

Call for papers

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Special Issue

Ambivalence of the world
and sociological theory

Presence and strength of the plurivocity

Editor

Emanuela Susca

Università degli Studi di Urbino “Carlo Bo”

Motivated by the desire to produce definitive and unambiguously clarifying discourses on society and the subject, sociological thought has from the beginning tried to expunge from its conceptual and analytical horizon that “grey” area – made up of ambiguities and intrinsically contradictory elements – which is recognizable both in macro-phenomena as a whole and in the motivations of the action. Nevertheless, ambivalence – understood as a configuration in which two different instances, in reciprocal tension but both ineliminable, act at the same time (Calabrò 1997) – touches the very object of sociology in an unavoidable and not marginal way. Indeed, we may say that ambivalence is necessarily a theoretical challenge with which it is essential to confront, as well as a field that questions any methodological reflection alien to reductionism and trivialization.

Before arriving at the metaphor of liquidity Bauman (1991) painted the fresco of a modern rationality aimed at eradicating ambivalence through historically disastrous dichotomies, and

LQ *The Lab's Quarterly*

opposed to that tragic past the project or the utopia of a post-modernity finally able to take charge of ambivalence itself by consciously accepting the difference and freedom of what escapes rigid categorizations. However, although three decades have passed, and apart from some studies often pioneering and of considerable value, sociological theory as a whole has shown itself to be unwilling to deepen, even critically, those baumanian analyses and to delve into the many trajectories of a topic that is anything but marginal or avoidable.

In fact, even today we can mostly see two opposing temptations corresponding to two intellectual postures. On the one hand, the anxiety to reduce complexity induces many to reject or drastically limit the presence of ambivalence, which therefore remains relegated to a secondary role of pathological discrepancy and ultimately is expelled by a self-declared science of the norm and the social order. On the other hand, a far from extinguished postmodernist tendency leads many to triumphantly celebrate ambivalence as the foundation and characteristic feature of the human condition, often forgetting that sociological work passes through determination and objectification that are prerequisites of communication and confrontation, both within the sociological community and outside it.

Escaping both of those opposite extremes, this Call wants to invite reflection on a notion that proves to be fundamental to understand the social bond, the dialectic persistence/change, and the concrete condition itself of those who inhabit the world.

For the realization of the special issue of “The Lab’s Quarterly” on this topic, both theoretical and theoretical/empirical contributions deepening the theme of ambivalence will be welcomed. Even in the autonomy of exposition and argumentation, contributions should focus on one or more of the following issues:

- 1) In what ways, and with what heuristic value, classical and contemporary sociology deals with ambivalence? If great authors like Simmel, Elias or Merton have addressed in a more direct way the area of indeterminacy and the many social antinomies, it is

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indeed undeniable that sociological reflections had soon to come to terms with the ambivalence of the world and of behaviours, with frequently interesting and topical results.

2) To what extent can the notion of ambivalence help to formulate or re-formulate a theory of social action that is *realistic*, but at the same time does not renounce the ambition to be precisely “theory”? Already refuted over time by several theorists and researchers, the *aut aut* between rationality and irrationality returns in many ways to propose itself in the social sciences, with outcomes that certainly do not facilitate neither authentically *scientific* analysis nor the advancement of our ability to understand.

3) Since the notion of social structure refers to the idea of frameworks that persist and reproduce themselves, could ambivalence help explain the change? Objectifying can imply the possibility to acknowledge an ambivalence of a structural type, wondering if and to what extent subjects can remove this ambivalence, or under what conditions ambivalence itself can instead lead to restructurings of more or less wide scope.

4) How could ambivalence be used as an instrument of empirical analysis? Beyond any Manichean – and now anachronistic – opposition between supporters of “quantity” and “quality”, the ambivalence inherent in the phenomena, as well as in relationships and subjects themselves, urges a collection and elaboration of empirical materials more sensitive to plurivocity and to the many shades of what tends to remain “unsaid” or difficult to observe.

5) What interdisciplinary dialogue this matter is calling for? If sociology came to deal with ambivalence later than philosophy and psychology, it is now perhaps possible to think of ambivalence itself in an authentically multidisciplinary perspective, going beyond boundaries that have been overcome and can be overcome between different human and social sciences, and going beyond their opposition to natural and supposedly “exact” sciences .

6) Can ambivalence enrich the point of view of critical sociology? After a long season in which an Enlightenment disposition has targeted duplicity especially to expose the ideology

LQ *The Lab's Quarterly*

of others, the notion of ambivalence could finally help to understand both the possible acquiescence of those subject to domination and the common “good faith” of those who objectively benefit from domination itself.

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Scholars interested in participating to the Call are invited to send an abstract of about 500 words in Italian, English or French to the editor Emanuela Susca at this e-mail address:

emanuela.susca@uniurb.it

After a first selection based on the abstracts, the papers in Italian, English or French will undergo a double blind peer review by two reviewers.

TIMELINE

Deadline for abstract submission:	30.10.2020
Review results returned:	01.12.2020
Deadline for paper submission:	15.05.2021
Peer review notifications:	30.06.2021
Deadline for final paper submission:	01.09.2021
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