

# PERSPECTIVES

*The Theory Section Newsletter*

VOLUME 16, NO. 1

OCTOBER 1993

## SECTION OFFICERS

**Chair**

Theda Skocpol

**Incoming Chair**

Charles Camic

**Secretary-Treasurer**

Mary Rogers

**Council**

Carol Heimer  
Miriam Johnson  
Linda Molm  
Thomas Scheff  
Kim Scheppele  
Charles W. Smith

**Nominating Committee**

Ira Cohen

**Theory Prize Committee**

Bob Connell

**Perspectives Editors**

Keith Doubt

Division of Social Science

Northeast Missouri  
State University  
Kirksville, MO 63501

tel: (816) 785-4636

FAX: (816) 785-4181

BITNET:

SS83@NEMOMUS

INTERNET:

SS83%NEMOMUS@ACADEMIC.N

EMOSTATE.edu

Richard Moodye  
Department of  
Sociology  
Allegheny College  
Meadville, PA 16335

tel: (814) 332-3327

INTERNET:

RMOODEY@ALLEG.EDU

## THE EDITORS TALK

**Doubt:** Teaching theory is one way that we express, sustain, and develop our understanding of theory and its significance to sociology.

**Moodey:** True.

**Doubt:** Well, what do you do?

**Moodey:** I try to use Michael Polanyi's notion that we humans know from something of which we are tacitly aware. I try to get students to attend to social theory in terms of other things they already know — things of which they are tacitly aware. I then move to have them attend to the social world from the theories they have learned. I try to get them to be able to use theories as tools of knowledge, aids to answering questions they really have. (By the way, this is a great theory that sometimes even works in practice.)

**Doubt:** What then is a good theory textbook?

**Moodey:** I think that it depends upon the purpose of the teacher using the book. For example, the same book cannot serve as an introduction to the history of theory, an introduction to systematic theory, and an introduction to theory construction.

**Doubt:** I use two theory textbooks at the same time: Irving Zeitlin's *Ideology and the Development of Sociological Theory* and Lewis Coser's *Masters of Sociological Thought*. I ask students to compare and contrast the rhetorical and the substantive

presentations of the different theorists. It can get interesting. For instance, Zeitlin's discussion of Max Weber, in contrast to Coser's, hardly mentions the significance of ideal types in sociological inquiry. Coser's review of Auguste Comte, in contrast to Zeitlin's, makes no compelling critique of Comte's work.

**Moodey:** I think that the pedagogical problem is in getting students to master some theoretical ideas well enough so that they are no longer "things-out-there-to-be-learned" but the internalized categories in terms of which they grasp interesting phenomena. When students confront a new theory or a theory about which they are skeptical, it cannot be a means of their knowing something else. Rather than some facet of society, the theory itself is the phenomenon to which students must attend. For students, theories often seem to get in the way of their learning about the really interesting stuff, the lives they lead, and the worlds they view. I want theories to illuminate their lives and to help them make sense of the richness and diversity of human society.

**Doubt:** Are you saying that, as long as theory courses exemplify thinking, significant and serious thinking about social reality, they are not only compelling but popular courses on campus?

**Moodey:** Yep.

**Chorus:** We invite Theory Section members to join in on this conversation.

## THEORY SECTION NEWS

### NAME CHANGE

At this year's business meeting, members voted to change the Section's name from Section on Theoretical Sociology to Theory Section.

"Sociological theories presuppose more than an understanding of the source of structure, or social order. They also proceed from a prior commitments about the nature of human action, particularly assumptions about action's relative rationality" (Jeffrey Alexander, "Action and Its Environments" in *Action and its Environments* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1988], p. 307).

### ELECTION RESULTS

The Theory Section election results for Officers and Council Members are – Chair Elect, Charles Camic, University of Wisconsin; Secretary-Treasurer, Mary Rogers, University of West Florida; Council, Thomas Scheff, University of California at Santa Barbara, Linda Molm, University of Arizona, and Kim Scheppele, University of Michigan, tied for the second position on Council. At the Council Meeting, it was decided that, since Camic steps down from Council to become Chair Elect, both Molm and Scheppele ought to be seated. Since Scheppele won the coin toss to break the tie, Scheppele will sit on Council for three years; Molm for two years (which is when Camic's position would expire).

"No canon, no collective, no institution can go outside itself to a world of independent objects for criteria of knowledge, since there is no other way except by its own rules to describe what's being done with regard to knowledge. Sociology, then, is responsible not just for its substantive discoveries but for having created the very possibility of them, because it has created itself. Sociological truth, as with any other kind, exists only because sociology has generated its own ways of conceding truth. It is not an aggregation of private people sensing individual objects, but a public, rule-guided, and institutionalized canon of social procedure" (Peter McHugh, "On the Failure of

Positivism" in *Understanding Everyday Life: Toward the Reconstruction of Sociological Knowledge*, ed. Jack D. Douglas [Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1970], p. 335).

The members of this year's Nominating Committee are Ira Cohen, Chair, Chris Pendergast, Stephen P. Turner, Janet Gouldner-Verplank, and Eviatar Zerubavel.

"Do not demand of politics that it restore the 'rights' of the individual, as philosophy has defined them. The individual is the product of power. What is needed is to 'de-individualize' by means of multiplication and displacement, diverse combinations. The group must not be the organic bond uniting hierarchized individuals, but a constant generator of de-individualization" (Michel Foucault in "Preface" to *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983], p. xiv).

### THEORY SECTION PRIZE 1993

This year's annual Theory Section Prize goes to Michael Macy of Brandeis University for his article, "Social Learning and the Structure of Collective Action," which is to appear soon in *Advances in Group Processes*. The Prize Committee – made up of Ira Cohen, John Hall, Michael Hechter, Diane Margolis, and James Rule – found this article to be a significant contribution to the rapidly growing theoretical literature on collective action. In contrast to more conventional rational choice models based on the assumption that individuals are "forward-looking" utility-maximizers, Macy presents an alternative stochastic learning model based on the assumption that people are "backward-looking" agents who respond to previously experienced reinforcement. This shift in assumptions, Macy argues, enables us to understand why people sometimes produce collective goods even if they might be better off by free riding. Using computer simulations, Macy then develops an evolutionary analysis of the conditions under which collective action can and cannot be sustained. The members of the Prize Committee extend their congratulations to Michael Macy.

## THEORY SECTION NEWS

"A moral observer cannot grade his subjects by looking at the doing of a behavior the way arithmetic teachers grade theirs by looking at the doing of a multiplication. And again, it is not because observers are weak or uninformed, nor because the moral rules are merely more complex, but because moral rules are incomparably and qualitatively distinctive. We never talk of the "erosion" of arithmetic, for example, but this is easy with morality, because deviance is always a conventional-theoretic charge. Moral rules not only permit but create and require the possibility of argument, denial, and disconfirmation" (Peter McHugh, "A Common-Sense Conception of Deviance" in *Deviance and Responsibility: The Social Construction of Moral Meanings*, ed. Jack D. Douglas [New York: Basics Books], p. 85).

Immanuel Wallerstein suggested that *Perspectives* publish a record of past Theory Section Prizes. We think that the suggestion is a good one and will try to compile this record for the next issue.

"Deliberate avoidance of philosophy is itself a philosophy, and one that may involve its proponents in many inconsistencies" (Lev Semenovich Vygotsky in *Thought and Language* [Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1962], p. 20).

### NOMINATIONS TO THE THEORY PRIZE COMMITTEE

Nominations are sought for the annual Theory Prize awarded by the ASA Theory Section. This prize recognizes an outstanding work that has made a major contribution either to the development of contemporary sociological theory or to our understanding of classical theory. For 1994, the prize will be selected from books published in English during the years 1990, 1991, 1992, or 1993. Nominations are encouraged from members of the Section; self nominations are acceptable. To have a book considered, please arrange to have three copies sent, along with a letter of nomination briefly outlining the book's

contribution to sociological theory. Send the books and the letter to Professor Bob Connell, Chair of the 1994 Theory Prize Committee, Stevenson College, University of California, Santa Cruz, California 95064. Professor Connell's phone is (408) 459-3837, and his FAX is (408) 459-3334.

"Various considerations dictate that common understandings cannot possibly consist of a measured amount of shared agreement among persons on certain topics" (Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1967], p. 38).

### MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

David Bogen was elected chair of the Membership Committee. The Committee's goal is to raise the membership level to eight hundred; we are fifty or so short.

"Just as society cannot be said to exist in any concrete sense apart from the concrete individuals who make it up, so the concrete human individual whom we know cannot be accounted for in terms of 'individual' elements alone, but there is a social component to his personality" Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*, vol. 1 [New York: Free Press], p. 337).

### Error

The last three issues of *Perspectives* have been incorrectly numbered. Volume 6, Numbers 1, 2, & 3 should have been numbered Volume 16, Numbers 1, 2, & 3.

"I am one of those people who are glad to have their own mistakes pointed out and glad to point out the mistakes of others, but who would just as soon have the first experience as the second; in fact I consider the first a greater gain, inasmuch as it is better to be relieved of very bad trouble oneself than to relieve another" (Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. with an Introduction by Walter Hamilton [Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1960], p. 36).

# PRACTICING

## CALL FOR P

At our business meeting in Miami Beach, the Theory Section voted to hold a theory conference immediately following the 1994 ASA Meeting in Los Angeles. The sense was that such a gathering should focus broadly on looking afresh at theory's place in the world. The conference, co-sponsored with the Department of Sociology, UC - San Diego, will be on the UC - San Diego campus. A program committee will soon make available details about housing, travel from Los Angeles to San Diego, and other logistics. Its members are Bob Connell, Harvey Goldman, Michele Lamont, Mary Rogers, and Stephen Turner.

The committee invites your participation in "Practicing Theory." Propose a panel, a workshop, a poster session, a paper, or even a focus group

about theory as a social and cultural practice; suggest topics that you want aired at the conference; submit the names of colleagues, students (undergraduate as well as graduate), editors, deans, program directors, or other individuals whose perspectives on social theory are distinctive, innovative, or otherwise of interest. The committee hopes this conference will reflect what is on the minds of people who study theory, do theory, or otherwise shape its institutional, cultural, and political status around the globe today.

Practical and intellectual issues, pedagogical and political matters, organizational and cultural concerns – the range of pertinent topics is exhilarating. Topics that committee members have bandied about include the following:

# NG THEORY

## RTICIPATION

- empirical perspectives on theory
- theory as critique
- the relationship among sociological, political, and social theory
- the forms of theoretical work, including forms of writing
- the gendered nature of theory
- how theorists' social locations and identities condition their theorizing
- teaching social thinkers such as Harriet Martineau, Cesar Chavez, or Sun Yat-sen
- meta-theory and theory
- the uses of social theory
- interdisciplinary programs in social theory
- theory across the curriculum
- the audiences for social theory
- students' perceptions of theory and theory education
- the changing intellectual milieu of sociological theory
- social theory as an autonomous, supradisciplinary activity
- Western and non-Western social theory
- sociological theory and feminist theory
- the recruitment of theorists
- theory and cultural studies
- the commerce and culture of publishing theory

To contribute to the conference, scheduled for August 10-11, submit five copies of your one- or two- page proposal to:

Mary Rogers  
 Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
 The University of West Florida  
 Pensacola, FL 32514

The committee welcomes your ideas. The deadline for receipt of submissions is Monday, January 24, 1994.

## LIKELY PERTINENT INFORMATION

### MSWS STUDENT FEMINIST PAPER SCHOLARSHIP COMPETITION

The Midwest Sociologists for Women in Society (MSWS) announces its sixth annual Student Feminist Paper Competition. MSWS will award scholarships to students who have papers accepted for presentation at the 1994 annual meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society in St. Louis.

Papers submitted must have been accepted for presentation at an MSS session, exemplify high standards of scholarship, and reflect feminist concerns and perspectives. To apply for the scholarship, students must submit: (a) three copies of their paper, including an abstract; (b) one faculty letter of support; (c) a cover letter which includes their name, address, phone numbers, paper title, name of the session organizer accepting the paper, and the title of the session in which it will be presented.

Applications must be received no later than Friday, January 21, 1994. Send papers and supporting materials to: Echo E. Fields, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Briar Cliff College, Sioux City, IA 51104, (712) 279-1623.

"I do not mean to raise the metaphysical question of how a person can be both 'I' and 'me' but to ask for the significance of this distinction from the point of view of conduct itself" (George Herbert Mead, *On Social Psychology*, with an Introduction by Anselm Strauss, [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977], p. 229).

### INTERNATIONAL SUMMER SCHOOL IN SOCIAL THEORY AT LANCASTER

The Department of Sociology in association with the Faculty of Social Sciences is pleased to announce an International Summer School in Social Theory (INSIST) to be held annually in two separate blocks (July and August), commencing 1994. Teaching will be provided by faculty and visiting scholars. INSIST not only covers

major themes in social theory but also offers an intensive and flexible way of obtaining credits or a master's degree. For further details and application forms, contact: Summer School Office, Department of Sociology, Cartmel College, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YL, U.K. Telephone: (+44) 524 594172.

"The specific content of any activity presented by the individual participant, or the role it plays in the interdependent activities of an on-going social system, will not be at issue; I shall be concerned only with the participant's dramaturgical problems of presenting the activity before others" (Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* [New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1959], p. 15).

### THE GENDER LENS

The Gender Lens (Sage Publications and Pine Forge Press: Series Editors: Judith A. Howard, Barbara J. Risman, Joey Sprague) is a new series of books directed toward demonstrating the importance of treating gender as a crucial sensitizing lens through which a wide spectrum of sociological phenomena must be seen. The series will address several goals. First, these books will present the now considerable corpus of theory and research on gendered structures and processes organizing the worlds of work, politics, families, development, law, education, and a host of other domains, to ensure that theory and research on gender become fully integrated into the discipline as a whole. Second, each of the series volumes will enhance readers' sensitivities to the full array of social differences and to the intersections of systems of gender with other interlocking systems of oppression. Third, much of boundary maintenance rhetoric within sociology is being replaced by attempts to build a transdisciplinary, multilevel framework based on a contextualized view of social action. This series will generate the terms of a multi-level theory of gender that will contribute to that general project. Fourth, the series is intended to generate an "intellectual collective" to nurture and build upon one another's contributions to a fuller understanding of gender. The orga-

## LIKELY PERTINENT INFORMATION

nizational and publication arrangements of the series are designed to promote this intellectual community.

Persons interested in potentially authoring a book in the future should contact any one of the three editors for more detailed information about the series. We invite potential authors to submit proposals after discussion with the series editors: Judith A. Howard, Department of Sociology DK-

40, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195, (0) 206-543-9885, jhoward@u.washington.edu; Barbara J. Risman, Department of Sociology, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC 27695, (0) 919-515-3291, nvashn@ncsumvs; and Joey Sprague, Department of Sociology, University of Kansas, 716 Fraser Hall, Lawrence, KS 66045, (0) 913-864-4111, sprague@ukanvm.

## BOOKS TO CONSIDER

*Critique & Humanism International*, Special Issue 1992 on Georg Simmel. Edited by Kolyo Koev and Christian Gulich. Address: *Critique & Humanism International*, Oborishte Str. 23, Sofia 1504, Bulgaria.

Documents from the Library of Sorbonne, Paris – including three letters from Simmel to French correspondents Xavier Leon and Celestin Bougle and two unpublished manuscripts by Simmel on the philosophy of art and philosophy – are expertly introduced by Gulich in a historical reconstruction of Simmel's work and scholarly affiliations in France at the turn of the last century.

*Sadomasochism in Everyday Life: The Dynamics of Power and Powerlessness*, by Lynn S. Chancer. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992. 238 pp.

"This work was intended as a philosophi-

cal and sociological rumination on the tendency for a specific type of social psychology – in this case, a sadomasochistic one – to correlate with certain social structures and mandates."

*The Interpretation of the Flesh: Freud and Femininity*, by Teresa Brennan. London: Routledge, 1992. 266 pp.

"Freud dreamt that metaphysics could be transformed into metapsychology, and he might have been right. Except that metaphysics, in this transformation, would have to take on another meaning, a meaning it once had. 'Metaphysics' would refer to a theory supplementary to the theory of physics, rather than a series of transcendental claims about a self-contained, self-originating subject. . . . my argument is that [Freud's] attachment to the idea of a self-generating ego meant he missed the metaphysical, or metapsychological, standpoint. . ." (p. xi).

## THEORY IN LA

Theda Skocpol, Theory Section Chair, announces the following four sessions and organizers for the 1994 Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association. She especially urges members to get in touch with ideas for the session on Theory in Historical Sociology. Our section may co-sponsor this with the Comparative and Historical Sociology Section. It might be possible to have two, related sections on these issues, if interesting papers can be arranged.

1. "*Theory in Historical Sociology*." Send submissions or inquiries to Professor Theda Skocpol, William James 470, Department of Sociology, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138. Phone: (617) 495-3851
2. "*Culture and Theory*" (co-sponsored with the Culture Section). Send submissions or inquiries to either Professor Theda Skocpol (address given above) or Professor Michele Lamont, Department of Sociology, Green Hall 2-N-1, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08545. Phone: (609) 258-4538.
3. *Open* submissions of papers on any topic in sociological theory. Send submissions to Professor Lauren Langman, Department of Sociology, Loyola University of Chicago, 6525 North Sheridan Road, Chicago, Illinois 60626. Phone: (312) 508-3463.
4. "*Roundtables on Sociological Theory*." Send submissions to Professor Paul Kamolnick, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Box 70644, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee 37614-0644. Phone: (615) 929-6652.