

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary social thought seems to be in a rather complex situation, which has been referred to in terms of a “crisis”, “fragmentation”, “pluralization”. One characteristic that appears to be undeniable, however, is that efforts for a unifying or dominating paradigm are no longer a mainstream concern. With the advent of so called postmodernism a few decades ago, the building blocks of “grand narratives” have crumbled and no other new candidates have emerged to take their place. It really is difficult to decide whether Habermas’s theory is more powerful than that of Giddens, or Bourdieu’s more powerful than that of Foucault. Instead, a whole variety of traditional as well as non-traditional approaches and directions—not all of them equally necessarily innovative and productive—are being developed in various combinations to reflect the complexity of social change and the “speed of movement” of our times, as P. Virilio shows in his works. This situation, which for some means merely a retreat to eclecticism, while for others signals the impossibility of social science as such, no doubt also serves as an opportunity for interdisciplinarity and multi-faceted thinking. There is no reason to disagree with R. Shusterman, the author of our lead article within this Symposium, who says that “we need a multiplicity of approaches to deal with the complexities of our contemporary social world and its countless problematic contexts. Our theoretical toolbox is best when it includes a variety of tools”. Shusterman himself builds his approach largely upon some neglected aspects in social thought such as embodiment and *aisthesis*, which together add up for him to “somaesthetics” with all its productive applications to some social and political issues.

Despite the well-known and hardly contested demise of “grand narratives” there might be one strong candidate to take their place—evolutionary theory. Our next author, P. Sýkora, attempts to show that the time is ripe to overcome the “sociological biophobia” and in addition to psychology and many other disciplines to accept that “sociological thought can only benefit from being enriched with the evolutionary perspective, as it is articulated by the modern theory of evolution”. On more philosophical grounds L. Bugaeva and J. Ryder argue that the resurrection of some approaches of philosophical anthropology, such as the relational conception of human being, can also serve to reconceptualize the fundamentals of social theory. The relevance of one type of multicultural approach (“egalitarian”) is defended by S. Courtois.

The papers published within the present Symposium do not aspire to be radically “groundbreaking”. However, they all make their own contribution to the ongoing reinterpretation of social issues—and constant reinterpretation is what we consider to be the main purpose of keeping social thought alive and effective.

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