Preface and Contents

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disClosure
Welcome to disClosure!

In this, our third issue, we — that is, a graduate student collective working under the auspices of the University of Kentucky’s Committee on Social Theory — present several works around the theme of fin-de-siècle democracy. Democracy is dealt with in the contexts of former colonies, crisis in Europe, and indigenous movements. The project of radical democracy and the problems of confronting racism is addressed from various perspectives.

As always, disClosure aims to be counter-hegemonic and experimental in nature. The three essays selected for inclusion in this issue depict various democratic struggles. By providing a multi-disciplinary forum in which social theoretical concepts are applied to contemporary problems, disClosure hopes to break down barriers between academic disciplines and to demystify the rhetoric of current intellectual practice. An important part of this project is our ongoing experimentation with genre. In this volume, we present artwork in the tradition of Northwest Coast First Nations, and by local artists, short works of prose and poetry, and review essays which grapple with topics presented in the works covered. We are also pleased to include, for the first time, interviews with speakers from the Committee on Social Theory’s spring lecture series.

This issue opens with Mark Strege’s work on “Universal Human Rights and Democratization.” Strege challenges the suggestion that we have reached the end of history by taking a historical look at international democratization and human rights movements; he gives several brief case studies in post-colonial Nation-states. Joel Woller then examines “white ways” of dealing with racism, questioning the appropriateness of confessional discourse on racism. McGandy’s call to living political commitment to democracy, frames the current crisis in Europe in the terms of Husserl’s Vienna Lecture. He argues that post-Cold War Europe has returned to the questions of identity and telos which troubled it during the early decades of this century. The empirical example of the colonization of the Lhéé-Lit’en Nation, in the western region of what is currently Canada, presents issues of identity, self-determination, and the difficulties of constructing a society after enduring two centuries of the violence of colonial rule. An especially thorny issue dealt with here is how to return to consensus rule, how to avoid democracy becoming the tyranny of the majority.

Chantal Mouffe, in interview with members of the disClosure collective, presents her work on attempting to reformulate the project of socialism in a way which leaves room for various democratic struggles and which recognizes and encourages democratic impulses within non-Western cultures. In disClosure’s interview with Sam Bowles, discussion centers around uneven development and terms of exchange, in light of the North American Free Trade Agreement, recurring interest in “civil society” and the “end of history” and on economic conditions.

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and political transition in Eastern Europe. Another look at democracy, capitalism, and the commodification of culture is offered by Sandy Baldwin, who gives us lessons on “How to Love Money without Really Trying.” In his invited report on “Democracy in Poland after Four Years,” Leszek Koczanowicz discusses the gap between theory and praxis as experienced in Poland, and gives an East European perspective on communism and civil society. In keeping with Mouffe’s “no guarantee” democracy, Koczanowicz demonstrates how viewing democracy as a process and not a fixed state gives reasons for optimism. Joseph Zomado’s description of an afternoon in “Ahab’s Book Shop” offers us a chance to take our noses out of the books and survey the scene of our scholarship. Finally, book reviews by members or graduates of the disClosure collective deal with recent scholarship on the military and civil society, new social movements, critical pedagogy, and currently existing socialism.

We are encouraged by the reception past issues of disClosure have received, and by the dialogue beginning to build around disClosure. Please take note of the call for papers for volume 4, on the back cover of this volume. We invite you to submit work for publication on the theme of “Boundaries.”

Special thanks for their assistance with this issue go to Nelson Messone, Arnold Farr, Peter Mortenson, Ted Schatzki and Wolfgang Natter.

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Over the course of the past decade, and particularly since the fall of the Berlin Wall, a much noted wave of democratization has swept over the world. From Argentina to Zambia, Bangkok to Bamako, authoritarian regimes have been challenged and forced to yield to popular governments legitimized by free elections. Considered in conjunction with the demise of the Soviet Union, these events have led some observers to speculate that democracy, and specifically its classically liberal form, has become the universal political ideal.

Perhaps the most celebrated example of such theorizing is Francis Fukuyama’s article entitled, “The End of History.” Published in the National Interest in 1989, Fukuyama’s article created a considerable intellectual stir. Informed by the thought of the German philosopher George F. W. Hegel, the author argued that liberal democracy “may constitute the endpoint of mankind’s ideological evolution,” and as such, would be the final form of human government. History in the Hegelian sense had come to an end, since the ideal, though not necessarily the implementation, of liberal democracy could not be improved upon.1

Fukuyama’s article engendered a number of skeptical responses, not the least of which was the contention that liberal democracy’s appeal was hardly universal. Recent events notwithstanding, political scientists such as Elie Kedourie have suggested that the values and traditions of many non-Western nations are incompatible with the requirements of democracy.2 On the other hand, theorists from the developing world, such as Julius Nyerere and Kenneth Kaunda, have argued that authentic democracies are not universally liberal, but instead vary according to the culture in which they exist.3 Both of these positions imply that liberal democracy is a distinctly Western construct, whose claims to universal validity are undermined by an appreciation of the culturally relative nature of political norms and values.

And yet democracy currently appears to be a cross-cultural standard of political legitimacy. As Giovanni Sartori has noted, no nation claims to be antidemocratic.4 How can we reconcile the claims of cultural relativism seen in the work of Kedourie and Nyerere with the outbreak of liberal democratic government all over the world? The answer to this question may lie with the increasing acceptance worldwide of a universal standard of human rights.

Fukuyama Revisited

Fukuyama, however, has a different explanation for the cross-cultural