

PLANETARY SOCIOLOGY

Beyond the Entanglement of
Identity and Social Structure

Edited by Harry F. Dahms

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES
IN SOCIAL THEORY

VOLUME 40

PLANETARY SOCIOLOGY

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES IN SOCIAL THEORY

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CURRENT PERSPECTIVES IN SOCIAL THEORY
VOLUME 40

**PLANETARY SOCIOLOGY:
BEYOND THE
ENTANGLEMENT OF
IDENTITY AND SOCIAL
STRUCTURE**

EDITED BY

HARRY F. DAHMS

University of Tennessee – Knoxville, USA



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Harry F. Dahms (PhD, New School for Social Research, 1993) is Professor of Sociology, Codirector of the Center for the Study of Social Justice, and Cochair of the Committee on Social Theory at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He is the editor of *Current Perspectives in Social Theory* and director of the International Social Theory Consortium. He is the author of *The Vitality of Critical Theory* (2011), has edited and coedited a dozen other books, and has published in *Sociological Theory*, *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*, *Comparative Sociology*, *Critical Sociology*, *Basic Income Studies*, *Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society*, and other journals, along with chapters in collections, encyclopedias and handbooks edited by others. Currently, he is finishing a book manuscript, *Modern Society as Artifice: Critical Theory and the Logic of Capital*. He also is working on a monograph on planetary sociology and another on sociology, critical theory, and science fiction.

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Anthony J. Knowles is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. His research interests include automation and transformations of labor, critical theory, basic income, queer theory, and political theory and democracy. He was a guest researcher at the University of Bielefeld for his dissertation research, which involves a comparative historical and theoretical analysis of automation and technological displacement in the United States and Germany.

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Bethany Nelson is a Lecturer at the University of Tennessee where she earned her PhD in 2022. Her primary research interests lie at the intersections of criminology, culture, horror, and subject making. Her other interests include social theory, death and dying, Appalachia, and neoliberal social formations.

Stelios Alfonso Panageotou is Assistant Professor of Political Economy at The College of Idaho. His research explores the tension between the capitalist economy and democratic political system. This interest led to his study of the anti-democratic management of Greece's financial crisis, which has appeared in *Review of Radical Political Economics* and *Comparative Sociology*. He has since shifted his focus to the United States where he decenters the human from democratic processes and focuses instead on corporations and money in politics. Elements of this project have appeared in *Logos: A Journal of Modern Society and Culture*, *The SAGE Handbook of Political Sociology*, and *Fast Capitalism*.

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COVID-19 and the Possibility of Transitional Justice (2022), which focuses on the pandemic as a catalyst to offer a transitional justice attempt to address mass incarceration, human rights, and harmful policies related to the American criminal justice system.

Vivian Swayne was born and raised in Appalachia and is currently a PhD student in Sociology at the University of Tennessee. Her research interests include law, policing, and state violence, with a focus on sexuality and social justice. She has experience in counseling, community organizing, and the nonprofit sector.

Della Winters is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at California State University, Stanislaus. Dr. Winters's research examines the consequences of the expanding carceral state and mass surveillance, particularly within the lives of women. Using qualitative data collection methods, she explores the intersections of privilege and disadvantage within carceral mechanisms. Dr. Winters' most recent research traces the emergence of long-acting reversible contraceptives as the primary mechanisms of reproductive healthcare and social policy in Tennessee.

PREFACE

In addition to an introductory section dedicated to an overview of the chapters included in this volume and a short chapter delineating the need for the paradigm of planetary sociology, the bulk of the chapters in this volume comprises contributions by both junior faculty and advanced graduate students that highlight and illustrate the importance and utility of planetary sociology as a novel reference frame. Its purpose is to deploy social theory for the purpose of illuminating our situatedness within social structures as concrete, specific, and distinctive features of social contexts that shape, support, and burden our identities. In this sense, this volume pointedly provides examples of “applied theory,” while relying explicitly on different traditions and instances drawn from the expanding canon of social theory. In addition, this volume includes contributions by senior scholars that are located at the intersection of identity structure and social structure, but which do rely on or address the paradigm of planetary sociology. They do, however, provide strong arguments and analyses that emphasize the centrality of related issues to the study of social life and modern societies in the twenty-first century.

Work on this volume dates back several years. I organized a one-day workshop on planetary sociology at Wofford College in Spartanburg, South Carolina, hosted by Rhiannon Leebrick, in March 2017, and two sessions on the topic at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Sociological Society in Atlanta, Georgia, in April 2019. On both occasions, contributors to this volume presented early drafts of their papers.

In addition, I presented papers delineating the paradigm at the Annual Conference of the International Social Theory Consortium in Innsbruck in May 2017, at the Self & Society Annual Conference (online) in August 2020, the Annual Conference of the Mid-South Sociological Association in Charlotte, North Carolina, in October 2021, and in the Sociology Graduate Colloquium of the Department of Sociology at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville in March 2022.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my home institution for supporting a leave semester in spring 2019, enabling me to circumscribe the paradigm presented here more precisely, and to move ahead with this volume. Furthermore, I taught six summer PhD-level graduate seminars under the aegis of planetary sociology between 2016 and 2022 in which several contributors to this volume participated, on such topics as “Planetary Sociology: Identity and Social Structure in Modernity” (2016); “Globalization: Capital, Identity” (2017); “American Exceptionalism as a Sociological Category” (2018); “Prejudice, Ideology, Modernity” (2020); “Sociology of American Democracy” (2021); and “Planetarity” (2022).

Finally, an early essay that addressed the theme of this volume appeared in 2018, with the title “Critical Theory, Radical Reform and Planetary Sociology: Between Impossibility and Inevitability” (Dahms, 2018).

I am pleased to thank Katy Mathers, Lydia Cutmore, Abinaya Chinnasamy, and Shanmathi Priya Sampath for the consistently superb work for and support of *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*.

REFERENCE

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PART I

INTRODUCING PLANETARY
SOCIOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION: NAVIGATING THE TENSIONS BETWEEN SELF AND SOCIETY

Harry F. Dahms

The contributions to this volume are divided into three parts.

Part I consists of this introduction and a chapter on planetary sociology that describes the new paradigm and the motivation behind and for it.

Part II comprises contributions to and applications of planetary sociology by junior scholars, presented from a broad range of vantage points, relying on diverse social-theoretical works and agendas, and with objectives that are specific to each chapter. Formats (and forms) vary depending on the particular aspects of the link between identity structure and social structure addressed and developed by each contributor.

Part III includes chapters by more senior scholars that highlight different dimensions of the tension between identity and social structure.

The first chapter in Part II is by Joel Crombez, “Critical Socioanalysis and the Critique of Religion, or, Why I Read Theory: Gloria Anzaldúa, Jacques Lacan, and Memories Of Latin America.” This essay deviates from what have come to be the increasingly manifest and open neoliberal norms of academic discourse, especially as far as the bureaucratization of academic publishing is concerned. The audience of the typical scholarly article is small and often limited to the author, editor, and reviewers. Often, readers confine themselves to the introduction and conclusion, merely scanning the bulk of an essay or article for useful “data.” Crombez contends that theory resists this “informationalization,” as its realm is not information, but knowledge, which in turn requires investment of time and exertion of effort. Readers must choose to dedicate their time to demanding mental tasks and to grasping what purpose the knowledge attained is to serve. According to the planetary sociology paradigm, working toward knowledge of self and society, along with their interconnections and coconstructions, is necessary for confronting the global endgame on our horizon.

Planetary Sociology

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Furthermore, critical socioanalysis provides a model for engaging in this practice. Relying on personal experiences, Crombez demonstrates the role of theory in this endeavor, which cannot be summarized abstractly. Rather, it requires careful reading and digestion of what has been learned, as the occasion for thought and active thinking.

The second chapter in Part II, by Bethany Nelson, is titled, “‘Dirty Mourning’: Appalachia, Identity, and Planetary Sociology.” This chapter explores the impact of globalized processes on identity formation in Appalachia. Often, residents of the region are understood as inhabiting space belatedly, which ignores the ways that global processes of extraction, exploitation, colonialism, and national politics come to bear in the region and on its inhabitants. Rooted in narratives of time, death, and belonging, personal identity formation in Appalachia is similarly rich and complex as the region itself, though both often remain unseen or overlooked. By appreciating and discerning the impact of selective hegemonies and colonial narratives on the region, we can explore how these facets shape personal development.

Stelios Panageotou’s chapter on “The Authoritarian Personality in White Middle-Class Suburbia: A Planetary Sociology of Trumpism and Me” centers on the tension between self and society as fertile soil for comprehending democratic decay. While citizens equipped to handle democratic practices are a necessary precondition for democratic revitalization, the deterioration of democracy suggests a breakdown in the “democratic production of the democratic citizen.” To make this point, the authoritarian personality must be understood as a kind of cancer that is antithetical to democracy and which afflicted the author. Critical theorists and social scientists in the mid-twentieth century identified this personality disposition as cultivating receptivity to fascism. Today, it is at the core of right-wing extremism, instantiated as Trumpism. Panageotou deploys the theory of the authoritarian personality as it is prone to shaping and inflaming familial, societal, and global contexts. Contributing to the project of planetary sociology, Panageotou demonstrates how global changes incite the most pernicious and antidemocratic features of the authoritarian personality, while subjecting his own self to critical scrutiny. By illustrating the inner workings of this personality disposition, Panageotou emerges as a “recovering authoritarian” and encourages readers to follow his example.

In “The Futility of Human Capital? Contradictions of ‘Neoliberal Ethics,’ Heteronomy, and Automation,” Anthony J. Knowles pursues a similar approach, arguing that modern societies are changing in ways that disrupt the complementarity between social structure and character structure. On the one hand, a “neoliberal” character structure is oriented toward the accumulation of human capital and propagates that such accumulation and hard work will lead to the realization of the “American Dream.” On the other hand, the deep roots of this character structure may further aggravate the probability of structural crisis, as developments in automation and ongoing transformations of labor continuously reconfigure the economic structure, amplifying the experience of meaningless, “soul crushing” jobs. Yet, is the accumulation of human capital futile? Would an abundance of jobs be conceivable that supports a middle-class lifestyle,

be socially respected, and provide meaning to the individual, without accruing growing social costs? Reflecting on his own biography growing up in East Tennessee, Knowles employs the planetary sociology framework to encourage sociologists to rethink the category of “human capital” and to recognize the divergence of social structure and character structure as a serious problem with potentially far-reaching planetary implications. Knowles concludes that only by critically examining the sociohistoric context from a planetary perspective will it be possible to constructively evaluate and reckon with proliferating challenges.

The chapter by Emily M. Landry, “Between Habit and Innovation: Social Construction of the Self and Systems for a Planetary Sociology,” contemplates the centrality of organizations to social life in the twenty-first century, exploring planetary sociology through an individual account of social construction of the self as the combined product of a military ethic of service, sociological training, and academic studies of entrepreneurship, involving unlearning, reorienting, and assuming new roles. New theoretical combinations are integral to this process, suggesting a role for planetary sociology in providing a framework for better understanding tensions and connection points between habit and innovation as it pertains not only to entrepreneurship but also to the social construction of the self and social systems.

In his chapter, Thomas F. Bechtold presents “A Planetary Political Ecology for Relict Species: The Abandonment of Societies and Environments.” This study of rural central New York, among a post-Vietnam generation, and under the force of land grabs following the United States farm crisis of the 1970s-1980s’ “consolidation” of farmlands into Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), unfolds the surroundings of this particular rural society and environment through critical theory and socioanalysis. It focuses on a “mute narrative” of reified (thingified) species and beings. Coming from a student of sociology, this paper is a response to the conditions of academic character formation and how a particular local milieu constituted the affinities for investigating society with the environment of non-humans as political.

In contrast to the previous chapters, even though several stressed aspects of the author as a person, Rachel A. Ponder’s chapter, “Opposing the Binary: Blurring the Lines of Gender and Sexual Identity for Planetary Sociology,” redirects attention away from the economy, organizations, and policy, toward the genuinely personal. Born to a family of ultratraditional values constructed by the Baptist church and the United States military, Ponder was introduced to a world of strict binary roles which defined how one must present one’s self, bolstering claims to membership in specific sex and gender categories. Her gender was a socially scripted dramatization of the culture’s idealization of feminine nature in which she was casted into a role to play to successfully navigate life. Noticing the drastic characteristics that differentiated the lives of males and females and the struggle of realization that one could deviate from this binary at a young age, recognizing her gender nonconformity led to feelings of isolation and fear. With the support of social theory, Ponder illustrates how the experience of social othering and social oppression aids in providing a unique lens that drives her research interests and academic career. Through her own individual identity

structurization, the process of pulling off only a minuscule amount of the multifaceted layers of society was difficult and time consuming. However, it was this necessary process that led Ponder to think in terms of planetary sociology. As a criminologist, she studies how people are categorized into specific social groups and deemed vulnerable to violence or harm. The paradox in studies of oppression is that social scientists do not blame the individual, but the institutions that prey on people's self-description. It is within this paradox that Ponder studies institutional and structural harm and strives to promote a more just, humane worldview for her students both in and out of the classroom.

Vivian Swayne's essay, "Working Through the Past: Punishment, Accountability, and Transformation within Self and Structure," examines how individual, interpersonal, and societal transformation will require continually working through the past. How did inequalities contextualize the author's identity formation in the southeastern United States? Racism, colonization, environmental degradation, misogyny, and homophobia shaped the institutions central to Swayne's Appalachian socialization, especially family, education, and law. A close encounter with the criminal punishment system in connection with one of her earliest intimate relationships sparked Swayne's interest and commitment to prison abolition. Ultimately, creativity and accountability, both personally and structurally, are essential for potential transformation.

The final chapter in Part II is by Della Winters, entitled "In the Sweet by and by: Living in the Space Between as an Insider/Outsider of Evangelical Christianity." Like several of the earlier chapters, here, too, religion plays a central role. Understanding the deep, intertwined roots of faith, family, nationalism, and capitalism within the United States is essential as we stand at the precipice of unprecedented global crises – climate change, economic inequality, and violence. Having been raised in a devout, Evangelical Christian household provided Winters with unique insight into the political and cultural landscape of the Appalachian coal fields, where her extended family – who face persistent poverty, environmental pollution, and nonexistent support services – expect relief from the crucible of life only through death. Reflecting on the long-standing influence of Max Weber's study, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2001/1905) and the consequences of widespread austerity-based policies (Piketty, 2014), Winters traces her experiences as an insider/outsider within rural Appalachia and academia as a microcosm of the world future that lies ahead, where global crises come home and local crises become planetary. Strategies to address impending global challenges demand analysis and action which extend beyond nations and national interests toward a planetary-level analysis. Specifically, planetary sociology brings a sociological analysis of the nuance and complexity of the "political, economic, organizational, and social" worlds into analysis with the often ignored natural worlds (Dahms, 2018). Thus, reflecting on the interconnected and interdependent levels of analysis – personal, familial, communal, national, and global – through the power of personal narratives serves as a beginning for conceiving of planetary solutions.

The first chapter in Part III is by Asafa Jalata, "The Missing Factor in Critical Global Studies: Indigenous Knowledge," a critical examination of the dialectical

relationship between colonial capitalism, racism, state terrorism, and racial/ethnonational domination from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century. It draws attention to deficiencies in theories of global studies. Excluding indigenous wisdom and knowledge from critical international studies has allowed hegemonic Euro-American-centric scholarship and ideology to limit our understanding of racism as a sickness and its continuous evolution in the modern world system, a sickness that has been hidden under the rhetoric of democracy, human rights, and social justice, where even progressive intellectuals have failed to thoroughly comprehend the devastating consequences of racism and terrorism in global studies. After establishing the dialectical relationship between colonial capitalism, racial terrorism, and the continuous destruction of indigenous peoples in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Australia, the paper explains how the dominant racial/ethnonational groups have continued to maintain their privileges at the cost of marginalized societies. Using indigenous wisdom and knowledge, the study exposes the intellectual deficiencies of Euro-American scholarship and ideology from the right and left in global studies, and demonstrates how the claims of democracy, human rights, and social justice do not adequately apply to the conditions of the indigenous peoples in the world. In conclusion, the chapter proposes ways of developing a comprehensive critical global study by critically including the wisdom and knowledge of indigenous peoples.

In the second chapter of Part III, "Allegory, Discourse, And Truth: The Ontological Grounding of Social Being," Reha Kadakal criticizes affirmative forms of thought that attempt to ground the ontology of social being on subjective-idealist terms. Recent proposals have put forth the notion of truth grounded in subjects' experience and in rationality of language and discourse. The implications of such an approach for social theory tasked with ontology and the pursuit of truth are perilous. Kadakal pays close, critical attention to the paradigm of society that stems from this subjective-idealist notion of truth and a social ontology that adopts discourse, language, and literary metaphors to comprehend social being. As an alternative, he offers a preliminary sketch of the relation of ontology, normativity, and mediation, as well as the notion of critique necessary for social theory tasked with ontology.

In "A Theory of Despair Among U.S. College Students," Joseph C. Hermanowicz contends that contemporary college culture is predicated on hedonism indicated by use of predominantly social time in which parties, alcohol, casual sex, and lax academics pervade students' experiences. A deleterious pattern among students that has developed dramatically coincides with this culture: their compromised mental health. In an apparent paradox, many students are suffering when enveloped by fun, a connection Hermanowicz focuses on by treating each as conditions that spring from the sociohistorical context that situates institutions of higher education. The result is a theory designed to explain why despair is rendered applicable and how it is institutionally installed in the minds of modern-day college students.

In the final chapter of Part III and this volume, by Laurindo Dias Minhoto and Lucas Fucci Amato, "Adorno, Luhmann and the Critique of Identity: Some Internal Connections," the authors highlight aspects of the Luhmannian strand of

systems theory that can be deployed in a cryptonormative way for an immanent critique of certain trends in contemporary social development. Specific emphasis is being placed on the growing economic determination of different spheres of life and the formation of sectorial industries – such as healthcare, education, crime control, etc. – that have been engendering an erosion of the autonomy of these spheres and the progressive exhaustion of social conditions for the exercise of freedom and the experience of difference. Certain “elective affinities” between Luhmann and Adorno reinforce the plausibility of an internal connection between these different theoretical conceptions, rather than mere and instrumental appropriation and external juxtaposition. Aspects of Luhmann’s conceptual construction – notably the way the system–environment relationship is thought – strongly resemble Adorno’s mode of conceiving the subject–object relationship in the speculative key of negative dialectics. As a critical model that modulates society’s real abstractions toward difference and systemic autonomy, and that underlines possibilities of reciprocal mediation between system and environment, systems theory puts itself in tension with its other: neoliberal governmentality, the generalization of the commodity form, and the instrumentalization of the individual by unilateral systemic imperatives in global capitalism.

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