

Karl Mannheim.**Sociology as Political Education. David Kettler and Colin Loader, editors.**

Transaction Publishers, 2001, 207 pp.

\$US 44.95 hardcover (0-7658-0054-3)

Colin Loader and David Kettler.**Karl Mannheim's Sociology as Political Education.**

Transaction Publishers, 2003, 233 pp.

\$US 49.95 hardcover (0-7658-0109-4)

Every human being who has radically experienced rationalization, as I have done as a sociologist, tends to act like the vintner who smashed and demolished all about him as his vineyard was being destroyed by hail: 'We'll soon see who first finishes it off.' He wants to pursue rational thought to its conclusion, and he wants to get to the conclusion as quickly as possible (Mannheim, 2001: 135).

Now that sociology has established a secure institutional place in the university, especially in North America, and legitimized itself professionally in large academic societies, international conferences and national journals like this one, it is easy to forget that the discipline once had to employ a much larger variety of genres and media to communicate its message. Its audiences and textual formats were at least as diverse and multidimensional as its topics and methods of study. A sociologist might take a stand on recent cultural trends, summarize a mass survey on the spiritual crisis of the day, or publish personal impressions of social changes in the pages of a newspaper. A university might announce a course or publish a colloquium prospectus in a popular journal. The protocol of a seminar series or the private correspondence between scholars concerning their public disagreements might circulate for a time among a group of colleagues. The minutes of a weekend symposium of scholars with conflicting political views and the copy of a professional brochure on the cultural and curricular tasks of the discipline might be distributed among a number of scholars, or handwritten lecture outlines, student notes and course transcripts might be perused and then filed away for decades. Documents like these make up the layered and fractured archive that can help us reconstruct the genealogical traces of the history of sociology.

Such in fact are the materials that constitute the remarkable collection of Karl Mannheim's early work from 1921 to 1935, edited by David Kettler and Colin Loader. As the editors point out in their introduction to the volume, "The history of sociology during its first century as a separate inquiry is simultaneously a struggle for definition and recognition. Its proponents have fought, first, to delimit their work from the mere elaboration of one or another political ideology, and, second, to establish their place in the prime legitimating agency for truth-seeking intellectual activity, the university" (Kettler and Loader, in Mannheim, 2001: ix). Throughout his career, Mannheim worked on each of these fronts simultaneously, often performing within an eclectic range of public and private, academic and popular, and oral and written forums. Against the radical orthodoxy and utopian aspirations of Marxism, the conservative and reprimativizing tendencies of fascism, and the naïve and dehumanizing auspices of liberalism, he attempted to advance an enlightened conception of a free-floating intelligentsia, a moral vision for the vocation of sociology, and a rational plan for rethinking politics as a scientific enterprise. These themes are the stock-in-trade of Mannheim's career, culminating in

the two books he published in his lifetime, *Ideology and Utopia* (1929/1936) and *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* (1935/1940), each of which appeared in German before being revised and expanded for the English edition. But these guiding threads are also woven into the shorter and arguably more enduring pieces that punctuate the principal phases of his life-work, including “On the Interpretation of Weltanschauung” (1921), “Competition as a Cultural Phenomenon” (1929), “The Problem of Generations” (1928), and “The Democratization of Culture” (1933), the latter a fragment of the comprehensive meta-theory that was to be his final masterwork (Loader and Kettler, 2003: 169). What this new collection highlights, in contrast to these previously published books and essays, is a refined conception of the task of sociology as a form of political education, a task which is both rooted in the life-experience and problematized by intellectual distance of the sociologist.

Loader and Kettler’s indispensable companion volume to these writings from the Heidelberg (1919-1930) and Frankfurt (1930-1933) periods demonstrates how Mannheim’s life and work can be understood reflexively in light of his own categories of analysis. Loader and Kettler’s book is therefore itself an exemplary contribution to the sociology of knowledge which Mannheim inaugurated. Doubly displaced from his native Budapest to Germany in order to pursue his studies in philosophy and sociology, and then to London in order to escape the Third Reich, Mannheim’s social location enabled him to enact (*vollziehen*) the “distantiation from life (*Lebensdistanzierung*)” that necessarily distinguishes the newly emerging free-floating intelligentsia (*freischwebende Intelligenz*). He understood the habitus of this rising social cadre to embody the ethos and organ of sociology’s “attunement (*Einstellen*)” to historical realities that are now in the process of coming into being:

The ideal subject enacts a world, which changes both him and the world within which he acts. But at the same, he perceives both himself and the world within which he acts as an object, thus creating a distance... The claim that distantiation can be turned from being a (malign) destiny into being an enactment that leaves the agent capable of further enactments at a higher level of self-control is the central argument of the sociological project (Loader and Kettler, 2003: 194).

Mannheim’s years in Heidelberg were for the most part spent under the posthumous influence of Max Weber, whose rivalry with Stephan George and his circle of poets and prophets was carried on in the Weimar period by Mannheim, his teacher Alfred Weber, and such thinkers as Leopold von Wiese and Alfred Solomon (Chapters 3 and 4). While competing among themselves for institutional recognition and a pedagogical following, they were largely allied over an insistence that the principle of value-freedom (*Wertfreiheit*) could be upheld in the practice of research and teaching. In spite of Mannheim’s troubling affinity for the urgency for political action felt among fascist political thinkers like Hans Freyer and Carl Schmitt, his antipathy to their blind faith that “true will establishes true knowledge” kept him firmly in line with the thought of his friend and fellow countryman Georg Lukacs, with whom he shared a rationalist belief in the educational mission of class consciousness (Chapters 5 and 6). Since for Mannheim Marxism “was not a worldview but a social science heuristic” (161), the problem for him was to identify and examine documentary evidence for a variety of such ideological and utopian expressions and regressions, rather than simply to argue for or against them. In this regard, his clash with Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer during his Frankfurt years, especially at the symposium organized by Paul Tillich in 1931, provides an especially illuminating glimpse into Mannheim’s overall methodological orientation. As he argued on this

occasion, the democratization of culture or spirit (*Geist*) must be viewed as both a danger and an opportunity for enhancing a form of rationalization which can be either dehumanizing or emancipating (Mannheim, 2001: 135).

The transcripts of the ten lectures that make up the summer seminar that Mannheim taught his first year in Frankfurt, "Introduction to Sociology," provide the centrepiece of the collection of original pieces and thus of Loader and Kettler's commentary. The importance of this text derives from the course's unique design and scope, which both summarize and anticipate the main themes that Mannheim addressed throughout his career, and pitch them simultaneously to a specialist group of established scholars and to a general audience of future teachers. In the process of describing the method and subject matter of sociology in a period of crisis, where revolutionary orthodoxy collides with a reprimativizing conservatism and both conflict with the promise of liberal democratization, Mannheim articulates the reflexive and critical task of the intellectual attitude: "We put the world at a distance, as well as the apparatus of experience and the apparatus of thinking. One is separated from the earlier allocation of meaning. An altogether peculiar relationship comes into being" (Mannheim, 2001: 21). What is most surprising in the subsequent discussions of his predecessors (including Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud) is not just how he considers them to blaze the trail to the sociological attitude toward life (*soziologische Lebenshaltung*), but also how he sees in them a kind of model and mirror of himself, as in the following assessment of Saint-Simon:

Silent in the midst of all this noise, judging others without being himself judged, both mundane and spendthrift, more by system than inclination, he lived fifty years in the span of one. He plunged into life, instead of stepping in. He used and abused everything in order to be able to allow for everything in his calculations. A completely experimental life (8).

That Mannheim should present this ideal self-portrait of the sociological attitude by quoting Lorenz von Stein quoting an unnamed French author is itself a curious enactment of the process of distantiation that he both advocates and exemplifies.

The fact that these transcripts were only recently discovered in the files of the late Hans H. Gerth speaks to the intellectual "problem of generations" that characterizes Mannheim's crucial position within the history of thought. The text and its transmitter constitute a revealing dimension of the intellectual migration that in many ways continues to define the parameters of Anglo-American sociology: Gerth later immigrated to the United States, where he collaborated with his former student C. Wright Mills in the publication of the most widely used collection of Max Weber's writings in English, of their book on social psychology and the sociology of knowledge; Norbert Elias, also in attendance, later immigrated with his teacher and research supervisor to England, where he developed his own version of the civilizing process and the dynamics of culture; and Kurt Wolff, whose notes from the final lecture are included as an Appendix, produced an edition of Simmel's writings that helped to secure a place for phenomenological sociology against its structural-functional rivals. To be sure, the diaspora of sociologists trained by Mannheim are as different from one another as they are from those who followed them. But such is the perennial conflict between science and youth, and often among those "university teachers [who], misapprehending their own vocations, view themselves as nothing but the purveyors of a scientific tradition and not simultaneously as the stewards of a freshly streaming flow of life" (Mannheim, 2001: 103). As Loader and Kettler

express this dilemma, in 1930 as in 2003, the idea of a crisis in the university poses the question of whether an institution oriented toward the advancement of science, rather than the social practice of cultivation (*Bildung*), “can sustain even those activities without reevaluating and reconstituting its relationship to its community and notably its youth” (Loader and Kettler, 2003: 3).

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<http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/cjscopy/reviews/mannheim.html>

November 2003

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