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**Special Issue Conference Edition**

**Critical Theory and the Concept of Social Pathology**

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Introduced by *James Gordon Finlayson*

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## Protest, Property and the Commons: Performances of Law and Resistance

By Lucy Finchett-Maddock

Routledge, 2016, pbk £36.99 (ISBN 978 0 415 – 85895 – 3), pp. 261

By Darrow Schecter

Lucy Finchett-Maddock (Law Department, School of Politics, Law and Sociology, University of Sussex) has written a remarkable book that bridges one of the most difficult divides traversing the relations between SPT and practical politics – that between scholarly excellence and effective activism. It is difficult to overestimate her achievement in this regard. In terms of scholarly excellence, *Protest, Property and the Commons* is characterised by theoretical sophistication. She provides the reader with highly reliable accounts of some of the main ideas of key SPT thinkers such as Benjamin, Castoriadis, Bloch, Schmitt, Lefebvre, Derrida and Butler, and, from a more focused legal-theoretical and recent perspective, she examines the work of Gunther Teubner, Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos. In terms of contemporary activism, then, she illuminates the juridical and political dynamics at work in variety of ongoing struggles to democratise social space, experience new forms of collective autonomy, re-imagine the commons, and resist the gentrification of cities around the world. Hence she delves into the theoretical implications of direct action, and, at the same time, she explores the practical implications of the law as a constantly evolving social practice that is too often held to be sovereign, static, formal and systemic. What emerges is a complex vision of praxis and conflict that avoids reductive schemata. A close reading of the book suggests that we are still discovering and re-discovering what it means to do interdisciplinary research whilst engaging in active political struggles. Stated in other words, genuinely interdisciplinary research has to address empirical issues and question existing disciplinary boundaries in ways that demand active engagement in the conflicts inherent in issues like squatting, welcoming refugees, shaping social space, and education in the broadest sense. The book challenges property rights and the architecture of existing social space, and thus serves as a reminder that the battle against fetishism and reification requires imagination as much as it requires pragmatic commitment.

**Darrow Schecter** is a Professor of Critical Theory and Modern European History at the University of Sussex. His books have been translated into Japanese, Turkish, Spanish and German. Recent publications include *The Critique of Instrumental Reason from Weber to Habermas* (2011) and *Critical Theory in the Twenty-first Century* (2013). He is currently completing a book on *Critical Theory and Sociological Theory*, due to appear next year.