Ten Years After, Decade to Come
The Contributions of Theory to Psychology

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Abstract. In this editorial article I review the first decade of published papers in Theory & Psychology, particularly noting several tensions and problems manifested in contemporary theory. One of these is the tension between the universal and the particular, another is captured by the way in which the work of James Gibson and Ludwig Wittgenstein is in a limited sense representative of the kinds of problems articulated in the journal. I discuss the changing social context of the academy and the publishing industry and how these are likely to influence journal publishing, and Theory & Psychology, in the next decade. Finally I introduce the papers that make up this special issue and that bring together a broad set of concerns that will likely define the problems of theory for the future.

Key Words: Gibson, journals, particularity, psychological theory, publishing, universality, Wittgenstein

Theory & Psychology became a possibility on an August day in 1986 when I was discussing the state of theory in psychology with the editor of a small publishing house at the American Psychological Association Convention in Washington, DC. She asked if I would be interested in founding a journal, then the furthest thing from my mind. I circulated the idea and began an informal discussion with various colleagues. Before long, however, the publishing house involved was taken over by a large international publisher and the editor who had popped the question moved to another company. Nevertheless, the idea had taken on a life of its own and continued to float, supported by a group of about 10 or 12 individuals from North America (mostly Western Canada) and Europe who met irregularly and carried on a discussion on an early incarnation of electronic mail on the potential of a journal devoted to theory but not rigidly defined by the limits of the discipline. Because many of us were members of the International Society for Theoretical Psychology, the journal has always had a strong but informal link with this group. It was Sage Publications in London who took the leap of faith, and along with the support of a distinguished triumvirate of
Co-editors we met in London to lay final plans, where Ken Gergen picks up the narrative in his piece in this issue. Having reached our tenth year of publication, it seemed appropriate to reflect on a decade of remarkable writing in the journal, as well as its surprising growth. That the anniversary should coincide with a new millennium seemed to fit the occasion, if only to note the passing of institutional psychology’s first full century.

What has been gained, what remains contested, and what is yet to come is in a fundamental way reflected in the decade of papers published in the journal. Both the continuing promise, new perspectives and growing multidisciplinarity of psychology as well as the limits of a discipline sometimes insular, sometimes bent on a technical rationality at all costs, and sometimes marked by a crass fetishism and faddishness are etched in various ways in the 6200 pages that make up the first nine volumes of Theory & Psychology.

As a journal that marked itself from the outset as non-traditional yet willing to grapple with both the tradition and the post-positivist fallout that has been reshaping the social sciences, Theory & Psychology has been the home of excellent writing and searching critique. In my opening editorial I reiterated in summary form a number of arguments for rejecting the received view of theories and for loosening our conceptions of what theory is and does (Stam, 1991). Those caveats and reminders were probably not necessary for the sophisticated audience and authors whom the journal found and who have made it their home. I think I can speak for my Co-editors and for those members of the founding group that we have been pleased and exhilarated by the quality and depth of the papers that have been submitted. And my fears that we would be inundated by papers written in careful psychologese, that is, pedantic, stilted and impersonal styles, were largely unfounded. Our authors have indeed brought us their best. Perhaps it is no surprise then that one of the most cited and enduring papers from that first issue addressed itself to the problem of rhetoric and irrationality in psychology (Lopes, 1991).

We have also been able to keep our promise to be international as well as keep a sympathetic eye open for submissions by junior colleagues. We have worked with several authors over the years in an effort to help those whose first language is not English and we have tried to encourage those whose papers were just not ready for publication yet. Nevertheless, the bulk of our papers come from Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, not surprisingly, and this is likely to continue as these are both the centers of the production of psychological writing in general as well as being predominantly anglophone. This is also the moment to acknowledge the importance of all our authors, especially those who have made Theory & Psychology their ‘home’, as well as the many readers who have contacted us over the years. We are encouraged and energized by your continuing interest, contact and words, both critical and kind.
In this editorial article I will first make some brief comments on the history of the journal and our current editorial policies. Next I will revisit the nine volumes of the journal and point out various resemblances and problems not obvious at first glance. Taking these issues as a whole is instructive for what it tells us about what we have shaped and what our authors have offered this forum. Despite the pluralism evident over these volumes (and announced with fervidity in our first issue), there are emergent problems and tensions that have become a mainstay of the journal. It is these I wish to address in this overview.

Third, I invited a large segment of members of the Editorial Board to write brief reflections on the nature of theory in psychology at the beginning of the new millennium. Specifically I asked these individuals to consider what place theoretical reflections and projects have in a discipline increasingly fractionated and what developments have created movement and space for future psychological projects. Of those invited, 14 returned thoughtful and articulate responses. What is most extraordinary, however, is the manner in which these pieces dovetail and present, as a set, an interesting kaleidoscope of problems facing psychological theorizing in the early 21st century. The foundational problems, the science question, the nature of theory, the place of modeling, cognition and the neurosciences in psychology, the puzzles of psychopathology, the insistence of psychoanalysis, and the place of reflexivity, language and poetics, all find an expression in these brief articles. As if finely orchestrated despite having been crafted entirely apart, these authors flag the range of our ongoing challenges, debates and creative tensions, carefully clearing a place that is uniquely devoted to resolving some of the most pressing issues in psychology’s continued search for foundational adequacy, meaningful empiricism and social relevance.

What We Are

The journal’s editorial policy has remained largely unchanged. Our acceptance rate has stabilized over the past three years at approximately 20 percent, meaning that many good articles have to be turned away. This is often the result of an author’s lack of familiarity with the policies and practices of the journal. If anything, what has been strengthened is our direction towards interdisciplinarity, away from grand theories, toward the careful delineation of particular problems, phenomena, theories or historical and critical studies. (Below I will cover in more detail the kinds of articles we have published.) We will continue to seek those papers that cover topics across sub-disciplines or that are interdisciplinary with a psychological focus, worthy of circulation and preservation. In the symbolic economy of knowledge, we can only write our best work when we are confronted with the best work on a problem. Of course what is ‘best’ is historically and socially
conditioned; it cannot be otherwise. But knowledge is never stationary, always revised in the light of other forms of knowledge production. Barry Allen (1998) reminds us that a responsible claiming to know always includes trying to know better than we do; we cannot stay where we are.

Where We Have Been

As we quit ourselves of this first decade, both our offerings thus far and the invited reflections in this issue are clear about what *Theory & Psychology* is *not*. We do not seek to duplicate the more rigidly defined emphases in establishment psychological journals. This includes what we see as work strictly derivative of the biological and neurological sciences that, for all their importance, continue to be only a piece of the whole. (We have published, and will continue to do so, work that falls within these special sciences but is integrative and critical.) Neither do we focus on the molecular details of research programs nor on work that in its minutiae never reaches for a larger question. At the same time, however, we have steadfastly refused the sweeping and the global articles that make only vague reference to psychological phenomena or that seek to undo all difficulties with a single shift in theorizing. Instead it has been our strength, and will continue to guide editorial policy, to focus on medium-range theory. Ours is the mid-level world of language and agency, of development and deviance, of perception and cognition, of phenomenology and hermeneutics, of feminism and realism, of psychology and science, of history and postmodernism, and so on. More than this, it is a continual rethinking of psychological topics—evidence that on a global scale the discipline is no longer fastened to a few stable anchors. But to rethink the discipline does not mean thinking in global, general and abstract terms or reinventing meta-theory. It means turning to the concrete and the bite-sized, to the actual and the possible, and how we come to know the difference.

*Theory & Psychology* covers a rich domain but for this overview I will break this down into roughly a dozen loose categories. These are idiosyncratic and will exclude some important papers. Nonetheless, I want merely to emphasize both the diversity, coherence and tensions of the contributions and highlight a number of features that make *Theory & Psychology* a unique home for psychological thought.

1. **Cognition, perception, semiotics.** This group of articles is a broad but generally critical set of presentations, beginning with the early special issue edited by Gergen and Gigerenzer (1991) and touching on a number of problems including consciousness (Shapiro, 1996), perception (Petersik, 1994), semiotics (Smythe & Jorna, 1998) and related papers on complexity and chaos (Ayers, 1997; Sambrook & Whiton, 1997). These papers have not been
uniformly sanguine about cognitive psychology in its many incarnations, although they offer varying critiques and implicit or explicit alternatives. It is in the solutions proffered that a number of features have been offered for a reconstituted cognitive psychology, but the tensions remain and are likely to continue as cognitive psychology grapples with the problems of a computational theory of mind (e.g. Ó Nualláin, McKevitt, & Mac Aogain, 1997). It remains to be seen whether a renewed cognitivism will be biologically driven, such as proposed by Edelman, ‘anthropologically’ centered, as Bruner has espoused, or discursive, as Harré has argued.

2. Methodology, hypothesis testing, mathematical modeling. Initially surprising to us but not surprising given the preoccupation within the discipline as a whole, Theory & Psychology became a home for a number of critical studies in these domains. These included a paper by Koch (1992) on Bridgman, several exchanges on hypothesis testing (e.g. Bailey & Eastman, 1994; Chow, 1991; Falk & Greenbaum, 1995; Sohn, 1998), positivism (Bickhard, 1992) and mathematical modeling (Luce, 1999). Although generally critical of most of the features of standard methods and their underlying premises, the important task of revision and rethinking and clarifying methodology has been pushed hard, including the crucial understanding that the proper role of methods is secondary to theory. Some of these papers were groundbreaking but are little recognized. For example, the important paper authored by Ruma Falk and Charles Greenbaum (1995) was sent to the late Jacob Cohen for review upon its submission. Professor Cohen subsequently requested permission to contact the authors and was inspired, on his own admission, to write his well-known 1994 paper ‘The Earth is Round (\(p < .05\))’, which was published in the American Psychologist. Because we were still in the throes of dealing with our sudden growth in manuscript submissions and had a substantial back-log, Cohen’s paper was published several months before the Falk and Greenbaum paper. Although Cohen acknowledged the impact of the Falk and Greenbaum paper on his own thinking, it is Cohen’s paper that is now cited whereas the Falk and Greenbaum paper has received much less attention than it deserves. These are the vagaries of being a small and relatively new publication and we have learned some of our lessons the hard way.

3. Clinical psychology and psychopathology, psychiatric and illness studies. The prevalence of clinical issues in the discipline and the conceptual and moral confusion that seems so much a part of these topics were well represented in the pages of Theory & Psychology. Various papers on the nature of therapy (e.g. Larner, 1998; Robinson, 1997) and on such issues as schizophrenia (Heinz & Heinze, 1999) and psychopathy (Levenson, 1992) have graced our pages. In addition, the currently much debated problems of sexual abuse have, in our view, received analysis in these pages that go far
beyond the simplified and dichotomized views presented in much of the
discipline (e.g. Burman, 1997; MacMartin, 1999; Meyer, 1996; Miltenburg & Singer, 1997). Indeed, for those who recognize the deeply moral enter-
prise that clinical psychology is, the questions of sexual abuse are much
more clearly in focus and our authors have contributed in an important way
to these issues.

4. Philosophy of psychology. Not surprisingly, we have consistently received
excellent papers on problems in the philosophy of psychology and on what
were once considered the problems of the philosophy of mind. These include
issues such as the move to bring a logical analysis to bear on psycho-
logical questions (e.g. van Haafken, 1998; Smedslund, 1993) and ques-
tions of rationality (e.g. Chiappe & Vervaeke, 1997). While not cohering or
necessarily fixing on a particular problem, these issues are no longer strictly
confined to either philosophy or psychology but have become obvious
interdisciplinary terrain.

5. Social and developmental psychology. We have published a host of
original articles covering not just traditional topics but issues confronting
a post-positivist developmental and social psychology. A special issue
devoted to ‘The Future of Developmental Theory’ appeared in 1993, edited
by Bradley and Kessen (see Bradley, 1993), and many articles on develop-
mental (e.g. Cheyne & Tarulli, 1999) and social (e.g. Kendall & Michael,
1997) psychological topics have been published since. What has become
evident is that the era of criticism that so dominated the 1970s and 1980s has
passed into an ever-widening search and appreciation of alternative theoret-
ical frameworks that have been characterized by, but not limited to, social
constructionism in social psychology and Vygotskian theory in devel-
opmental psychology. In both cases there is an occasional unease with socio-
rational positions and a strain to move away from these as the only possible
alternate options. The papers in the journal have attempted to articulate these
questions.

6. Feminism, sexual politics and the body. Feminist analyses have been
important contributions to the journal and we have published a number of
significant papers (e.g. Joy, 1993; Stoppard, 1998). In addition, many of the
papers in our special issue on the body and psychology (Stam, 1996) were
developments of or inspired by feminist theory (e.g. Bayer & Malone, 1996;
Pizanias, 1996). The impact of feminism has yet to fully play itself out in
theory in psychology for the variability, range and depth of feminist theory
that has developed outside psychology has the potential to effect wide
changes in the discipline (see Feminism & Psychology on these issues, a
journal that has now also completed its first decade of publishing).

7. Social constructionism and discursive psychology. A vigorous debate has
been carried on these pages reflecting much current thinking on the issues
of social constructionism vs realism and the uses and possibilities of discourse analysis in psychology. Papers by Gergen (e.g. 1997), Shotter (1995a, 1995b), Harré (1991) and others have continued to refine the questions of a socially constructed psychology that is at once contested (e.g. Fisher, 1995) and elaborated (e.g. Greer, 1997). Likewise, versions of discursive psychology are themselves the subject of debate and revision (e.g. Leudar & Antaki, 1996; Morgan, 1998; Wetherell & Potter, 1998). The social constructionist debate has produced a great deal of compelling argument, although the quality of the debate is occasionally hampered by repetition. Nevertheless there have been important developments in the topics and questions now covered under this rubric, including important developments in narrative. Discursive psychology has produced a substantial body of work that has focused the efforts of its proponents and is reflected in the increasing sophistication of its positions.

8. Historical studies or those concerned with historiography. The problems of history in psychology were frequently debated and a number of important studies found their way into these pages in our first decade. These include the exchanges on the future of history in psychology initiated by Danziger (1994) as well as a number of more specialized studies on the rat (Wertz, 1994), industrial psychology (Hollway, 1993), behaviorism (O’Neil, 1995), South African psychology (Louw, 1997), Windelband (Lamiell, 1998; Mos, 1998; Windelband, 1998), and more. As they should, the problems of the history of psychology reflect larger issues in the philosophy of history as well as the history of science communities. The place of disciplinary history has become thoroughly problematized and we look forward to further debates on these questions as well as more important cross-talk between history and theory on these pages.

9. Critical theory and social critiques of psychology. The recent resurgence of self-consciously critical perspectives in psychology was also reflected here, in the work, for example, of those writing about the German school of Critical Psychology (e.g. Holzkamp, 1992; Teo, 1998; Tolman, 1991) and in a special issue on Marxism (Parker, 1999). These are among the more fascinating topics that have emerged because critical theorists struggle with the meaning of their adjective. What does ‘critical’ mean if it is to be more than a nod to Marxism? What is the future of German Critical Psychology? The foundational claims involved in these debates are important for they rest on political and not just epistemological goals, yet the days of orthodoxy in critical theory seem to have passed. In addition the extent to which critical psychologists continue to build bridges to post-structural, feminist and other critical traditions will likely determine some of their impact.

10. Psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic studies made a number of appearances in the context of other topics and occasionally as a topic in their own right.
Nevertheless, these have been fewer than might have been expected given the general place of psychoanalytic thought in cultural studies, social theory and elsewhere. (Kareen Malone makes a plea in this issue for just such contributions.) Psychology in the English-speaking world continues to be hostile to psychoanalysis; however, as certain segments of the discipline make contact with interdisciplinary work, this may yet evolve into a genuine dialogue between psychologists and psychoanalysts.

11. **Hermeneutics and phenomenology.** A consequential and ongoing discussion within psychology concerns the theoretical developments that have come to us from hermeneutics and phenomenology. These too were ably represented by such authors as Richardson and Woolfolk (1994) and Williams and Gantt (1998) and also represent a rich and relatively underrepresented tradition in the journal. The last decade has seen much writing derived from the work of authors such as Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre, reviving and renewing the questions of ‘self’ and ‘identity’ within the context of a tradition of justice and morality. These incisive questions have hardly exhausted themselves.

12. **Postmodernism and deconstructionism.** We began publishing just as postmodernism and the broad problem of deconstructionism not only became a topic of intellectual debate almost everywhere in the human sciences but also fed into the (somewhat uglier) ‘culture wars’ that seemed to grip the academy. A number of these debates entered psychology and gradually spilled over onto our pages (e.g. Hepburn, 1999; Morss, 1992; Parker, 1998). Given that these issues are often filtered through disciplinary lenses or the lens of one or another project, psychology has not been at the forefront of the postmodernism/deconstructionism debates. The questions are nonetheless pressing, if not contemporary.

I have deliberately simplified and left out a number of substantial papers that defy easy categorization. For example, we have published occasional papers on topics such as evolution (e.g. Hyland, 1993) or science studies (e.g. Courtial & Gourdon, 1999) that do not fit into any of the above categories. In addition, our Review section, edited by Lorraine Radtke and Stanton Wortham, has been among our most consistently praised feature. By selectively choosing books and reviewers, including an occasional review symposium, our Review Editors have been able to steer away from the dull and obtuse reviewing that often characterizes social science review journals and tackle issues in an engaging and argumentative manner, often more candidly than is possible in a full-length article.

It is difficult, if not unnecessary, to summarize such a large body of work, but I shall make two more general points about the contexts of the journal.
The first concerns the manner in which, as I have already said, we publish work in the middle-range. Second, I want to examine those papers that have particular authors’ work as their topics.

**Universal vs Particular**

As the discipline continues what appears to be an endless process of fractionation and specialization, on the one hand, while borrowing foundational support from the established, especially biological, sciences, on the other hand, the place for medium-range theoretical development is more important than ever. Our emphasis on mid-range theorizing is not over-inclusive and tries to establish a ground beyond the hyper-specialization so characteristic of psychological writing. It has also confirmed our commitment to the importance of cross-talk between sub-disciplines and, more important, has allowed the journal to take part in the multidisciplinarity of the social sciences without failing to critique and develop the discipline of psychology. The journal has become a home for what we like to think is among the best writing in theoretical psychology.

In this matter we take part in a general tension between the universal and the particular that is playing itself out in the social sciences and that has been relatively underplayed or deemed immaterial in psychology. The breakdown of a tradition of universal, grand theorizing in the social sciences has been replaced by an emphasis on particularity (gender, race, class, etc.) as well as a renewed sense of historical, hermeneutic studies and a critical, moral stance towards technology and technical rationality (see Wallerstein et al., 1996, for a full discussion of these issues in the social sciences more broadly). This has been met, in some ways, by a renewed biologism and genetic determinism that reinserts the claim of the inevitability of progress. However these tensions manifest themselves over the next decade, psychological theory can hardly remain aloof without a substantial cost to its social relevance and participation in broader areas of scholarship.

**Gibson and Wittgenstein**

An alternative way of interrogating such a large body of work written by a heterogeneous group of scholars is to focus on the authors whose work is most likely to be a topic in its own right. On this view it is just those problems that engaged James Gibson and Ludwig Wittgenstein that in some fundamental way have come to define the theoretical boundaries, preoccupations and controversies of the journal. (Vygotsky and Mead as well as several others play a supporting role here.) Although I am aware that this is crudely reductionistic of the concerns of our authors, at the same time it is telling that the work of these two figures should continue to provide fertile material for this generation of psychologists, a generation that is no longer in
the thrall of the received view of theory yet is still striving to articulate a clear way out. Gibson’s (1987) notion of perception is instructional here:

Awareness of the persisting and changing environment (perception) is concurrent with the persisting and changing self (proprioception in my extended use of the term). This includes the body and its parts and all its activities from locomotion to thought, without any distinction between the activities called ‘mental’ and those called ‘physical’. Oneself and one’s body exist along with the environment, they are co-perceived. (p. 418)

Captured in this set of concerns is a potential for revising traditional accounts of a large number of so-called ‘higher order processes’ which Gibson only hinted at but which make up some of the issues confronting those who work in the fields of Gibsonian realism, direct perception, and so on (e.g. Costall, 1999; Noble, 1993), as well as the critics of this approach (e.g. Sharrock & Coulter, 1998).

Reflecting an entirely different set of concerns, we can take the emphasis on Wittgenstein as representative of a host of problems that manifest themselves in his later writings on the questions of language and their relationship to ‘forms of life’. These have informed a group of papers in the journal that have debated the merits not only of Wittgenstein’s work but of its broader insertion in a substantial set of psychological problems (e.g. Jost, 1995; Maraun, 1998; van der Merwe & Voestermans, 1995; Parker, 1996; Shotter, 1995; see also Potter’s article in this issue). Neither of these sets of papers (on Gibson and Wittgenstein) entirely capture the breadth and range of what has been published in Theory & Psychology but they are informative for indicating the topics that their authors have revitalized through reading Gibson and Wittgenstein: perception and reality, body and world, language and life. They aim for a post-Cartesian subject in a post-positivist psychology. And these topics will, I expect, continue to exercise our authors in our second decade.

It does not mean that these topics exhaust the universe of material that is relevant to Theory & Psychology. Indeed, we have never put hard limits on the subject-matter of our submissions and are always prepared to consider the unusual paper or the fresh take on an old problem that comes our way. In part, this must remain so if we are to be open to the efforts of scholars who think in settings that are themselves changing.

The Academy, the Publisher and the Culture of Change

Psychological theorizing does not, to make the obvious point, occur in a vacuum. Both the academy and its place in the world and the nature of academic publishing have continued to change over the past decade in ways that are at once predictable and surprising. And their combined impact will likely continue to affect psychology in ever new ways.
The combination of the fragmentation of knowledge (often just ‘information’) along with the wide deployment of ‘knowledge workers’ who are not necessarily in the academy, nor obligated to its strictures, continues apace—aided by what has been euphemistically called ‘globalization’. Those of us who remain under the intellectual roof of the university (long since become a multiversity) can hardly continue to display the classic disaffected intellectual disdain for social changes that are shaking the foundations of our own workplaces. In a world of radical pluralism we find the age of unified theories and objectives either nostalgic or unattainable. Likewise, the production and transmission of knowledge via electronic means only supports the student’s sense of education (and, by implication, psychology) as a hodgepodge of offerings, a kind of virtual cafeteria from which one can pick and choose whatever the appetite demands. Not surprisingly, then, in its most public moments (at APA conventions and the like) psychology appears to be preoccupied with trivial and banal topics (witness the recent interest in ‘optimism’). What are missed are real opportunities to question what the cultural dislocations make of us as ‘subjects’, how the changing nature of ‘knowledge’ will affect psychology, and how traditional psychological topics, divisions and sub-disciplines seem inadequate to the task of educating the 21st-century student. We believe that Theory & Psychology will remain a crucial part of these discussions.

In addition to all the other changes taking place in the university, it was impossible to foresee the backlash that unleashed itself across the campus in North America and elsewhere, but most vigorously in the United States, when the (originally ironic) term ‘politically correct’ was turned into a form of assault on any and all attempts to raise questions of justice, fairness, inequity and the politics of identity. The hobbling of critique is something we must still contend with, if not as a problem of self-censorship then at least as the problem of what happens when the academy becomes a self-conscious site of ideological (and also epistemological) battles (cf. Wilson, 1995). The angry voices reflect social tensions that cannot be whisked away by a call for civility. Psychology has remained largely aloof from the debate, although individual psychologists have not. The current resurgence of a self-consciously and socially informed critical psychology reflects the frustrations and hopes among some psychologists that important debates have not taken place in and about the discipline.

In tandem with the changing academy, academic publishing is unlikely to remain unchanged. There have been calls, for example, to place all scholarly papers on the world-wide web—prior to their adjudication by referees and their subsequent publication. Obviously this is contested terrain, the outcome of which depends on the way in which the web is commercialized and the place of paper-publishing is resolved in the internet-economy (or iconomy). Knowledge itself, especially any form of technological knowledge, has become increasingly commodified (e.g. Shulman, 1999), and this shows no
sign of abatement, changing the role of the university and the academic in ways not entirely conducive to free and open research. Again, we must await the long-term effects of such changes, but we should not expect psychology to be immune to such moves, making the role of reflexive theory anything but a luxury.

What has not changed is the role that journal publishing continues to play in the economy of obtaining work, tenure and promotion, the evaluation of the professoriate as well as the role publishing plays in the manner in which scholarship is viewed on the international stage. Superficially the symbolic economy of knowledge is separate from the economic pressures of obtaining and keeping work, but their deeper interrelation is rarely acknowledged. It is the combination of the need to preserve our best work along with the academic/economic pressures to publish that act as a conservative force on the publishing enterprise.

The overt effects of this on Theory & Psychology have been minimal (our publisher, Sage, has been a participant in these developments by adding electronic access to its publishing program as it became possible). Nonetheless, academic journals are meant to add to the ‘commons of knowledge’ but their production and sale is a peculiar mix of scholarly and market interests and we are not immune from the broader changes sweeping academic cultures. Thus, while the content of the journal continues to reflect the concerns of the community of scholars who read and contribute to it, the changes in publishing may influence us in as yet unknown ways. In addition, although the effects of new technologies in publishing are sometimes seen as pernicious and negative for the traditional paper journal, electronic advances have compensatory features, such as wider accessibility and therefore a wider range of submissions to the journal.

This Issue: Laying Wagers on Theory

The clusters of shorter articles that make up this issue capture a range of problems and possibilities that have been raised in past issues while inviting reconsideration of those problems in new ways. We begin with a recapitulation of possibilities first presented by Kenneth Gergen in his article in the first issue along with his views on where Theory & Psychology has fulfilled those early hopes and where it confronts unmet challenges. Jonathan Potter argues for a ‘psychology of practices’ based on the work of Wittgenstein and Sacks, urging a post-cognitive renewal for the discipline. Dan Robinson follows with a reminder of how science has progressed, namely by ‘the application of an informed imagination to a problem of genuine consequence’. His wagish comparison of historical examples of scientific discoveries with what the hypothetical psychologist might have done using the tools of aggregate statistics is nonetheless a serious call to psychology, and
more importantly to editors of psychological journals, to break out of narrow methodological confinements.

Two renowned philosophers of psychology make the compelling case that theorizing in psychology is neither a luxury nor an option. Joseph Margolis demonstrates how physicalism has continued to plague psychology, which, for all its massive undertakings as a science, has yet to resolve this problem. Rom Harré makes a case for theorizing that is sensitive to the multitude of local valid psychologies by arguing for a psychology of ‘cognitive task and neural tool’ and applying this kind of metaphor to the different psychological processes involved in the use of the concept ‘rule’.

Revisiting her contribution to the first issue of the journal, Jill Morawski acknowledges an important dimension of the process of theory development, namely the role of the observer-analyst as an ‘other’ subjectivity in the historical process of subjectivity formation. She proposes a set of possible templates and examples whereby the theoretician is made visible in the process of theorizing. Mark Freeman seeks to ‘humanize’ psychological theorizing through a more self-conscious hermeneutic orientation that he calls a ‘poetics of the Other’. By this he brings to the project of psychological theory a movement to enlarge our concerns beyond those of rationality and include a broader understanding of human life such as captured by aesthetics and religious experience.

The two contributions that follow mark a turn to a different set of considerations inspired by psychoanalysis and psychopathology. Kareen Malone succinctly captures one of the fundamental tensions characterizing theory and the contributions to Theory & Psychology. Indeed, the general interpolation of the body, the self, the discursive, and so on, marks the resurgent categories of a subjectivity once these have been thoroughly historicized. How to address then this relentless quest for subjectivity without losing those hard-won historical insights gained over the past decades? Malone argues that Lacanian theory gives us both subjectivity and a link to the social but a subjectivity that is learned only through the body. Louis Sass, Jennifer Whiting and Josef Parnas show us the importance of the current dialogue between philosophy and the study of psychopathology. In certain categories of psychopathology, it is in the very absence of certain experiences taken to be universal that this dialogue is capable of addressing what is meant by ‘normal’.

Three papers close this series of theoretical statements and present another face of theorizing by urging a reconsideration of certain fundamental problems that have not been given their due in the discipline: René van Hezewijk makes the case that there are two kinds of debates in psychology—gaps and controversies. Only the controversies are amenable to proper resolution, and theory, on his view, ought to concern itself with the reconstruction of metaphysical claims implied in empirical work. Ivana Marková is concerned with the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of theories that
examine the interdependence of the individual and society. She argues for a dynamic semiotics rather than a cognitive psychology of attributes in studying this interdependence. Gerhard Strube rounds out this group by arguing that the potential of generative cognitive theories has never been fully appreciated and, that properly used, these can provide a powerful theoretical tool.

These pieces together once again raise the stakes for theory: we are long past a monotonous critical phase in theory development and we know that to be ontologically serious at this late date is risky if not indefensible. The alternative is no longer neo-positivism (as practiced in psychology) vs some singular alternative. Indeed, the possibilities of alternative and deep work have always been in and around the discipline, providing those willing to search with possibilities and opportunities rarely acknowledged in the mainstream. What the fractionation of psychology has pressed is the very requirement to rethink fundamental problems and questions. It is my hope that this issue serves as a reminder of both the best of what has been in Theory & Psychology and what consequential work still lays ahead.

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