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Classics and classicality: JCS after 20 years

Journal of Classical Sociology

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journals.sagepub.com/home/jcs**Simon Susen**

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Abstract

This article provides an introduction to the 20th Anniversary Special Issue of the *Journal of Classical Sociology*. It begins with some brief observations on the key developments that have shaped the disciplinary core of sociology over the past decades. It goes on to reflect on the role of classical sociology in Europe and beyond, drawing attention to its continuing presence in British and Anglo-American intellectual circles. Far from existing in a bubble of academic ivory towers, the paradigms emerging from disputes in the social sciences in general and in sociology in particular are profoundly shaped by wider historical trends – notably those influenced by different forms of collective action, as illustrated in the impact of social movements on the university sector in the late 1960s. In light of recent calls for ‘the decolonization of academia’, we ask to what extent sociology can, and should, strive to go beyond the hegemony of the ‘Western’ canon. Having given a succinct overview of the 20-year history of *JCS*, we elucidate the different formats of the material published in the journal, stressing the importance of editorial flexibility. On a more substantive note, we point out that the thematic scope of the work published in *JCS* has been wide-ranging and inclusive – not only because of its editors’ broad conception of ‘classics’ and ‘classicality’, but also because of the interdisciplinary spirit permeating the journal. This commitment, as we explain, manifests itself in the wide range of thinkers and topics discussed – from a multiplicity of perspectives – in the journal. We also grapple with noteworthy challenges posed by the academic publishing industry in the early 21st century, including the difficulties arising from peer-review processes. Finally, we express our gratitude to those who have contributed to this 20th Anniversary Special Issue and emphasize the journal’s commitment to defending the legacy of classical sociology.

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Keywords

Canon, classical sociology, classicality, classics, decolonization, humanities, *JCS*, *Journal of Classical Sociology*, paradigms, peer review, politics, social sciences, sociology

I. Introductory remarks

The context of sociology, indeed of the humanities and social sciences as a whole, has changed radically over the last 25 years. The *Journal of Classical Sociology* was started with SAGE on the assumption that ‘the sociological classics’ would be foundational to any sociology degree programmes in a modern university. Initially, we worked with the (more or less taken-for-granted) notion that we would publish articles and book reviews that stretched from the work of Auguste Comte and Henri de Saint-Simon in the 1830s to Talcott Parsons’s *The Structure of Social Action* in 1937. The emphasis on this period was not arbitrary. Comte invented the word ‘sociology’, and his work remains influential (Wernick, 2017). The high-water mark of emerging sociology was in the late 19th century and lasted until the end of the First World War – with Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Georg Simmel and Ernst Troeltsch. The early Parsons (1949 [1937]) was an important indicator of these developments (cf. Robertson and Turner, 1991). He had translated Weber’s (2001/1930 [1904–05]) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*; as such, he was an important bridge between sociology in the United States of America and sociology in Europe. *Structure* – as it came to be known – offered a general analysis of the importance and limits of action theory and presented solutions to the legacy of utilitarianism. It had its own limitations, not least the ‘missing’ chapter on Simmel.

The centrality of this century for the evolution of sociology was underpinned not simply by the names of sociologists, but also by the legacy of basic issues in the discipline. In this respect, the following questions have remained crucial: What is the nature of industrial society? How is social order possible? What are the main drivers of social change? What is the nature of capitalist society (and what are the key dynamics underlying its reproduction and transformation)? What is an appropriate methodology for theoretically informed and empirically substantiated sociological research? From the ‘early’ sociologists mentioned above, we inherited a vocabulary and terminological tools by which to analyse modern societies. In particular, Weber’s (1978 [1922]) *Economy and Society* offered a rich framework of sociological concepts, including the following: class, status and power; authority, legitimacy and domination; charisma; bureaucracy; value spheres; the nature of law in modern societies. Despite the criticisms of *Economy and Society* as a compilation that was put together after Weber’s death (in 1920), it more or less defined the constituent elements of sociology in the 20th century.

II. Classical sociology in Europe and beyond

In the previous section, we have of course been referring to an intellectual tradition that flourished mainly in Europe – notably in France, Germany and Italy. In the immediate post-war period, British sociology was dominated more by social policy and welfare economics than by sociology as such. Marshall’s (1964 [1949]) famous Cambridge

lecture on ‘Citizenship and Social Class’ did not become influential until much later in the century (cf. Susen, 2010; Turner, 1993a, 1993b, 1994 [1990]; Turner and Hamilton, 1994a, 1994b), in a period when citizenship was coming under attack from the early years of Thatcherism. Sociology in the United States has always followed a different tradition. In the early days of Anglo-American sociology, the Chicago School – with prominent scholars such as Ernest Burgess, Ruth Shonle Cavan, George Herbert Mead, Robert E. Park, Edwin Sutherland, W. I. Thomas, Frederic Thrasher, Louis Wirth, Florian Znaniecki and others – played a pivotal role in the growth of a distinctive North American tradition, above all through the emergence of urban sociology. American pragmatism was instrumental in the development of sociology, especially in the work of Mead (1967 [1934]). The characters and their context were celebrated in Shils’s (1997) *Portraits: A Gallery of Intellectuals*. Shils came under the influence of the economist Frank H. Knight, who is remembered primarily for his work on risk and uncertainty, but Knight also translated Weber’s (1927 [1923]) *General Economic History*. Knight’s career and interests illustrate the fact that, at the time, there was no sharp distinction between economics and sociology. Shils, who had a fellowship at Peterhouse College Cambridge, was an important link between Anglo-American and British sociology (see, for instance, Adair-Toteff and Turner, 2019).

Both American sociology and British sociology were eventually influenced by the wave of Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany. In Britain, they included Norbert Elias at Leicester University. As a schoolboy, one of us (Bryan S Turner) was taught French by Alfred Sohn-Rethel. Nobody really anticipated that, after he had returned to Germany, he was to become famous as the author of *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology* (1978 [1970]). In the United States, Jewish refugee intellectuals formed the New York Intellectuals and the New School.

British sociology flourished in the post-war period. Although Anthony Giddens, with his Chair at the University of Cambridge, came to play a dominant role, British sociology was particularly strong in the ‘old’ (so-called redbrick) universities (such as Birmingham, Leeds, Leicester and Manchester) and in the ‘new’ universities (such as Essex, Lancaster and Warwick). Of the older universities, Durham had a strong sociology department, under the leadership of John Rex, between 1964 and 1970.

III. Sociology, politics and paradigms

Sociology developed in the 1960s, during tumultuous times. Student protest movements, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) and similar movements in the United States – such as the Students for a Democratic Society in the 1960s, with the Port Huron Statement as its platform – were widespread and engaged sociology students. Protests at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and Lancaster University involved students who, in later life, became professors of sociology. Student movements gained further momentum during the Vietnam War (1955–1975). University departments were affected by these movements, and sociologists were very much present among ‘the disobedient generation’ (Sica and Turner, 2005). As a result of these confrontations, sparked by the May 1968 events in France, Vice-Chancellors and Presidents of universities were not enthusiastic

about expanding sociology departments, despite high student numbers. For many conservative university managers, sociology was a smokescreen for socialism (or ‘worse’). As a Lecturer at the University of Aberdeen in the late 1960s, Bryan S Turner encountered Presbyterian ministers who warned their young congregations against taking sociology courses, which they thought were ‘equivalent to socialism’.

The point of this brief digression into British university life in the 1960s is merely to note the importance of ‘the classics’ and their interpretation in various political movements. Some of these political movements, such as the Anti-Apartheid Movement, were successful (in the case of the AAM, at least in contributing to the end of apartheid), but the majority of these movements, including the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, failed. Their very failure, however, had long-term effects.

One of the motivating texts in this period was *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Berger and Luckmann, 1967 [1966]). At the time, the simple interpretation of the book was that oppressive institutions were merely ‘social constructions’ and could be ‘deconstructed’ by virtue of effective critique and action. In retrospect, this interpretation of the work was wildly wrong. Berger, influenced by the conservative German philosopher Arnold Gehlen, appeared to be saying that important social constructs had to be protected and secured. In a parallel fashion, Berger’s controversial views on the vulnerability of religious beliefs and institutions – notably in *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (1967) – were replaced, in his maturity, by a vigorous rejection of simplistic versions of the secularization thesis.

The majority of students, whether radical or conservative, entering British universities in the 1960s, marked by the growth of the academic sector, would have read ‘the classics’ from this foundational century. By then, of course, the structural-functionalist paradigm of Parsons’s later work was beginning to unravel – with critiques from conflict sociology, Marxism, feminism, interpretivism, symbolic interactionism and sociological approaches drawing on existentialism and phenomenology. Turner’s experience as a sociology student at the University of Leeds was to receive lectures on Parsons and functionalism from Roland Robertson, who went on to pave the way for globalization theory. Alan Dawe, as a follower of John Rex, delivered numerous lectures on conflict sociology and the ‘two sociologies’, which was the title of Dawe’s influential *BJS* article (1970). At the time, Rex’s *Key Problems of Sociological Theory* (1961) was a major text on sociology reading lists. The undergraduate theory lectures were constructed by Dawe as a debate between Marx and Weber.

By the late 1960s, the functionalist paradigm was breaking down. For the next half century, there was a war of paradigms, with little agreement on ‘the right’ explanatory frameworks and problems. Symbolic interactionism, especially from Erving Goffman, appeared to speak more directly to students’ personal issues than the political, economic and historical sociologies of capitalist societies. In contemporary sociology, this trend has become more dominant with questions about personal identity, especially sexual identity, replacing (or at least sidelining) the macro-sociology of social structures. Insofar as sociology lecturers retain an interest in political and historical sociology, it is through the (post)structuralist lens of Michel Foucault, rather than through the comparative-historical prism of Max Weber’s interpretive sociology. In retrospect, it appears that

sociology has never had its ‘Kuhnian moment’, when a dominant paradigm had formed the general point of consensus on theory and methods (cf. Elias et al., 1982; Martins, 1974; cf. also Castro et al., 2018).

One explanation of this ‘war of paradigms’ is that sociology, probably more than most disciplines in the social sciences, is constantly influenced by external factors. To be precise, it is influenced by *constantly changing* social factors, including social movements. One obvious example of this constellation is the impact of feminism on sociology curricula. The key figures and prevailing concerns of the classical tradition have been criticized by a large proportion of feminist writers, who point to its domination by (‘white’, ‘Western’, ‘middle-class’ – in short, privileged) men and their ‘power-laden interests’. The founding figures were unsurprisingly men in a period in which – given the sexist practices, ideologies and institutions associated with patriarchy – women were still struggling to achieve a public voice. If we take one example, namely the Chicago School, it was clearly a School of *male* social theorists. Jane Adams and the Hull-house Settlements are often identified with Chicago urban sociology, but more as a footnote than a dominant trend.

IV. Beyond the ‘Western’ canon?

In accordance with recent calls for ‘the decolonization of academia’, classical sociology is frequently (and increasingly) criticized for its ‘whiteness’. W. E. B. Du Bois, who was out in the cold for a long time, is now recognized as a key figure, but his presence does not remove the criticism of academic racism. There is a stronger criticism that sociology and, even more so, anthropology have been parasitic on the history of colonialism (cf. Bhabra and Holmwood, 2021; Go, 2016; Seidman, 2013). Sociology is often criticized for neglecting major figures from outside the intellectual traditions of ‘the West’. It is argued that the absence of serious attention to such figures as Ibn Khaldun illustrates the dominance of ‘the white Western classics’. These criticisms are reflected, for example, in the growth of ‘Southern Theory’ (Connell, 2007) and in Said’s (1978, 1993) work on Orientalism.

The result of these intellectual changes – associated with what may be described as ‘the rise of a post-functionalist sociology’ – has meant (for those sympathetic to this project) the transformation of a standard curriculum or (for those critical of this project) the loss of a core curriculum. Irrespective of one’s interpretation of these trends and developments, it is hard to deny that modern sociology is driven by intellectual fashions – which often come from literary traditions, from cultural studies or film studies. The impact of postmodernism on the social sciences is a primary example (Susen, 2015, 2016). The history of popular journals such as *Theory, Culture & Society* might be taken as an illustration of these trends and developments, at least in British sociology. Arguably, *TCS* – which began life with an editorial board drawn primarily from sociology departments – has been successful precisely by *not* being a journal focusing *exclusively* on sociological issues. This process illustrates what we may call ‘the hollowing out of sociology’ by the emergence of journals catering to cultural studies, feminism, the study of the body, film studies and so forth. To put it bluntly, contemporary sociology is increasingly ‘decorative’ (Rojek and Turner, 2000), focusing on ‘identity studies’. The impact

of these trends depends, to some extent, on the vitality of sociological associations – especially the American Sociological Association, the British Sociological Association, the Australian Sociological Association, the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie*, the *Association Française de Sociologie* and those in many other countries, but also – of course – the European Sociological Association and the International Sociological Association. All of these associations play a crucial role in defending sociology in the public domain. The other component vital to the survival of sociology as a coherent discipline is a strong defence of ‘the classics’ – that is, a defence that can (and should) be thoroughly reflective and critical, rather than defensive and self-righteous.

The *Journal of Classical Sociology* has not been ignorant of these trends and developments. The Introduction to the first issue of the journal was entitled ‘The Fragmentation of Sociology’ (O’Neill and Turner, 2001). It saw the defence of ‘the classics’ as contributing to the coherence of the discipline. In our ‘Tenth Anniversary Report’ (Susen and Turner, 2011b), we again asked ourselves the following question: What is the justification for ‘classical sociology’ in a discipline that has taken modernity and modern society as critical topics of inquiry (Turner, 1990; Wagner, 1994, 2001, 2012; cf. Susen, 2015, 2020)?

We gave a similar defence to the one we are now exploring in this 20th Anniversary Special Issue. ‘The classics’ give us a vocabulary, a shared list of critical research topics and a tradition of empirical research driven by theoretical analysis. As editors, we have argued that the journal seeks to defend not the concept of ‘the classics’ as a static canonical framework, but, rather, the idea of ‘classicality’, which reflects a continuing and deepening tradition – a diverse group of scholars, including seminal figures such as Robert N. Bellah, Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Boltanski. In a way, then, *JCS* has always been about more than just reasserting the importance of ‘the classics’ (Webster, 2005), let alone confining the notion of ‘classicality’ to the ‘Holy Trinity’ of Marx, Durkheim and Weber (Susen, 2020: xviii, 97–98, 116; Susen, 2021; Susen and Turner, 2011a: xx–xxi; Susen and Turner, 2011b: 8).

The journal has continued to grapple with significant challenges to sociology throughout its 20-year existence. We – as editors – recognize that these challenges to sociology (and, more generally, to the social sciences) have been growing, rather than remaining the same. To face up to this new situation, we went through a major development of the editorial board over the past few years to recognize the vitality of sociology and the depth of its intellectual resources. The editorial board represents our unwavering commitment to academic excellence, combining North American and European traditions. In preparing for this 20th Anniversary Issue, we include articles by members of the editorial board and by other sociologists whose writings, in our view, reflect the strength of contemporary sociology.

V. Between success policy and policy success

When, in 2001, *JCS* was launched, even its most sympathetic readers might have thought that, in the best-case scenario, it would operate on the fringes of academic discourse or, in the worst-case scenario, it would struggle to survive, if not eventually disappear, not least due to the general trends shaping sociology in the late 20th and early 21st centuries,

as outlined above. Contrary to these gloomy predictions, however, *JCS* has gone from strength to strength. In fact, it has been thriving and growing – not only intellectually, but also (if this is anything to go by) in terms of the metrics used by SAGE to measure its success: subscriptions, article submissions, article downloads and article citations.

Between 2001 and 2007 (Volumes 1–7) *JCS* published three issues per (annual) volume. Given its immediate success and expanding impact, in 2008 *JCS* began to publish four issues per (annual) volume. While, since 2008, *JCS* has continued to be a quarterly peer-reviewed academic journal, we – as editors – have often been tempted to increase the number of issues to six, if not eight, per year. Each time, however, we made the conscious decision to stick with the four-issues-per-year format – not only because it has become more and more difficult to find both suitable and reliable reviewers, but also because we aim to ensure that we publish only material of the highest quality.

In practice, this quality-, rather than quantity-, driven approach has meant that, over the past years, the rejection rate has continued to be relatively high, with only the strongest submissions being able – so to speak – to survive the lengthy, and often laborious, multi-stage review process. To be clear, as editors we do *not* derive any pleasure from the fact that every year we reject (and, in many cases, desk-reject) a large proportion of submissions. We consider it our duty, however, to protect our reviewers from being expected to read, to comment on and to make informed judgements about submissions that – in our view – stand little, if any, chance of making it through the review process and offering a significant contribution to the field.

VI. Changing format(s)

Let us make a few remarks on the different *formats* of the material published in *JCS*. The journal publishes the following types of contribution:

- Stand-alone articles
- Editorials and introductions (to Special Issues)
- Themed articles (in Special Issues)
- Extended commentaries (in Special Issues)
- Responses to themed articles and/or extended commentaries (in Special Issues)
- Short book review articles
- Extended book review articles
- Responses to book review articles
- Research notes

Unlike most other academic journals (but similar to other internationally renowned journals, such as *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, *Sociological Theory* and *Theory & Society*), we have been operating on the basis of a relatively flexible word-limit policy. Over the years, we have resisted the temptation to be overly rigid, let alone prescriptive, with respect to the length of the pieces that appear in our journal. This policy has given both our authors and us, as editors, a considerable degree of freedom in terms of publishing high-quality material in different formats and at different lengths (sometimes longer, and sometimes shorter, than the conventional and formulaic 8000-word article).

As is the case with the editors of other academic journals, we have a duty to protect our reviewers – not only from reading and evaluating articles that are highly unlikely to survive the review process, but also from working their way through submissions that are simply too long (or, indeed, too short) to be considered for publication. In other words, while we have been following a flexible, case-by-case word-limit policy, we have *not* sought to convert our journal into a vehicle for the publication of mini-monographs (or, indeed, of back-of-the-envelope notes, pamphlets or collections of provocative aphorisms, let alone unsubstantiated claims).

Finally, we should mention that SAGE recently introduced a new Flexible Page Budget (FPB) policy, removing all page-budget limitations and encouraging us, as editors, to accept more of what, in our view, is right for the journal. In essence, the introduction of FPB involves the removal of rigid page budgets, effectively lifting stringent limits on the amount of content we can publish in our journal. While, in the past, there have been strict limits on the number of pages that could be included in each issue or volume, we now have far more flexibility in this regard. As a consequence of this novel arrangement, we are in a position to combine the flexible word-limit policy we have been applying to individual *article submissions* with a more flexible page budget concerning forthcoming *issues* and *volumes*. Obviously, the aim of FPB is *not* to lower our standards, to trigger an inflationary trend of fast-track acceptance and publication procedures or – as noted above – to create a space for the publication of short monographs (or aphoristic shopping lists). Rather, the purpose of FPB is provide both our authors and us, as editors, with a greater degree of flexibility, adaptability and – ultimately – freedom.

VII. Thematic and (inter)disciplinary scope

As mentioned above, *JCS* publishes articles in different formats on a range of key thinkers and debates in the humanities and social sciences, as well as short and extended review articles on recently published books, especially in the field of social theory. Over the past 20 years, the thematic scope of the work published in *JCS* has been wide-ranging and inclusive – not only because of its editors' broad conception of 'classics' and 'classicality', but also because of the interdisciplinary spirit permeating the journal. Although – as the title of our journal indicates – *JCS* focuses on scholars and controversies in sociology, its thematic scope comprises a range of academic disciplines and subdisciplines in the humanities and social sciences – notably philosophy, history, literary theory, political science, political theory, psychology, economics, anthropology, criminology, cultural studies, media studies, as well as science and technology studies. Rather than reinforcing the intellectual and institutional boundaries between these disciplines and subdisciplines, *JCS* has always tried to overcome the somewhat arbitrary lines drawn between them. Thus, instead of playing the role of a disciplinary gatekeeper whose main task it is to patrol the ideological and structural boundaries between academic realms and epistemic comfort zones, *JCS* seeks to cross-fertilize conceptual tools, theoretical frameworks, methodological strategies and empirical data from different traditions of inquiry and research cultures.

While seeking to contribute to an in-depth understanding of the origins of sociology, *JCS* aims to demonstrate how classical currents of thought continually renew and

revitalize the sociological imagination in the present day. The journal is a critical but constructive reflection of (and on) the roots, formation and development of sociology from the Enlightenment to the 21st century. This genealogical approach – as alluded to above – takes into account the degree to which sociology has been, and continues to be, shaped by its neighbouring disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. In addition, it grapples with insights and contributions from academic fields that, at first glance, may appear far removed from, if not irrelevant to, sociology. In this respect, the ‘obvious non-obvious’ candidates are areas of study from the natural sciences, even – or, perhaps, especially – if this involves examining sociology’s out-of-fashion connections with disciplines that seem to contradict the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions underlying both moderate and radical versions of social constructivism (cf. Bulle, 2011; Goldberg, 2018; McKinnon, 2010; Offer, 2013; Quilley, 2010; cf. also Renwick, 2012).

For some time, natural scientists have sought to disclose ‘the laws of nature’ – above all, in astronomy, biology, chemistry, earth science and physics. In parallel, *some* social scientists – that is, those motivated by positivist ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies – have sought to uncover ‘the laws of society’. In its infancy, sociology was very much part of this ambitious endeavour. There is little doubt, however, that, since Weber’s programmatic (and, subsequently, paradigmatic) commitment to *Verstehen* entered the scene, sociology has gradually moved away from a reductive catch-all pursuit of *Erklären* (Apel, 1979; Bourdieu, 1993; Delanty, 1997; Dilthey, 1883; Habermas, 1970; Outhwaite, 1986 [1975], 1987, 1998, 2000; Susen, 2011, 2021). This ‘interpretive turn’ – although it was not necessarily an ‘interpretivist turn’ (Susen, 2015: esp. Chapters 1 and 2) – included a resolute rejection of the Comtean notion of ‘social physics’ (cf. Kemple, 2004), a trend that culminated in the rise of seminal approaches that are – rightly or wrongly – associated with interpretivism and social constructivism, notably the following: micro-sociology, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, social psychology, social phenomenology, existential(ist) sociology, hermeneutics, standpoint and perspectivist epistemologies. (For useful overviews of these – and other – approaches, see, for instance, Elliott and Turner (2001) as well as Turner (2000 [1996], 2006).)

In recent decades, these have been succeeded by (or, in some cases, combined with) interpretive frameworks that tend to place a strong emphasis on the notion that *all* practices, structures and constellations of the human world are largely, if not entirely, socially constructed. On this account, the social universe consists of symbolic, discursive and representational components that manifest themselves in the constant construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of cultural forms, including identities and differences (cf. Susen, 2015: esp. Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 5). Particularly influential in this regard are feminism, LGBTQIA studies, poststructuralism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, intersectionalism and posthumanism. All of these approaches have had a significant impact on the humanities and social sciences, especially on sociology (including its terminological, theoretical and methodological toolboxes).

Without a doubt, sociology has been profoundly shaped by these trends and developments (cf. Susen, 2020). Different scholars will have different opinions on the respective contributions and limitations of each of the aforementioned (and other) approaches.

Notwithstanding their respective merits and demerits, in one way or another, all of them are influenced by the ‘founding figures’ of sociology – Marx, Durkheim and Weber – and, consequently, by three major traditions of sociological thought: Marx’s critical/historical-materialist approach, Durkheim’s positivist/functionalist approach and Weber’s comparative-historical/interpretive approach (cf. Giddens, 1996 [1971]; Morrison, 2006 [1995]). One may have good reason to claim that this list is incomplete and that, more specifically, other seminal thinkers belong to the prestigious league of foundational figures: Auguste Comte, W. E. B. Du Bois, Harriet Martineau, G. H. Mead, Henri de Saint-Simon, Georg Simmel, Ferdinand Tönnies, Ernst Troeltsch and Mary Wollstonecraft – to mention only a few. Regardless of one’s view on this matter, it is hard to deny that the far-reaching influence of Marx, Durkheim and Weber – not only on sociology, but also on adjacent disciplines and, more broadly, public debate – is unrivalled. This is reflected, for instance, in the fact that there are major academic journals whose mission it is to follow the respective intellectual traditions associated with these seminal thinkers. Obvious examples are *Capital & Class*, *Historical Materialism*, *L’Année sociologique*, *Durkheimian Studies/Études Durkheimiennes* and *Max Weber Studies* – among many others.

JCS is committed to recognizing the enduring pertinence of the terminological, theoretical and methodological tools provided by modern social thought. As we stressed in our ‘Tenth Anniversary Report’, *JCS* ‘was never intended to be simply a celebration of classical sociology narrowly defined as the foundational work undertaken by Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim and Max Weber’ (Susen and Turner, 2011b: 7; cf. Grüning and Santoro, 2021; Holzhauser, 2021). Thus, the engagement with classical sociology – as we understand it – should *not* be reduced to the study of European social thought produced between the mid-19th and early 20th centuries.

If, however, one seeks to make a case for ‘classical sociology’ in the narrow sense, then one may wish to focus on writings produced between 1844 (the year in which Marx wrote the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*; 2000/1977 [1844]), 1893 (the year in which Durkheim published *The Division of Labor in Society*; 1984 [1893]) and 1922 (the year of the posthumous publication of Weber’s *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*; 1978 [1922]). *JCS* has published a considerable amount of material analysing this historical period and scrutinizing the foundational sociological works produced within this context of major civilizational – that is, social, political, economic, demographic, technological, cultural, scientific, philosophical and ideological – transformations.

VIII. Key thinkers and central issues

Far from reducing the study of classical sociology to the exegesis of the writings of Marx, Durkheim and Weber, the journal has engaged with a wide range of intellectual traditions. There is not much point in providing an exhaustive list of the thinkers whose works have been extensively and critically examined by our authors. To give our readers an idea of the breadth of topics and range of intellectual traditions covered in *JCS*, however, it may be worth including a short (alphabetically organized) list of the most important *thinkers* whose contributions have been discussed in our journal:

- Raymond Aron
- Jane Addams
- Theodor W. Adorno
- Hannah Arendt
- Ulrich Beck
- Reinhard Bendix
- Jessica Benjamin
- Peter L. Berger
- Luc Boltanski
- Raymond Boudon
- Pierre Bourdieu
- Charles Cooley
- Gilles Deleuze
- Eric Dunning
- Émile Durkheim
- Jenny P. d'Héricourt
- Ferdinand de Saussure
- William E. B. Du Bois
- Shmuel N. Eisenstadt
- Norbert Elias
- Michel Foucault
- Sigmund Freud
- Erich Fromm
- David Frisby
- Hans-Georg Gadamer
- John Galbraith
- Harold Garfinkel
- Patrick Geddes
- Anthony Giddens
- Franklin Giddings
- Erving Goffman
- Antonio Gramsci
- Jürgen Habermas
- Maurice Halbwachs
- G. W. F. Hegel
- Martin Heidegger
- Leonard Hobhouse
- John Holloway
- Edmund Husserl
- Florence Kelley
- Louise W. Knight
- Peter Laslett
- Bruno Latour
- Emmanuel Levinas
- Niklas Luhmann
- György Lukács
- Karl Mannheim
- Herbert Marcuse
- Harriet Martineau
- Karl Marx
- Marcel Mauss
- George H. Mead
- Robert Merton
- John Stuart Mill
- Friedrich Nietzsche
- Vilfredo Pareto
- Robert Ezra Park
- Talcott Parsons
- Helmuth Plessner
- John Rawls
- Paul Ricœur
- Philip Rieff
- Edward Said
- Jean-Paul Sartre
- Alfred Schütz
- Georg Simmel
- Werner Sombart
- Pitirim Sorokin
- Herbert Spencer
- John Stuart Stuart-Glennie
- Alexis de Tocqueville
- Arnold van Gennep
- Thorstein Veblen
- Lester F. Ward
- Max Weber
- Alfred N. Whitehead
- Peter Winch
- Ludwig Wittgenstein

JCS has published original material not only on a wide range of *thinkers*, but also on a wide range of *topics*, such as the following:

- Ability and disability
- Abstractions
- Affect
- Age
- Anarchism
- Authority
- Biopolitics
- Brexit
- Bureaucracy
- Capitalism
- Citizenship
- Class
- Command economy
- Conservatism
- Crime and criminology
- Critical realism
- Critical theory
- Culture
- Democracy
- Deviance
- Discourse
- Disenchantment
- Empathy
- Enrichment
- Environmentalism
- Ethics
- Ethnicity
- Ethnomethodology
- Evolutionary theory
- Fact(s)
- Fascism
- Feminism
- Gender
- Globalization

- Happiness
- Human nature
- Human rights
- Ideal types
- Identity
- Ideology
- Inequality
- Judaism
- Labour
- Laws
- Liberalism
- Love
- Marxism
- Memory studies
- Methodological individualism
- Migration
- Modernity
- Modernity and the Jews in Western social thought
- Morality
- Multiculturalism
- Multiple modernities
- Music
- National socialism
- Nationalism
- Neoliberalism
- Norms
- Obligation
- Politics
- Politics as a vocation
- Postmodernity
- Power
- Pragmatism
- Protestantism
- Race
- Realism
- Reification
- Religion
- Responsibility
- Risk
- Self
- Sex
- Sexuality
- Social holism
- Social movements
- Socialism
- States
- Surplus value
- Symbolic power
- Temporality
- The 'Axial Age'
- The civilizing process
- The postsecular
- Time
- Unintended consequences
- *Verstehen*
- Welfare
- Work

The sheer variety of these topics indicates that *JCS* has combined (and cross-fertilized) different disciplinary perspectives concerned with the critical study of the social world. Suffice it to say that, within the discipline of sociology, the following subdisciplinary traditions of inquiry have played a pivotal role in the ways in which the aforementioned themes have been examined and discussed in *JCS*:

- Social, cultural and political theory
- Cultural sociology
- Economic sociology
- Historical sociology
- Philosophical sociology
- Political sociology
- Sociology of culture
- Sociology of education
- Sociology of experience
- Sociology of gender
- Sociology of knowledge
- Sociology of language
- Sociology of modernity
- Sociology of power
- Sociology of race
- Sociology of religion
- Sociology of science and technology
- Sociology of space
- Sociology of the body
- Sociology of time

IX. Academic peer review in the 21st century

We should point out that, in recent years, it has become increasingly difficult to find academics and experts willing to review articles submitted to our journal. Arguably, there are several interrelated reasons for this trend:

1. *Time*: Reviewing an academic paper in a methodical, conscientious and professional fashion takes time – in fact, in many cases, a considerable amount of time. For most researchers, time is scarce, especially in the current academic climate.
2. *Personal and professional pressures*: Due to a combination of personal and professional pressures, not to mention the additional difficulties caused by the recent and ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, more and more researchers are hardly prepared to sacrifice their precious time to review article submissions for academic journals. Seeking to juggle competing personal (notably domestic and/or family-related) and professional (notably administrative, teaching-related and research-related) priorities, a large proportion of academics do not have sufficient time to review article submissions for journals.
3. *Lack of institutional support*: Most academic journals expect their reviewers to provide them with their service ‘free of charge’ – that is, without any material or financial support or remuneration from publishers, let alone from universities or other institutions. Of course, the incentive ‘to be a good citizen’ is of considerable symbolic, if not moral, value. For a large proportion of academics with a sense of professional duty, this ‘deontological’ incentive continues to be an important reason for agreeing to review a certain number of articles per year.
4. *Lack of recognition*: Given that most academic journals operate in accordance with strict policies based on double-blind peer review, reviewers remain (at least nominally) anonymous and, hence, do not receive formal, official or public recognition for their work. The introduction of so-called ‘verified review scores’ by online platforms – such as ORCID, Publons and Web of Science ResearcherID – provides reviewers at least with a small degree of formal and public recognition. Practically, however, it makes little, if any, difference to their careers, which is why most academics are reluctant to review more article submissions than they can realistically cope with.
5. *Technology*: Many reviewers (and authors) complain about the online platforms and workflow-management systems (such as ScholarOne™) used by most 21st-century academic journals. Long gone are the days of typing up a manuscript, sending it (in a physical envelope) via ‘snail mail’ to the editors of a journal and receiving a straightforward (‘accept’ or ‘reject’) response by letter a few months after submission. And, although this seems far more recent, long gone are the days of exchanging a few informal emails – along with relevant attachments – between editors, authors and reviewers, allowing everyone involved in the process to keep things simple and to focus on the substance of the submission, rather than on the technology surrounding it. Admittedly, digital workflow-management systems have many significant logistical advantages. Our editorial experience tells us, however, that a considerable proportion of reviewers (and authors) – mainly those who belong to the ‘pre-digital generations’ – complain that it takes them longer to download or to upload the relevant documents than to write up their feedback (or, in the case of the authors, a manuscript). Perhaps, less was more.
6. *Power*: One of the paradoxes of dominant academic reviewing processes may be described as follows: the higher up researchers are positioned in the academic hierarchy, the more likely they are to possess a particular expertise, but the less

likely they are to review article submissions for academic journals. Granted, there are many exceptions to the rule. In fact, we could provide a list of internationally renowned scholars who have kindly reviewed numerous papers for our journal over the past two decades (in some cases, on a regular basis). As – dare we say it – experienced editors, however, we cannot shy away from the fact that often the *most* qualified and most suitable *potential* reviewers are the ones who are *least* likely to support us with their good will, generosity and expertise.

To some readers (especially to those not involved in academic peer-review processes), the previous points may seem trivial. To others, these points may seem self-indulgent, comparable to a neo-Nietzschean expression of editorial grievances and academic resentment, accumulated and hardened over the years. To most journal editors, however, they will sound familiar and be part of their day-to-day work. In our case, it has become more and more common that we, as editors, are obliged to contact up to 20 (or more) potential reviewers, before two or three of those approached by us kindly agree to read, to comment on and to assess the respective submission. In practice, this means not only that the review process has become far more complicated than it used to be, but also that the whole process (‘from submission to decision’) takes far longer than it would if it were more straightforward to find academics willing, able and qualified to carry out the job at hand.

In addition, we should draw attention to the following difficulty: most submissions that survive the editorial pre-review phase (stage 1) *and* the first peer-review phase (stage 2) will enter a third phase, commonly known as the ‘revise-and-resubmit’ phase (stage 3), which may be repeated once (stage 4), if not twice (stage 5). In light of the above, it becomes evident to anyone directly involved in the process – that is, to the authors, reviewers and editors – that, in a large number of cases, the *modus operandi* of 21st-century academic publishing is extremely laborious and time-consuming.

Finally, we should not forget that accepted articles have to be professionally proof-read, copy-edited and typeset. As editors, we are only too aware of the fact that an enormous amount of time and effort goes into the preparation and production of each article. It is no accident that a new area of inquiry, which focuses on the social conditions of academic publishing, has emerged in recent decades (Thompson, 2005, 2012 [2010], 2021). Many studies in this field shed light not only on the causes and consequences of the commodification of academic publishing, but also on the largely hidden, painstaking and often tension-laden ‘noumenal backstage’ activities that serve as the ‘real’ foundation for the ‘phenomenal frontstage’ of polished and published academic outputs.

This Anniversary Introduction is not intended to be a list of complaints about the complexities of the academic publishing industry in the early 21st century. Given the challenging circumstances under which most high-quality journals – including *JCS* – currently operate, however, we feel that it would be disingenuous not to touch on at least some of the major issues arising from recent and ongoing trends and developments in the publishing industry. If any academic discipline is committed to exposing and examining the ‘social conditions of possibility’ (Bourdieu, 2000 [1997]: 12; cf.

Susen, 2007: 163) underlying the production, circulation and consumption of knowledge, it is sociology.

X. Contributions to this Anniversary Issue

We would like to thank Michael Burawoy, Manuel Castells, Bridget Fowler, Sandra Harding, Steven Lukes, William Outhwaite, Richard Swedberg, Stephen Turner and Sylvia Walby for their thoughtful contributions to this 20th Anniversary Special Issue. We believe that their articles reflect a diversity of voices and experiences, illustrating that the critical vision that permeates the mission of *JCS* can and should, be expressed from a variety of positions and perspectives. It is in this spirit, we contend, that the legacy of classical sociology is very much alive – not as a canonical catalogue of past intellectual traditions but, rather, as an invaluable source of open, cutting-edge and critical forms of sociological inquiry.

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