

PERSPECTIVES

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NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

Big Data/Big Theory – Part I*John W. Mohr, University of California, Santa Barbara**The Duality of Theory and Practice in Seattle*

As I set about organizing the Theory Section's program for next summer's ASA meetings in Seattle, I decided to highlight some of the new theoretical work that is emerging in sites where innovative empirical programs are finding their footing. I think these are places where it is especially easy to see the *duality of theory and practice* at work. This is the idea that I would like to focus our collective attention on this year, and it is with that theme in mind I tried to create a set of panels that would explore some of the interesting edges between what we know and what we don't know—to reflect upon some research areas where we need theory to help us understand what we are seeing at the same time that we need new empirical research to help us advance theoretically.

In some ways, the balancing of theory and practice is always needed, but that need is also, I think, more pronounced in some places and at some times than others. My sense is that the embrace of edgy theory-infused empirical work is on the upswing in sociology, and I think this bodes well for sociological theory. I say this in part because I have been watching a number of new research programs coming into formation where scholars are finding the headroom to bring broad, smart, and interesting theorizing to bear on problems that are deeply embedded in, and indeed constitutive of, the design and conceptualization of the empirical work itself. Often, this research is more exploratory than confirmatory, and, as I will try to explain here with regard to the case of the new field of computational sociology, I think we can

identify some of the reasons why this is happening more frequently now than before.

Three of the panels in Seattle will be Open Submission; all take on some part of this challenge. One is on theorizing perception (organized by Joseph Klett and Terence McDonnell), one is on theorizing relational sociology (Emily Erikson), and one is on abductive theorizing (Iddo Tavory). If it fits the topic, please consider submitting your paper to one of these panels. (For descriptions of the sessions as well as more details on how to submit your paper, see page 28). In addition, we will have two panels with invited speakers. One of these, organized by Marion Fourcade and Raka Ray, will be on Visualization and Social Theory. The goal of the panel is to ask the provocative question, "How can the vibrancy and resonance of sociological concepts be reflected in visual form?"

The fifth panel is also an invited panel, which I will organize in collaboration with Ronald Breiger and Robin Wagner-Pacifici. This last session has the title "Big Data/Big Theory," and that is also the title of this edition of the Note from the Chair. In the remainder of this note, I will explain what I mean by this juxtaposition of terms and, in the spirit of offering up a more concrete example of my broader optimism, I will propose three reasons why I think the era of Big Data is likely to be good for theory.

Big Data

By Big Data, I especially mean to refer to the world ahead of us (and, indeed, increasingly all around us) in which important components of

social life become digital in their essence. I am referring to the kind of world where many if not most of our texts never actually achieve materiality, but instead begin and end their existence as information organized into bits of data, stored, transferred, and occasionally projected on a screen. Or, as I see in the case of my seventeen-year-old daughter and her friends, we begin living some significant segments of our social lives in digitally mediated systems of exchange where the defining features of the interaction are precisely the affordances of digitization itself. Consider the humble *selfie*—a self-portrait, appropriately silly, tongue out, eyes crossed, captured at some moment, at some place, during some event, with some person, or in some group, and then *liked* online by some number of people from some group. Then gone. The image itself is never anything but data in electronics and it comes into existence, however temporarily, only because of and within this digitally mediated exchange experience. And it is not just the young. I confess I am scarcely better, though my digital worlds are more defined by citation counts, links, tweets, reads, comments, and downloads. For me, what archetypically defines this dimension of the digital world is that it is a style of social life that creates a digital footprint at the very moment and in the very expression of its occurrence. In short, I am especially interested in that nexus space in Big Data where social life itself exists primarily as data (and vice versa).

Of course, this type of digitization is always only partial. Material beings still exist on the sending and receiving ends of these digital systems and, in any case, only some components of social experience can operate through digital media. No argument there. Beyond this, there is the highly problematic matter of the actual accessibility, not to

mention the ethicality, of analyzing all this data—and this opens up numerous other complications. But, setting those concerns aside for a moment, what fascinates me is that for the first time ever, we as social and humanistic scientists may gain access to what is essentially an overwhelming amount of high-quality data about the social and cultural world. For the first time, we may begin to approach the kind of relationship to data that a discipline like physics or engineering has with their terabytes and petabytes of highly precise information. I'm not saying, by the way, that this means the laws of physics will now explain society. In fact, I am saying just the opposite. Because we now have data to describe social life in such enormous detail, social scientists rather than physicists should try to figure out what this data means.

And I will say, appreciatively, from the standpoint of a sociologist who likes using formal data analysis, I think Big Data does have the potential to produce digitally accessible information that is far richer than anything social scientists have ever had or known before, and that some part of that richness will come from the fact that much of that data is produced within the very flow and practice of daily life itself. Instead of gathering answers retrospectively from standardized survey questions, Big Data can provide texts from spontaneous tweets, posts, or messages that are wound into dynamic conversations between friends or communities, thus allowing social scientists to capture social life in its natural richness as it unfolds in real time. High quality data could mean data that was created authentically, with complete textual (and visual or audio?) content recorded, all types of relational signatures captured, and precise temporal and geo-stamping included.

Moreover—and this is actually the most interesting thing to me—Big Data sources can provide us with articulated access to complex levels and systems of meanings. Data is not limited to attitudes or opinions registered retrospectively in surveys; instead, Big Data can allow us to strategically examine different types and forms of meanings, from simple sentiments to complex thoughts, from immediate reactions to deliberative reflections. And, in contrast to the era of survey research, rather than focusing our attention on designing sampling strategies and systems for retrieving statistically reliable extrapolations of data, we can now have access to nearly entire populations of participants or complete universes of events, which means that we can select particular (theoretically meaningful) components of social/cultural systems for our analysis.

Of course there is a whole lot more that could be said about the nature and character of this emergent digital transformation of our social world and about its impact on the social sciences (Anderson 2008; Jockers 2013; Kitchin 2014; Lazer et al. 2009; Lee and Martin 2015; Liu, 2013; Mayer-Schonberger and Cukier 2013; Moretti 2013; and the responses to Lee and Martin in the October 2015 issue of the *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*). And there are many critically important implications of these changes for sociology, for basic sociality (Turkle 2012), social class and inequality (DiMaggio et al. 2001.), civil liberties (Scheer 2015), and so much more. But these matters are not my focus here. My focus is on how Big Data is going to have an impact on the intellectual subfield of sociological theory over the next generation or so (and vice-versa). In the remainder of this short essay, I will describe three reasons why I think the shift toward Big Data will demand more and better theory.

Big Data/Big Theory

My thesis is simple. In the not too distant future, I think that Big Data is going to have a very Big Impact on sociology. And I think that the more that sociologists (as well as other social and cultural scientists) embrace the analysis of Big Data (which I think is, after all, inevitable), the more they are going to need to (and want to) call upon good sociological theory—*lots* of it—which is what I mean when I talk about an emerging era of Big Theory. In its simplest form, my argument is that those who analyze Big Data with a goal of studying the social or the cultural will be much advantaged by drawing on well informed sociological and other social-scientific and humanistic theories. The flip-side of that would be that sociological theory (et al.) will be much advantaged by becoming more engaged with efforts to think about and analyze Big Data. *That* duality of theory and practice is the subject and, I suppose, the thesis of this essay. But let me step back for a minute. Just why do I believe that the study of Big Data is going to require an era of Big Theory, and just what do I mean by that phrase?

I am sure there are lots of other reasons that we can find, but at the moment I want to consider three things about the move to Big Data that will require a greater and more ambitious effort at theorization. I will call these (1) the Paradigm Effect, (2) the Data Effect, and (3) the Culture Effect. I will explain each of these in turn. I should also note that many of the papers that I cite in the remainder of this essay have just been published as part of a special collection of 18 essays entitled, “Conceiving the Social with Big Data: A Colloquium of Social and Cultural Scientists,” in the online journal *Big Data and Society*. I co-edited the colloquium along with Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Ronald Breiger. All of

these papers can be accessed via the journal's website: <http://bds.sagepub.com>.

To be continued: See Part 2 in the Spring Edition (2016) of *Perspectives*.

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THE 2015 JUNIOR THEORIST AWARD LECTURE

Only 10% Human: Gut Bugs and the Curious Prevalence of Autism among Somali Refugees

Claire Laurier Decoteau, University of Illinois at Chicago

"I can tell you the exact date that I began to think of myself in the first-person plural ..."
(Pollan 2013)

This story is about a group of parents of children with autism in the Somali diaspora who think of themselves *in the multiple*, and how this constitutes both a postcolonial critique of Western biomedicine and a radical rethinking of the relationship between the social and biological body. There is growing statistical evidence that Somali refugees and immigrants have higher prevalence rates of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) than some other ethnic/racial groups (Barnevik-Olsson et al. 2008; University of Minnesota 2013). Somalis in North America call autism the "Western disease" because there is no word for autism in the Somali language and because, they claim, it does not exist in Somalia (Brisson-Smith 2009). Yet, Somali parents have widely divergent explanations for their vulnerabilities to autism, and in some cases have forged coherent "epistemic communities" around a definition of illness, its causal pathway, and possible courses of treatment. In Toronto, an epistemic group has consolidated around gut bacteria as a causal mechanism for the development of autism. They argue that it is the diet and medical environment in North America (including the use of preservatives, genetically-modified processing, and antibiotics in both health care and food production) that explain the high rates of autism within the Somali diaspora.

Explanations from an Epistemic Community of Somali Refugees

Adar Hassan has two sons with severe autism – the younger can speak a little and the elder is non-verbal; both have severe behavioral disturbances and suffer from gastrointestinal problems, difficulty sleeping, and skin disorders. But she does not believe that autism is genetic, because no one in her family has ever seen such behaviors or symptoms before, and, unlike Americans, Somalis know their ancestors "like a hundred fathers back" (Interview, 6/12/14). In addition, Adar explained to me, the rates of autism prevalence have climbed steadily since the early 1990s. When her first son was diagnosed with autism in 2001, the rates were 1 in 150, and now they are 1 in 68 (CDC, 2014). As Adar explains, "that can't be explained genetically. Genetics don't explode ... They *know* even if they don't say it. There's something environmental ..." (Interview, 6/12/14).

Instead, Adar believes that the change of diet that accompanied her own forced migration from Somalia to Toronto changed her gut microbiota, which then affected her children during pregnancy and birth. There are several environmental and agricultural differences between life in Somalia and life in Canada which Adar believes influenced her children's gut bacteria: Vitamin D deficiencies from changing exposure to sunlight, the lack of raw milk, the overly sanitized environments in North American schools and hospitals, and agricultural production that relies on genetic

modification, fertilizers, and pesticides. In addition, Adar, like many Somali women in North America, gave birth through Caesarean section because Western doctors are unfamiliar with labor in women who have been circumcised. “Babies born by Caesarean ... do not acquire their mother’s vaginal and intestinal microbes at birth,” which can lead to difficulties in the development of their immune systems (Pollan 2013). Both of Adar’s children were also given several courses of antibiotics during their infancies, which she believes destabilized their already fragile gut microbiome. As another member of the Toronto epistemic community explains, antibiotics are overprescribed: “We’re consuming a lot of antibiotics ... some of the daycares, they are requesting if the child is sick, they will say you can’t bring him back unless he’s on medications ... The parents ... request the antibiotics so the child could go back to school so they can go to work or attend to another child or whatever ... We have a culture of antibiotic abuse that’s going on” (Fatima Kediye, Interview, 6/10/15).

The Microbiome-Autism Connection

According to several scientists researching connections between intestinal flora and autism, immigration from Somalia to Canada could shift a population’s disease profile. For example, Jeremy Nicholson, Chair of Biological Chemistry at the Imperial College of London, explains: “Diseases have changed in the last 60 years ... and certain disorders like autism correspond to the country’s industrial development, brought about in particular by antibiotics” (ABC Four Corners, 2012). One theory is that antibiotics, especially repeated doses at a young age, can wipe out the diversity of bacteria living in the gut, rendering children vulnerable to attack by hostile or pathogenic

bacteria, which can in turn affect synoptic development in the brain.

Microbiologists are fond of saying that we are only 10 percent human. As Michael Pollan explains in a recent *New York Times* article: “for every human cell that is intrinsic to our body, there are about 10 resident microbes ... To the extent that we are bearers of genetic information, more than 99 percent of it is microbial. And it appears increasingly likely that this ‘second genome,’ as it is sometimes called, exerts an influence on our health as great [as] and possibly even greater than the genes we inherit from our parents. But while your inherited genes are more or less fixed, it may be possible to reshape, even cultivate, your second genome” (Pollan, 2013).

One hundred trillion bacteria live on our skin, in our mouths, and in our intestines. And we have a symbiotic relationship with the species that call us home – they protect us from infection, help us digest food, and keep our cells powered. But if something wipes out their diversity or stops it from developing in the first place, we are at greater risk for all kinds of illnesses. As Martin Blaser explains in his book, *Missing Microbes* (2014), the rise of “modern plagues” such as obesity, childhood diabetes, food allergies, cancer, celiac disease, colitis, and autism stems from “the disappearing microbiota.” He argues that the loss of diversity within the microbiome impacts our metabolism, immunity and cognition. Blaser worries “that with the overuse of antibiotics as well as some other now-common practices, such as Caesarean sections [and the widespread use of sanitizers and antiseptics], we have entered a danger zone, [a] no-man’s land between the world of our ancient microbiome and an uncharted modern world” (39).

Adar Hassan noticed that both of her autistic sons crave highly processed, carbohydrate-based foods, but when they are given low-carb diets, their behavior improves (ABC Four Corners 2012). She found the same to be true of dairy products. When she listened to Dr. Derrick MacFabe's presentation on pathways from gut bacteria to brain inflammation, she finally heard a causal theory that made sense to her (Ibid). The "gut bugs," MacFabe explains, crave carbohydrates. Children eating high-carbohydrate diets are feeding the bugs, which then negatively affect their brain development: "When we eat, we feed microbes. It is possible that these bacteria produce compounds that go back to the brain and alter behaviors, make us eat more of what it takes them to live, and produce behaviors that help spread them around" (MacFabe 2009). This is a distinct ontology of the body that suggests that colonies of bacteria living within us control our behavior, some of which negatively affect our health.

Rethinking the Body through the Microbiome

I am intrigued by the "gut bug" theory of autism because it challenges us to rethink the relationship between the self and the social. Nikolas Rose (2013) urges us to critically interrogate the relationship between the human and social sciences in order to reconceptualize the body, or vitality, as a complex, aggregate capacity that is always situated within a specific locale or environment. According to the ontology of the body offered by microbiome research, the social resides *inside* of our bodies, in the form of bacterial colonies that alter the human form. We are literally inhabited by the social. Michel Foucault and Judith Butler have forcefully argued that our bodies are the materialized effects of social discourses. Prohibitive discourses are written onto the body, are

performed by the body, or are incorporated into our bodily contours through the psychoanalytic process of melancholia. And yet, here is a body that defies boundaries, as the social world and our particular social history in that world are reflected by trillions of bacteria changing us from the inside out. And these bacteria have desires – they crave carbohydrates that make them grow. Here, discourses are not merely written onto the body by external social actors, but written *by* the body, by its internal coinhabitants – millions of microbes pursuing their own individual and colonial self-interests, in contestation with other microbes. This is a truly multiplicitous theory of the body – we are, after all, only 10% human. You get your microbiome largely from your mother, but it takes three years for your microbiome to stabilize and it can change throughout your life. Your diet, environment, romantic partners, health practices, hobbies, and travels are all reflected in your microbiome. Your bacterial colonies reflect the contingency of your social position and practices. I believe this is the kind of body Deleuze and Guattari had in mind in *Anti-Oedipus*.

For Deleuze and Guattari, a "body without organs" is a totalizing fiction. It makes us believe that our bodies are a unified system, a site where productions are recorded in such a way that it seems natural and appears as if the body is the origin of desire and production: "an enchanted recording or inscribing surface that arrogates to itself all of the productive forces and all of the organs of production, and that acts as a quasi cause by communicating the apparent movement (the fetish) to them" (1983/2000: 11-12). The body without organs operates like Lacan's *objet petit a* – it is produced through a misrecognition of ourselves as whole, complete beings, which disavows the chaos, multiplicity and

fragmentation of our bodies as real, desiring machines. However, for Deleuze and Guattari, unlike for Lacan, desire cannot be reduced to lack. And this means that lack does not come from “somewhere deep down inside,” from some primordial separation from the mother, but lack is forced onto people in the social world. For Deleuze and Guattari, desire’s source is not lack but production. And the body without organs is precisely this organization which is overcoded in such a way as to prevent the proliferation of desire. This body without organs, then, forces us to disavow the disparate desiring machines that ‘hang together’ as a body, but without coherent organization. The microbiome theory of the body challenges this view of a body without organs, by representing instead a series of organisms without a body, a set of desiring machines that continually produce new connections and segmentations. Gut bacteria reflect the wholly social nature of our corporeal constitution. We are social beings – both inside and out. And it is only totalizing fictions, stories of genetic predetermination, for example, which make us believe that our bodies are coherent systems with a control tower and a DNA roadmap.

Emma Allen Vercoe, a microbiologist at the University of Guelph who works closely with the Somali parents in Toronto, argues that gut bacteria theories remain on the fringe of mainstream science because they challenge not only the biomedical ontology of the body but the whole system of biomedical research and care. She explained to me that the clinical trial – the gold standard of medical research – relies on the notion of the homogenous, standard patient. Clinical trials presume that people will respond to treatment in similar ways. Microbiome research, instead, presumes that each individual is wholly unique. This is why downing vats of yoghurt or taking standardized

probiotic formulas often do not work – they are not attuned to your particular microbiota, which is a signature of you and you alone, reflecting your precise biography and location.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari discuss the relationship between what they refer to as nomad science versus state science. Nomad science is usually “barred, inhibited or banned by the demands and conditions of state science” (1987/2000: 362), and this has certainly been the case with the gut bacteria theory of autism causation. It remains underfunded and underexplored. And yet, for many Somali parents, it captures their experiences of raising children with autism and provides clues toward therapies that help them manage symptoms. Rather than nomad science, perhaps we can see microbiota research as “refugee” science.

For Adar and the other members of her epistemic community, the microbial theory also serves as a postcolonial critique. Not only does it suggest that the ills of late capitalist modernity have given rise to a series of ‘modern plagues,’ autism among them, but it also captures their own experiences of alienation and marginalization: the forced immigration brought on by civil war in Somalia and the health inequalities they have faced as poor, Black, Muslim refugees in a major Western urban metropolis. Their experiences and structural positionings are reflected in the gut bacteria theory of autism causation, but so too is their resistance.

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TEACHING FORUM

Using Popular Culture to Teach Social Theory

Joseph Klett, University of California, Santa Cruz

Is Beyoncé a feminist? And why is this a good question to pose in an undergraduate social theory course?

The answer to the second question is revealed in how students answer the first: *of course* Beyoncé is a feminist! Students implore: did you not see last year's MTV Video Music Awards? Beyoncé performed on stage in front of lights that spelled out the word "FEMINIST" in huge letters. Why question this self-identification by one of the most powerful and well-recognized women in popular music?

"Well," other students might say - perhaps with some prodding by the instructor - "let's think about this." Beyoncé put "FEMINIST" in bright lights, but does "Queen Bey" fit the definition of feminism as presented by theorists like Dorothy Smith? Her music promotes a message of women's empowerment, yet didn't she close off a maternity ward in Harlem, thereby excluding mothers in labor who lacked her level of fame? She encourages women to assert their independence from men, but don't her ample contributions to the Republican Party undermine a woman's right to choose how to care for her own body? She claims that she supports equality, but later cites the "authentic, God-given talent, drive, and longevity that will always separate me from everyone else."

As heads in the lecture hall begin to nod in the other direction, a third perspective emerges in the crowd. Beyoncé's last tour was called the "Mrs. Carter Tour." This identifies her foremost as the wife of Shawn Carter, better known as Jay Z. Does it matter that she is a black woman crafting this message? Another student,

anticipating Patricia Hill Collins' elaboration of feminist theory, asserts that race is a context that imposes different expectations on women in society. Is Beyoncé not challenging expectations of black women when she promotes her equal partnership with Jay Z?

Posing the question "Is Beyoncé a feminist?" demonstrates the value of using popular culture for teaching social theory. The question challenges us to reconsider our seemingly self-evident nomothetic concepts: what does it *mean* to be a feminist? As a critical theory, feminist theory is not just descriptive. Feminist theory is also normative in the sense that it urges theorists to reflect on the ways that they apply the term "feminism" to empirical evidence. If we employ Smith's concept of *standpoint*, what other perspectives emerge that problematize Beyoncé's calls for "equality?" Can there be gender equality without political or economic equality? And what, if anything, changes when we consider Beyoncé's intersectional identity as a black woman?

While such theoretical issues may all be illustrated using empirical examples from academic literature, there is added pedagogical value in tapping into more readily available illustrations.

First, popular culture is widely accessible. As Smith herself implores us to do, we must locate theory where we are in the world, instead of solely where we want to be. And rather than recreate the social world anew, we - the sociologists - must also locate students where they are. Neither students nor instructors need

consume Beyoncé’s music in order to know Beyoncé’s story: what arguments in popular media may lack in theoretical rigor, they make up for in abundance.

Second, popular culture helps demystify social theory. Examples from popular culture help students recognize theoretical concepts in the wilds of their everyday lives. Especially for students begrudgingly fulfilling a theory requirement, the use of familiar examples can bring theory down to earth in ways that spur debate not only between students and instructors, but also among classmates, friends, and families.

Third, popular culture is a source of empirical data in its own right. Icons like Beyoncé play a unique role in society. Students can inquire into the nature of this role, and consider how an icon can change the very symbolic system in which he or she operates. It is of course important to distinguish “Beyoncé the social actor” from “Beyoncé the social icon” – and making these distinctions can generate fruitful theoretical questions in the classroom. In this sense, popular culture provides more than pedagogical expediency; it provides theoretical opportunities all its own.

I would like to offer some advice for those who have trepidation about theorizing in the world of popular culture.

First, popular culture is not the same thing as youth culture. Younger students may seem better versed in the stuff, but this does not disqualify you from offering your own perspective. Students might resent you for forcing a beloved icon under the analytical lens; more likely, though, they’ll appreciate you for connecting theory to something they already care about. Subsequent examples will

find them even more ready and willing to engage.

Second, be respectful. Before mobilizing popular culture in your theory lessons, check your own opinions and biases on the examples you select. Students are more receptive if you approach Twitter and the Kardashians with the same equanimity as you do civil infrastructure and the Medici. You’re entitled to an opinion; but it’s best to get this opinion clear in your own head before you subject this material to analysis. Only then can you develop a complex object of conversation that allows multiple perspectives to emerge in the classroom. More to the point, this is simply better pedagogy. By allowing students to think widely about a topic before they focus their theoretical lens, you may end up doing more than simply applying theory to the social world: you may also help them see how theory-building works in practice. Steer the middle and you will find a very productive discussion.

Does this mean that you need to consume more pop culture yourself? Yes. If this seems like a burden, know that you need not search far to find plenty of good material. Aside from the news media you’re already reading, magazines like *The New Yorker*, websites like *Slate*, and shows like *The Daily Show* are established outlets for theoretical exegesis. My personal favorites include satirical sketch programs like *Key & Peele* and *Inside Amy Schumer* (both on Comedy Central). The ASA’s own *Contexts* is also a great resource for terse analyses of popular culture. Even better, find the blog of a sociologist who specializes in popular culture, and check it regularly. On the topic of Beyoncé, for example, websites like *Colorlines* (www.colorlines.com) and *Racialicious* (www.racialicious.com) provide excellent scholarly analyses.

Using popular culture to teach social theory does not require sub-specialization. In an oft-cited interview in *Vogue*, Beyoncé is quoted as saying, "That word [feminism] can be very extreme... but I guess I am a modern-day feminist. I do believe in equality." She follows this assertion with the sentiment, "But I'm

happily married. I love my husband." Show your students what you find interesting about these statements, and they will show you how relevant popular culture can be for teaching theory in the classroom.

The Art of Play and Teaching Theory

Siri J. Colom, Connecticut College

What is theory for? There are nearly as many answers to this question as there are sociologists. Stinchcombe (1982) says one goal of teaching is to demonstrate models of great sociological research. Even if the classics are not perfect models of great research, they still offer students a sense of what sociology can be. By contrast, Michael Burawoy (2013) uses the metaphor of theory as maps—some better than others—for looking at particular areas of social life. He suggests that teaching theory is as much about teaching a way of thinking and looking at the world, as it is a series of ideas. Using the metaphor of a mountain range, he critiques survey courses where "students are taught to survey the mountain range from below, rather than attempting to climb one or more mountains and see things from their summits." From still another perspective, R.W. Connell (1997), in a classic critical look at social theory, notes that our celebration of "founding fathers," particularly in our courses and textbooks, is more a reflection of the preexisting institutions (of domination) that exist in the social world.

So, we have theory as a foundation to the discipline, a map of the social world, and a reflection of that world. There is a scalar

sense here as well: as a view of our discipline, as a view of the world, and as a view of our view of the world. Theory is indeed all of the above, and it is in part the tensions among these multiple conceptualizations of theory that make it malleable and useable. That is what enables us to *play* with the ideas and find new ways to critique them, new ways to understand them, and new ways to use them

I would like to propose that we take seriously the idea of play as both theoretical and pedagogical tool. Play leaves space for the imagination, for wonder, and for creativity. At the same time, play is not just a pedagogical tool. It also parallels the craft of theoretical thinking: no decent theory has come about with a certain amount of playing with ideas. Play opens the possibility of learning from mistakes, something we often do not leave room for in our classrooms.

Play can also be a great equalizer. Many of our students are excellent at memorization, but teaching theory through play asks them to do more than memorize. Because of the type of thinking it requires, theory is one of the courses that can privilege the student with an elite educational background. By asking students to play, however, one often

sees that it is the strongest students who have the most difficult time simplifying and explaining. For example, at times I hand out colorful markers or crayons and ask my students to draw a theoretical argument in pictorial form. Drawing is one of the oldest forms of abstract play and has its own internal logic: it forces us to think in a different register. Inviting students to construct and play with arguments in a variety of registers (or multiple “literacies”) allows them to practice translating ideas into another medium, and thus gives them another opportunity to own the material.

Play can also become a means to “fair play.” Students who might not normally think of themselves as being strong at working through an argument may find they have much to add when they are asked to creatively move from the abstract to the concrete. Even when students struggle, often seeing the multiple ways in which other students play and draw the concepts helps them to understand.

Increasingly, our institutions are asking that we incorporate more “active learning” into our classrooms. This can be difficult to do when you are reading dense and difficult texts from more than a century ago, but play is perhaps the most active form of learning. And the process of play and theoretical thinking are actually quite similar. Both theories and play are a kind of conversation. Both build upon a set of assumptions and require a framework, and thus both are a way to interpret the world. Theories and play can be problematic too: Because we enact the social world as we play, it can be difficult to make play and theory our object if we are actively involved. But the best

play, like our best theories, pushes us to be reflexive.

As an extended example, I will share a game I designed to teach Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. I called the game “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism!” (Everything was in the punctuation.) I designed it as a board game, which combined elements of *Chutes and Ladders* and *Candyland*—high culture meets low. Students begin in the Middle Ages and weave their way around the board, ultimately arriving in Modernity and the iron cage. In order to progress and move their figures, they must answer questions about Weber's text (e.g. “What is a calling?”); if they answer them correctly, they can roll the dice and move to a new space. (Including the element of chance opens up an opportunity to talk about predestination.) Some spaces they land on are blank, whereas others—marked “You are a dilettante,” or “You are an otherworldly ascetic, put on your hair shirt!”—will send them back a few spaces or delay them. Still other spaces, such as “A penny saved is a penny earned” and “You are searching for signs of election,” allow them to jump forward. Finally, winning is not the goal: does anyone *want* to end up in the iron cage in a world driven by consumption?

As a form of play, there are a couple of things the game achieves. First, the content and framework for the game mimic the outline of Weber's text, such that the game is not about memorization of the text, but instead a means of helping students visualize the theoretical and historical trajectory of his argument. The temporality of the story becomes the basis for the game's movement. Players can get hung up in places on the board that parallel the tension in the book between traditional and

modern world views, such as getting stuck in the “Quicksands of Disenchantment” or in the “Curve of Unprecedented inner loneliness.” Second, the game requires a deep understanding of the text. This is a benefit for both the student and the teacher. For students, the game becomes wittier the more they understand the text. For the teacher, I, too, have to have a complex understanding of the work in order to synthesize the text into a game and have that synthesis be coherent.

One final important benefit of adopting a playful approach to theory is that the fear of failure becomes a less potent force. Some have compared sociology to a martial art. While this metaphor is useful when suggesting that sociology has a role in politics (à la Bourdieu), I think it does more harm than good when it encourages us to approach theory or sociology as a contest and fight rather than a conversation. It supports the loud voice rather than the quieter questioner, the winner rather than the loser. Shifting metaphors from fighting to playing enables us to reclaim failure, transforming our understanding of it away from mere loss and toward a broader perspective that sees

failure as something that *must* occur. Because it is through the cascading series of gentle failures during play that lead to profound learning. Cultural theorist Judith Halberstam suggests that failure is the alternative to a capitalist narrative of success, and in this sense play provides a similar counterpoint to the fight. Play is the space of the child, when there is the greatest possibility for transgressive and alternate ways of understanding the world. Play offers hope. Maybe through play we can also suggest that the “iron cage” is not the only possibility.

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“Puzzling” through Theory: Teaching Theory as a (Jigsaw) Puzzle

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As researchers, we often speak of a “puzzle” in the symbolic sense of a theoretical puzzle – something as-yet unexplained by existing theories. By contrast, I will argue that, as teachers, employing the metaphor and material form of a *jigsaw puzzle* can be an effective teaching tool, enabling students to

engage in visual and experiential learning to master theoretical arguments. The form of this pedagogical tool is easily transposable to a wide variety of different theoretical content. I will describe how I run the exercise, discuss pedagogical virtues of this approach, and conclude with specific tips to keep in mind if

you decide to run a similar exercise in your courses.

“Puzzling” Through Theory

As my undergraduates walk in, I hand each a set of 5-6 index cards. They look through them as they pass time before class officially starts, reading the fragments on their cards. Each of them holds several random pieces summarizing parts of Theda Skocpol’s (1979) masterful argument about the conditions for the French Revolution. Over the next hour-and-a-half, they will work as a team, using the metaphor of a jigsaw puzzle to guide them into thinking about how to reassemble the logical pieces of a theoretical argument into a comprehensive whole.

To start, I describe the exercise and ask them: Why do this? Why are we reconstructing the steps of the author’s argument? Eventually they decide that it will help them learn the content of the material in greater depth, and that unpacking the logic of the argument will make them more sophisticated readers and more able writers. We talk about how reading academic articles can be challenging, but understanding the underlying logic of them can both help make that particular argument easier to understand, help spot areas to critique, and make future reading of academic work easier.

Before students begin assembling, we unpack how the metaphor of a jigsaw puzzle helps reason through an academic argument. I ask them what strategies they would use to solve a jigsaw puzzle. Their suggestions inevitably include looking at the box’s cover picture, finding edge pieces, and grouping by color. Reading the article in advance is analogous to looking at the box’s cover. Important ideas (identifying the outcome explained) and

difficult concepts (exogenous starting conditions) can be rendered approachable through the metaphor of edge pieces. If you were doing a jigsaw puzzle of a farm scene, you might start by grouping pieces by color, gathering together the red pieces of the barn, the blue of the sky, and the green of the grass. If you group the pieces of this argument, what categories would you use?

They begin. As they work, I circulate around observing, giving encouragement, or gently helping them reason through when I see they are stuck on a problem.

Pedagogical and Scholarly Foundations of “Puzzling” Through Theory

A hands-on collaboration that visually reconstructs a theoretical argument is considerably different from a standard lecture approach to teaching theory. Theory often carries a strong association with abstraction, and unsurprisingly many common classroom techniques for teaching theory also ask students to interact with theory at an abstract level. But we know from pedagogical studies of education that learning styles vary, and that many students are kinetic or visual learners who learn by doing and seeing (Reid 1995). Indeed, hands-on ways of learning are frequently more effective than abstract lecture for gaining a deeper understanding of a theoretical concept, with better ability to retain and apply that knowledge (Kolb 2014; Nelson et al. 1993).

Unpacking theory as a reassembled puzzle is a strategy utilized by mature scholars employing narrative analysis to diagram a theory’s structure (Mahoney 1999). One of Mahoney’s assignments in his graduate course asks students to diagram an argument

on their own. When I was a graduate student in Jim's class, I was dazzled by the experience, amazed that something so fun had also helped me master a complex theoretical argument. Now as a professor, I often include an exercise in my graduate courses where students diagram an article's theoretical argument (see two examples of my grad students diagramming Slater's (2009) work). But instead of teaching comparative historical narrative analysis per se, I use it as a practice that forces a deeper engagement with theory building, laying bare the structure and sequence of argumentation, and thereby opening up informed moments of critical engagement, in which students can identify steps in the sequence for further interrogation.

Undergraduates typically struggle to produce a diagram themselves, but can reassemble the argument if the teacher provides the basic building blocks and guidance. In the eight years since I first ran the "assemble the puzzle" exercise with the French Revolution, I have run this exercise dozens of times with a variety of different theories—including Eric Helleiner (1998) on how money causes nationalism, Peter A. Hall (2012) on how varieties of capitalism help explain the Euro crisis, and James Scott (1998) on how imposition of nonlocal authority imposed Euclidean abstract rationality on cities. So I can confidently state that the underlying form of the exercise is easily transposable to a variety of different theoretical content.

Tips on "Puzzling" in Your Classroom

If I've successfully sold you on the technique and you'd like to think about puzzling through theory in your own course, then read on for specific tips about what works (and what doesn't).

Constructing the Puzzle

- **Prep Time.** There can be some sunk costs in setting up this exercise the first time but this initial investment pays itself off several times over when you re-run on autopilot.
- **Structure of the Argument.** The exercise is less frustrating to students when the article has a clear linear sequential argument. Consider alerting students to the structure if the argument includes recursivity, contingency (multiple if/then pathways), node-and-spoke arguments in which a variety of distinct sequences emerge as a result of a central change etc.
- **One Right Way.** The exercise works best when there is only one right way to assemble the pieces, and the groups are able to reach that outcome sometime within 10 minutes of the end of class. Try to design your pieces with this in mind.
- **Pilot Test.** There can be some trial and error in getting the right amount of summary and specificity; test and revise as needed.

Running the Exercise

- **Individual Specialists.** Individual students should receive a manageable number of pieces of the argument, and given time before the exercise to begin.
- **Group Size.** Ideal group size is a factor of how well the students work together and the total number of steps involved. Generally, the exercise works great in groups of three to six.
- **Manage Group Dynamics.** You may want to be cognizant of dominant personalities

or gender dynamics in the small group structure to ensure that students are cooperating with each other considerately and that everyone's voice is heard.

- **Save It!** Encourage them to snap a picture of their completed argument as a study guide.

By employing the *metaphorical* frame of a jigsaw puzzle, instructors put the alien process of “thinking theoretically” into a schema that is accessible to any student who has ever assembled a jigsaw puzzle. By employing the *physical form* of fitting together puzzle pieces, students engage experiential and visual learning styles that are often under-represented in classrooms, but which can be effective ways of building mastery over complex questions. By giving each student responsibility over a few pieces of the big picture, norms of small group social obligation naturally reinforce engagement.

Ultimately, teaching theory as a puzzle affords undergraduate learners a microcosm of “doing theory” professionally, as they journey through frustrations, challenges, and missteps, ultimately culminating in an *answer* – and the thrill of discovery that comes with it. Groups feel an incredible sense of accomplishment when they complete a puzzle, and because of the experience of the journey they have a demonstrably stronger grasp of the argument. Though many are nervous or uncomfortable because the activity is unfamiliar when they become familiar with and understand “their” pieces. Otherwise groups dump pieces into a big pile,

and silently stare at the pool, too overwhelmed start, many classes enjoy the exercise so much by the end that they request to do it again with another reading later in the semester.

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CONFERENCE RECAP

New Directions in Pragmatism*B. Robert Owens, University of Chicago*

The Pragmatism and Sociology Conference, held August 21, 2015, at the Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago, drew a crowd of approximately 120. The conference was organized by Christopher Winship, Christopher Muller, Neil Gross, John Levi Martin, and Robert Owens, and co-sponsored by Andrew Abbott. The conference was part of a crowded slate of pre-ASA events, including the Junior Theorists' Symposium, also hosted at the University of Chicago. These overlapping events created challenges for organizers and potential attendees alike. As the conference drew much more interest than initially anticipated, we had to decide whether to change our venue, our budget and, most importantly, our conception of the conference midstream. When registrations rose above 100 (we expected 30-50 at the outset), the organizers were faced with an apparent trade-off between two Deweyan ideals we valued equally highly: openness to all, and the opportunity for all to participate actively in the conference's intellectual exchanges. We decided to err on the side of openness, and ultimately we were able to seat everyone who signed up through the conference website. Happily, the level of the conversation also remained high throughout the day, and short presentations followed by long discussion periods allowed for meaningful audience participation.

The conference began with a strong sense of opportunity and purpose. Winship's welcoming address harkened back to a similar conference held a few years ago at Harvard, along with the candid assessment that "in an important sense that effort failed." An explicit goal of this year's conference, therefore, was to clarify the place

of pragmatist thought in the discipline of sociology, and to encourage substantial follow-up after the conference. Efforts in that direction are ongoing. In this short review, I give more allusions than explanations of the papers' arguments, and I hope interested readers will follow up with the papers, which remain available on the conference website: <http://sociology.uchicago.edu/pragmatismconf/papers.shtml>.

Conference panels were organized around several themes: (1) theory and evidence, (2) agency and action, (3) methodological implications, (4) pragmatism and fields of study, and (5) valuation. But the thematic conversations that dominated the day's conversations cut across these panels. The crowd continually returned to several themes: the meaning and relevance of "orthodoxy" in pragmatism; the normative implications of pragmatist thought; and what, if anything, was the pragmatic value of the conference itself. The last question was raised persistently, even urgently, in Winship's opening remarks, in Abbott's comments after the first panel, and by Susan Silbey in one of the final comments of the day. We arrived at no conclusive answer, although an authentic resolution of that point was probably always beyond the scope of the single day's proceedings. It will be borne out in months and years to come.

The applications of pragmatism to contemporary empirical work were on display in several of the presentations, notably those by Mario Small (on those to whom people turn for social support), Matthew Desmond (an ethnography of the process of eviction), and

Adam Seligman (on non-profit pedagogy and practice). Small's paper was an elegant reminder of that how we conceptualize action matters even in apparently very simple, descriptive contexts. When people turn to others for help, their action orientations may be instrumental, affective, or pragmatist—but we cannot coherently say that they are all three. Desmond took on a vastly more complex empirical setting—the production and perpetuation of a city slum—but, like Small, argued that excessive abstraction can lead us astray when we aim to understand why and how people act. Small, Desmond, and Seligman all argued that linking social research to social interventions was perhaps a more authentically pragmatist concern than linking social research to pragmatist theory. Their talks thereby compelled us to think seriously about the normative content of the interventions they described, and initiated a discussion of the normative implications of pragmatism that would recur throughout the day.

Notwithstanding Small's, Desmond's, and Seligman's important arguments, there was little apparent appetite for working out, at a theoretical level, a statement of contemporary and applied sociological pragmatism. Martin set the tone on this point early on when he suggested that pragmatist ideas are sufficiently distant from our normal habits of thought that we must continue to read the classics—we cannot trust ourselves to get pragmatism right if we unmoor ourselves from them. This set an extended conversation on orthodoxy—what it means, and whether we should value it—into motion.

In the day's classics-heavy, norm-inflected discussions, Dewey clearly emerged as the thinker of single greatest interest to the crowd. Iddo Tavory and Stefan Timmermans made a case for Peircian semiotics as the key basis for

a pragmatist theory of action, and James, Mead, and Rorty each merited mention in at least a couple of papers. The discussion of symbolic interactionism was limited to a single extended exchange. Yet throughout the day, the discussion of Dewey was the most sustained and perhaps also the most detailed and conceptually rigorous.

The papers by Neil Gross and Hannah Waight (on Dewey's view of social science), Ann Mische (on Dewey as a resource for understanding future-oriented action), and Dan Huebner (on Mead's view of history) all explored how the classics continue to act as valuable resources for contemporary questions. Gross and Waight argued that Dewey's interest in social action did not amount to an intended "basis for a social theoretical paradigm" and that his experimentalism may entail stronger disapproval of our current methods and standards of proof than we usually admit. Mische argued, conversely, not that we have been invoking Dewey when we shouldn't, but that we haven't when we usefully could. Dewey in *Human Nature and Conduct* theorized about the "cognitive and emotional processes" by which we think about our future—a line of inquiry that Mische herself is pioneering in the present and one that opens up many further opportunities for important sociological work. Huebner made the case for Mead as a productive resource for thinking through the conceptual and definitional challenges that are never finally put to rest in historically-oriented social science.

Pragmatism is a sprawling intellectual movement with branches running in different directions within and outside of sociology. At the conference we fell into certain habits of thought about pragmatism that focused our discussions while simultaneously stripping

away much of pragmatism's complexity. This was probably an inevitable development, and it brought with it clear benefits but also limitations. In addition to the focus on Dewey, two further narrowing assumptions about pragmatism that took hold seemed especially salient to me.

First, the conference was above all about pragmatism and American sociology. The specific contours of our national discipline structured the ongoing discussions of how to use pragmatism—this was evident, for example, in Steven Hitlin's paper on social psychology as the most (but in some ways the least) pragmatist sub-discipline of sociology, and in Daniel Silver's account of his intellectual journey into sociology after writing a dissertation on Kant and Heidegger. No one has done more to establish the significance of pragmatism to contemporary social theory and empirical sociology than Hans Joas, and his influence was certainly felt at the conference. Joas's former students Huebner and Silver were among the presenters, and almost half of the presented papers cited his work. But the focus on specifically national disciplinary concerns in the conference discussions marked a significant departure from Joas's frequent efforts to put pragmatist theory in dialogue with trends in German social theory and philosophy. For all the richness of international sociology that was thus left aside, this move helped to provide focus to the conference, and it was in a way even an exciting intellectual development. While pragmatism developed and took root in the United States, the Americanism of the conference represented a maturation of sociological pragmatism independent of the interests and ideas of its preeminent contemporary expositor.

A second, related habit of thought that became visible over the course of the day was the

treatment of rational choice theory as the assumed foil to pragmatist explanations in social science. Winship's paper and commentary by Josh Whitford complicated the dichotomy, but rational choice seemed to remain the dominant assumed interlocutor for much of the time. In one moment of productive tension, Desmond had to clarify in response to a question from the floor that rational choice theory was not the "big bad wolf" he was contesting in his ethnography. I suspect that the costs of this particular habit of thought outweighed the benefits—that is, our collective tendency to set up pragmatism in opposition to rational choice theory may have concealed more than it revealed. By setting our sights on an opponent that was too easily dismissed in simplistic caricature, we perhaps passed over some opportunities to flesh out the finer points of pragmatist epistemology, as outlined in Isaac Reed's challenging paper, and the very practical matter of how to learn and theorize pragmatically, Richard Swedberg's topic.

Several of the papers provided fascinating glimpses of pragmatism's boundaries and points of contact with other traditions, albeit in a somewhat chaotic fashion. Abbott discussed how the arrival on the scene of another intellectual movement (developmental psychology) fundamentally altered the trajectory of pragmatism between the generation of James and Peirce and that of Mead and Dewey. Nina Eliasoph used pragmatism to attempt to clarify a core concept in the institutional logics literature. Philip Gorski presented a challenging argument about pragmatist metaphysics and pragmatism's relationship to critical realism—challenging because, as he noted, a common argument and common assumption about pragmatism is that it is fundamentally anti-metaphysical. Reed pointed out in the discussion that we sociologists often rely heavily on Bourdieu's

key theoretical terms in theoretical discussions, and some of those terms—habitus and reflexivity—bear strong family resemblances to pragmatist concepts of habit and creativity. An exchange between Reed and Ann Swidler signaled that working out pragmatism's relation to Bourdieu's field theory remains an important unresolved project in sociological theory—one of several productive loose ends left open at the close of the conference.

As for what may come out of the conference, two possibilities are in play. One is a published volume that might distill the common ideas developed in the papers and the day's discussions. The goal would be to provide an agenda-setting statement on the place of pragmatism in contemporary sociology with a more systematic presentation of the key themes than the conference format was able to provide. The second possible outgrowth of the conference is a website to serve as a focal point for discussions of the pragmatist canon—a more dynamic version of a traditional “reader.”

Both ideas are still in early development, and of course both entail the risk of failure through confusion, fragmentation, or simply failure to attract attention. The range of possible outcomes for a website seems especially large, given that there are few models to follow. But the pragmatist ethos embodied in Dewey's writings on democracy is experimental and open-ended, and it seems to favor certain features of a website as a follow up to the conference, which could draw on the wisdom of the crowd and could evolve continuously. Gorski motivated his conference paper with an opening reference to a debate that took place on a blog—a compelling reminder that in consequential ways our scholarly communication system already relies on informal online channels. Those of us who are invested in seeing a clear, rigorous, and useable sociological pragmatism develop as a mainstay of the discipline may be well served to embrace experimentalism in this realm as well as others.

CONFERENCE RECAP

The 2015 Junior Theorists' Symposium

Hillary Angelo, University of California, Santa Cruz

Ellis Monk, University of Chicago

The ninth Junior Theorists' Symposium (JTS) was held at the University of Chicago on Friday, August 21st. The one-day conference featured the work of nine junior scholars and three senior discussants: Patricia Hill Collins (University of Maryland), George Steinmetz (University of Michigan – Ann Arbor), and Gary Alan Fine (Northwestern University).

JTS began nine years ago as opportunity for sociologists at the earliest stages of their careers to engage prominent 'senior' theorists in conversation, and as a place to share creative, original, and half-baked ideas. As the symposium has grown in size and reputation, it has also become highly competitive: JTS receives close to 90 submissions for 9 slots each year, and the event is (rightly or wrongly) perceived to be an important venue for young scholars on the job market. Applications have grown extremely polished, and presentations for the most part very professional, as the event's growing size and profile have disciplined young theorists accordingly.

In 2015, we remained committed to preserving JTS as one of the few places where, as last year's organizers put it, "not only junior scholars, but junior *scholarship*...receives a public platform." We achieved this goal by selecting papers that were highly original and still in conceptual development. In addition, we wanted to use JTS's growing status as an opportunity to profile work in sociological subfields not always considered close to the intellectual heart of traditional "theory," and selected discussants and organized the panels

accordingly. In so doing we hoped to help continue to make JTS a more inclusive space as the event matures.

The event was a great success. One thing we had not anticipated was the continued proliferation of pre-ASA mini-conferences, several of which were of particular interest to a large number of JTS regulars. As a result, attendance was quite a bit smaller than in 2014, with closer to 50 than 100 attendees in the audience. Still, the generous financial contributions and lively conversation that continued over food and beer during the "Theory in the Wild" reception attests to the continued importance of the event. Participants and audience members celebrated JTS as a warm, funny, and intellectually stimulating environment.

The papers and discussants were excellent. We especially thank Drs. Collins, Steinmetz, and Fine for taking the time to provide such thorough and provocative feedback. One interesting and useful effect of the smaller audience size was that there could be much more dialogue between presenters and discussants, and among presenters, both within and across panels. Though we organized the panels based on the empirical foci of the papers presented, we could have easily chosen any number of theoretical and methodological themes that ran across many of them, such as ideology, case selection, the use of quantitative data in theoretical arguments, and the relationship of political and normative arguments to theory.

The first panel examined “Race and Gender.” Clayton Childress (University of Toronto) presented a paper called “Cultures of Inequality: The ‘Double Match’ of Race and Meaning.” Childress’s study of trade fiction publishing showed how literary agents’ use of race as a category of cultural difference produced unequal outcomes in publication: white agents are hesitant to represent black authors. Jason Orne (University of Wisconsin-Madison) presented a “theory of sexual racism” in his paper of the same title. Orne showed how structural availability, cultural hierarchies of attractiveness, and interactional search methods influence racial partner selection even in interracial relationships, thus demonstrating the interplay between sexuality and race at the individual level. To close, Sarah Mayorga-Gallo (University of Cincinnati) presented a paper entitled “Diversity as Ideology in Multiethnic Spaces.” Mayorga-Gallo drew on ethnographic research in a multiethnic neighborhood in the United States to argue that “diversity” is an ideology that contributes to the maintenance of white dominance in multiethnic spaces. Dr. Collins’ comments prompted panelists to consider *racism* as an—even unintentional—social process; the possibility of interacting/multiple ideologies; and the challenges of carrying out fully intersectional analyses—in this case, one of race and sexual orientation.

The topic of the second panel was “The State and Globalization.” Anna Skarpelis (New York University) compared the role of race in welfare state building in Germany and Japan in her paper, “Brutality in Stone? Nazi Germany, the Japanese Colonial Empire, and Insidiously Racialized Welfare States.” Skarpelis argued that race operates “insidiously” in two senses in the German and Japanese welfare states: it produces patterned and unjust outcomes in the provision of state services, and also operates as

an amorphous, underspecified concept, particularly post-1945. Ana Velitchkova (Centre for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies) presented “Aiming at the Equal Community, Producing Inequality: The Community Logic Meets the Logic of Practice in the Making of the Global Esperanto Field.” Velitchkova used the case of Esperanto to argue that even in the most egalitarian-minded communities, and even in those with universal inclusion as their explicit goal, participation and inclusion is uneven. Lastly, in “Linguistic Modernity: The Limits of Ideology and State Power in the Creation of Modern Standard Languages,” Jeffrey Weng (University of California, Berkeley) named and described the concept “linguistic modernity.” Weng’s paper historicized the ideal of a universalized linguistic field and argued that this ideal is closely tied to nationalism, and thus linked to national identity and territoriality. Dr. Steinmetz’s remarks concerned the interpretation of historical material and what kinds of conclusions we can draw from marginal cases.

In the last panel, “Culture,” Ekédi Mpondo-Dika (Harvard University) began by presenting a paper titled “How Institutions Feel: Funeral Homes, Human Service Agencies, and the Institutional Patterning of Emotion.” Mpondo-Dika theorized the institutional structuration of emotional experience and proposed the concept of “institutional emotion-making” to emphasize institutions’ roles in selecting, relaying, and entrenching some cultural categories of feeling at the expense of others. Next, Brad Vermurlen (University of Notre Dame) studied the management of cultural marginality in cultural production, presenting a paper called “Structural Overlap and the Management of Cultural Marginality: The Case of Calvinist Hip-Hop.” Based on the public discourse and performances of Calvinist hip-

hop artists, Vermurlen specified four mechanisms by which cultural marginality is self-managed or managed by others. Finally, Natalie B. Aviles (University of California, San Diego) presented “Moving Targets in the ‘War on Cancer:’ Toward a Pragmatic Event-Based Theory of Organizational Culture in the National Cancer Institute,” in which she offered a preliminary sketch of a theory of organizational culture for sociology of science, drawing on insights from American pragmatism. She offered a “pragmatic process theory of organization” as a theoretical lens, and used it to analyze the formation of translational research at the National Cancer Institute. Dr. Fine challenged the idea that institutions “feel” and raised questions about building theory from concrete cases.

In addition, this year’s JTS inaugurated a new annual feature: for the first time, the winner of the Theory Section’s Junior Theorist Award was invited to present at JTS. The Theory Section granted two awards in 2015, to Isaac Ariail Reed (University of Colorado – Boulder) and Claire Decoteau (University of Illinois – Chicago). Because Reed was unable to attend, Decoteau presented a paper on new research called “Only 10% Human: Gut Bugs, Autism, and Bodies without Organs.” The paper drew on interviews with Somali parents of children with autism in Toronto, who believe that gut bacteria is one of the primary causal factors for the development of autism and blame the diet and medical environment in North America for the high rates of autism in the Somali diaspora. Decoteau drew on Deleuze and Guattari to show how ‘gut bugs’ disrupt the biomedical ontology of the body, challenge sociologists to rethink materiality, and, for Somalis, serve as a postcolonial critique.

The mini-conference concluded with an invited after-panel on the theme of the challenges of “abstraction.” Kieran Healy (Duke), Virag Molnar (The New School), Andrew Perrin (UNC-Chapel Hill), and Kristen Schilt (University of Chicago) reflected on theory-building as a process of abstraction, and the particular challenge of reconciling abstract theory with the concrete complexities of human embodiment and the specificity of historical events.

JTS continues next year under the leadership of Anna Skarpelis and Clayton Childress. Skarpelis and Childress are eager to continue the tradition of JTS, and to bring together junior and senior theory scholars. JTS 2016 will be held on Friday, August 19 at Seattle University (see the official call below). While Skarpelis and Childress are still booking discussants, they are excited to announce the participants in the JTS 2016 after-panel, which will consist of Ashley Mears (Boston University), Fred Wherry (Yale University), Tey Meadow (Harvard University) and Chris Bail (Duke University), discussing the relationship between theory and method. For JTS 2016 they will also hold a brainstorming meeting among the new co-organizers for JTS 2017 and JTS alumni interested in contributing to the future direction of the event. This will take place immediately after the theory section business meeting.

We offer our thanks to the entire Junior Theorists community—including past panelists, discussants, and organizers, and especially the Theory Section—for its continued support. We hope to see you in Seattle!

Member News and Notes

Fall 2015

BOOKS

Abramson, Corey. 2015. [*The End Game: How Inequality Shapes Our Final Years*](#). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Baker, Joseph O., and Buster G. Smith. 2015. [*American Secularism: Cultural Contours of Nonreligious Belief Systems*](#). New York: NYU Press.

Daipha, Phaedra. 2015. [*Masters of Uncertainty: Weather Forecasters and the Quest for Ground Truth*](#). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Duyvendak, Jan Willem, and James M. Jasper, eds. 2015. [*Breaking Down the State: Protestors Engaged*](#). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Duyvendak, Jan Willem, and James M. Jasper. 2015. [*Players and Arenas: The Interactive Dynamics of Protest*](#). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Jasper, James M. 2014. [*Protest: A Cultural Introduction to Social Movements*](#). New York: Polity.

Jung, Moon-Kie. 2015. [*Beneath the Surface of White Supremacy: Denaturalizing U.S. Racisms Past and Present*](#). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Markofski, Wes. 2015. [*New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism*](#). New York: Oxford University Press.

McCormick, Lisa. 2015. [*Performing Civility: International Competitions in Classical Music*](#). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McGarry, Aidan, and James M. Jasper, eds. 2015. [*The Identity Dilemma: Social Movements and Collective Identity*](#). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Royce, Edward. 2015. [*Classical Social Theory and Modern Society: Marx, Durkheim, Weber*](#). Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield.

Savelsberg, Joachim J. 2015. [*Representing Mass Violence: Conflicting Responses to Human Rights Violations in Darfur*](#). Oakland: University of California Press.

Stones, Rob. 2015. [*Why Current Affairs Needs Social Theory*](#). New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

ARTICLES AND BOOK CHAPTERS

Blute, Marion. 2015. "Modes of Variation and Their Implications for an Extended Evolutionary Synthesis." Pp. 59-75 in [*Handbook on Evolution and Society: Toward an Evolutionary Social Science*](#), edited by Jonathan H. Turner, Richard Machalek, and Alexandra Maryanski. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

Ermakoff, Ivan. 2015. "The Structure of Contingency." [*American Journal of Sociology* 121\(1\): 64-125.](#)

Fein, Lisa C., and Jeremy B. Straughn. 2014. "How Citizenship Matters: Narratives of Statelessness and Citizenship Choice in Estonia." [*Citizenship Studies* 18\(6/7\): 690-706.](#)

Fridman, Daniel. 2014. "Resisting the Lure of the Paycheck: Freedom and Dependence in Financial Self-Help." [*Foucault Studies* 18: 90-112.](#)

Hall, John R. 2015. "Patrimonialism in America: The Public Domain in the Making of Modernity—from Colonial Times to the Late Nineteenth Century." [*Political Power and Social Theory* 28: 7-41.](#)

Lopes, Paul. 2015. "The Heroic Age of American Avant-Garde Art." [*Theory and Society* 44\(3\): 219-49.](#)

Luft, Aliza. 2015. "Genocide as Contentious Politics." [*Sociology Compass* 9\(10\): 897-909.](#)

Mayrl, Damon. 2015. "How Does the State Structure Secularization?" [*European Journal of Sociology* 56\(2\): 207-39.](#)

Menchik, Daniel. 2014. "Decisions about Knowledge in Medical Practice: The Effect of Temporal Features of a Task." [*American Journal of Sociology* 120: 701-49.](#)

Reyes, Victoria. 2015. "Global Borderlands: A Case Study of Subic Bay Freeport Zone, Philippines." [*Theory and Society* 44\(4\): 355-84.](#)

Turner, Stephen. 2015. "Entzauberung and Rationalization in Weber: A Comment on Iván Szelenyi, and Incidentally on Habermas." [*International Political Anthropology* 8\(1\): 37-51.](#)

Velitchkova, Ana. 2015. "World Culture, Uncoupling, Institutional Logics, and Recoupling: Practices and Self-Identification as Institutional Microfoundations of Political Violence." [*Sociological Forum* 30: 698-720.](#)

OTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS

Aliza Luft won the 2015 Outstanding Graduate Student Paper Award (Honorable Mention) for the Collective Behavior and Social Movements Section of the American Sociological Association.

Richard York won the 2015 Distinguished Scholarship Award from the Animals and Society Section of the American Sociological Association.

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

The 2016 Junior Theorists' Symposium

Seattle, Washington, August 19, 2016

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: February 22, 2016

We invite submissions of extended abstracts for the 10th Junior Theorists Symposium (JTS), to be held in Seattle, WA on August 19th, 2016, the day before the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association (ASA). The JTS is a one-day conference featuring the work of up-and-coming sociologists, affiliated with the Theory Section of the ASA. Since 2005, the conference has brought together early career-stage sociologists who engage in theoretical work, broadly defined.

We are pleased to announce that Mounira Charrad (UT Austin), Ann Mische (Notre Dame), and Tukufu Zuberi (UPenn) will serve as discussants for this year's symposium. In addition, we are pleased to announce an after-panel on the relationship between theory and method featuring Christopher Bail (Duke), Tey Meadow (Harvard), Ashley Mears (Boston University), and Frederick Wherry (Yale).

We invite all ABD graduate students, postdocs, and assistant professors who received their PhDs from 2012 onwards to submit up to a three-page précis (800-1000 words). The précis should include the key theoretical contribution of the paper and a general outline of the argument. Be sure also to include (1) a

paper title, (2) author's name, title and contact information, and (3) three or more descriptive keywords. As in previous years, in order to encourage a wide range of submissions we do not have a pre-specified theme for the conference. Instead, papers will be grouped into sessions based on emergent themes and discussants' areas of interest and expertise.

Please send submissions to the organizers, Anna Skarpelis (New York University) and Clayton Childress (University of Toronto), at juniortheorists@gmail.com with the phrase "JTS submission" in the subject line. The deadline is February 22. By early March we will extend up to 12 invitations to present at JTS 2016. Please plan to share a full paper by July 27, 2016.

Finally, for friends and supporters of JTS, the JTS symposium depends on donations to be self-sustaining. We ask that you consider donating either on-site or through PayPal to the juniortheorists@gmail.com account. If you are submitting a proposal to JTS 2016, however, we kindly ask that should you wish to donate, you only do so after the final schedule has been announced.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Theory Section Open Sessions at ASA 2016

OPEN PAPER SESSION 1: *Directions in Relational Sociology: Theory, Method and Practice*

Session Organizer: **Emily Erikson** (Yale University), email: emily.erikson@yale.edu

Relational sociology provides a large-scale theoretical framework for the social sciences. This panel will address the following types of questions: How do you practice a relational sociology? Are some methods inherently more relational? What is the pay-off to using relational concepts, theory, or methods in empirical research -- particularly relative to other theoretically driven research programs? What makes research relational?

OPEN PAPER SESSION 2: *Abduction and the Craft of Theorizing*

Session Organizer: **Iddo Tavory** (New York University), email: iddo.tavory@nyu.edu

The past few years have seen increasing attention to early pragmatism, and a resurgent interest in abduction: the imaginative recasting of the world in terms of surprising observations. We invite papers that develop or critically assess this move, linking it to explanation, causality, and the craft of theorizing.

OPEN PAPER SESSION 3: *Theorizing Perception*

Session Organizers: **Joseph Klett** (University of California, Santa Cruz) and **Terence McDonnell** (University of Notre Dame), email: jklett@ucsc.edu

This session welcomes research that builds theory for the sociological study of sense perception. Cognition and materiality are hot topics in theory these days. New research on the sociology of perception and sensory experience can bring these important theoretical contributions into conversation. To further close this gap, this panel seeks papers that push forward sociological theorizing on perception, including papers that consider perception beyond the visual to hearing, taste, smell, and touch. How are the senses made and remade in everyday life? What does perception "do" to interaction and interpretation? And how might we test these theories using qualitative methods? We encourage authors to submit papers that address the social production and reproduction of perception, the roles of perception in interaction, and/or the methods which researchers might use to study perception. We welcome a broad range of perspectives including but not limited to theories of culture, cognition, embodiment, and practice. Of particular interest are papers that contribute to material-semiotic or hermeneutic analysis, papers that critically engage affordance theory/ecological psychology and/or cognitive science, and papers that address perception at work in collective action.

THEORY SECTION REFEREED ROUNDTABLES

Session Organizer: Achim Edelmann (University of Bern), email: achim.edelmann@soz.unibe.ch

Theory Section Award Announcements

The Theory Prize (Book in 2016)

The Theory Prize is given to recognize outstanding work in theory. In even-numbered years, it is given to a book, and in odd-numbered years, to a paper; in both cases, eligible works are those published in the preceding four calendar years. This year the Prize will go to a book published during 2012, 2013, 2014 or 2015. To be considered for the award, a nominating letter must be sent by email to the chair of the committee by **March 1, 2016**. In addition, nominated books must be sent to the listed physical addresses of all five committee members, postmarked no later than **March 15, 2016**. Self-nominations are welcome.

Committee Chair: Isaac Ariail Reed,
University of Colorado
(isaac.reed@colorado.edu)

Department of Sociology
327 UCB
Boulder, CO 80309

Committee Members:

Laura Ford, Bard College
c/o Melissa Germano
Fairbairn 207
Bard College Sociology Program
P.O. Box 5000
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Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, University of California, Santa Barbara
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5701 S. Woodlawn Ave.
Neubauer Collegium
University of Chicago
Chicago, IL 60637

Paul McLean, Rutgers University
Department of Sociology
Rutgers University
26 Nichol Avenue
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-2882

Junior Theorist Award

The Junior Theorist Award honors the best paper each year submitted by an early-career sociologist. Self-nominations are invited by scholars who have received the Ph.D. but who, at the time of nomination, are not more than eight years beyond the calendar year in which the Ph.D. was granted. Nominations should consist of one article written or published in the 12 months preceding the nominations deadline and a letter explaining how the paper advances sociological theorizing.

The winner will present a keynote address at the Junior Theorists Symposium the year after the award is given (2017). Please submit the article electronically to the committee members at the email addresses below by **March 1, 2016**.

Committee Chair: Claudio Benzecry,
Northwestern University
(claudio.benzecry@northwestern.edu)

Committee Members:

Kieran Healy, Duke University

(kjhealy@soc.duke.edu)

Steve Hoffman, University of Buffalo

(sgh@buffalo.edu)

Brayden King, Northwestern University

(b-king@kellogg.northwestern.edu)

Michael W. Raphael, Graduate Center, CUNY

(mraphael@gc.cuny.edu)

The Edward Shils-James Coleman Memorial Award for Best Student Paper

The Shils-Coleman Award recognizes distinguished work in the theory area by a graduate student. Work may take the form of (a) a paper published or accepted for publication; (b) a paper presented at a professional meeting; or (c) a paper suitable for publication or presentation at a professional meeting. Papers must be authored solely by graduate students or jointly by graduate student collaborators. Each year's selection committee has latitude in determining procedures for selecting the winner, including the option of awarding no prize if suitable work has not been nominated. The Shils-Coleman Award includes an award of \$500.00 for reimbursement of travel expenses for attending the annual ASA meeting. Please submit the article electronically to each of the committee members at the email addresses below. Self-nominations are welcome. The deadline for submission is **March 1, 2016**.

Committee Chair: Craig Rawlings,
Northwestern University

(craig.rawlings@northwestern.edu)

Committee Members:

Matthew Norton, University of Oregon

(mnorton@uoregon.edu)

Juan Pablo Pardo-Guerra, London School of Economics

(j.p.pardo-guerra@lse.ac.uk)

Vaughn Schmutz, UNC Charlotte

(vschmutz@uncc.edu)

Andrea Voyer, Pace University

(avoyer@pace.edu)

Lewis A. Coser Award for Theoretical Agenda Setting

The ASA Theory Section seeks nominations for the Lewis A. Coser Award for Theoretical Agenda Setting. This prize is intended to recognize a mid-career sociologist whose work holds great promise for setting the agenda in the field of sociology. While the award winner need not be a theorist, her or his work must exemplify the sociological ideals that Lewis Coser represented, including resisting the fragmentation of sociology, maintaining the discipline's critical edge, and insuring the predominance of substance over method. Eligible candidates must be sociologists or do work that is of crucial importance to sociology. They must have received a Ph.D. no less than five and no more than twenty years before their candidacy. Nomination letters should make a strong substantive case for the nominee's selection and should discuss the nominee's work and his or her anticipated future trajectory. No self-nominations are allowed. After nomination, the Committee will solicit additional information for those candidates they consider appropriate for consideration, including published works and at least two additional letters of support from third parties. The Committee may decide in any

given year that no nominee warrants the award, in which case it will not be awarded that year. Send nominations to the Chair of the Committee, **John Mohr** (mohr@soc.ucsb.edu). The deadline for submissions is **March 1, 2016**.

Committee Chair: John Mohr, University of California, Santa Barbara
(mohr@soc.ucsb.edu)

Committee Members:

Marion Fourcade, University of California, Berkeley (previous year's recipient)

Kathleen Gerson, New York University, Vice President-Elect of the ASA

David A. Smith, University of California, Irvine, President of the Society for the Study of Social Problems

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

Stumped about what to send your favorite social theory colleague? We've got you covered. You can find eCards for every secular, commercialized American celebration this winter online at <http://www.asatheory.org>!

