American academy.

The case of Burawoy, however, should not be taken as representative of an overall tendency by the volume's contributors to retain the radical engagement of their formative years. Perspectives and ideals from the 1960s certainly appear to have had a long-term impact upon their outlook. But at the same time, it is evident that sociology has been remarkably successful in integrating and assimilating radical views and dissident tendencies without a dramatic alteration of its reward system, its power structure, or its everyday practice.

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