Perspectives

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Theory Surrounds Us
Murray Webster, Jr.
University of North Carolina-Charlotte

Most of us teach undergraduate theory courses where we face questions about what theories are and how they relate to life. I would like to explore implications of two points that most of us offer, in one form or another, to our students. First, the theories of a discipline hold the knowledge of that discipline; what we know of social processes and social structures resides in our theories of them. Second, whether or not we explicitly recognize it, we always have at least a partial theory for every situation and every process. In other words, theories are essential and they are ubiquitous.

Whatever their linguistic or mathematical forms, theories include *concepts* naming phenomena and *relations* telling how the concepts covary or affect each other. Theories of organizational structure might name different forms of organization and tell how they interrelate or transform from one form to another form. Theories of world economic and power systems identify core states and hegemonic structures; theories of network processes define power relations and negotiating strategies; and so on. What we know of those things resides in the theories of them. When we help students develop a sociological understanding of world systems or bargaining relations, we try to help them see situations in terms of the appropriate theories. They may never have thought about core and peripheral states before or how they relate to each other; they may not have thought about dating relationships in terms of who is getting what and at what cost. When they do those things, they use the theories they learned.

When our students develop their skills to look at situations and see the concepts of sociological theories, and then look for some common explanations or predictions of the theories, they come to appreciate that sociology offers insights and knowledge that previously they did not have. The extent of their new understanding is exactly the extent to which they are learning what sociological theory has to offer about phenomena they study.

Of course, our theories are never perfect, yet in many cases, they are improving. Once someone comes to know the theories of a particular structure or process, some facts become understandable. At the same time, things we cannot answer also become apparent. This apprehension starts the process of theory improvement. A theorist deliberately seeks questions that, at present, her theory cannot answer. This "What if…" investigation may lead to additional concepts or relations that extend the range of cases

the theory can analyze. As theories improve, more questions become answerable, and facts that previously were puzzling begin to make sense. This greater understanding does not happen, however, without theory growth.

My second point, that we always have a theory, can be appreciated by thinking about the alternative: that we have absolutely no understanding of a situation. As soon as we think we begin to understand something, to see regularities or to find ways to analyze the case, we invoke at least rudimentary theory. Most of our students believe that people generally prefer flattery to criticism; that groups tend to protect their economic interests; or that individual behavior is often predictable from institutional roles. Many practical business people who think they eschew theory have nevertheless noted that as organizations grow, they seem to differentiate their structures. That observation is far less developed than Max Weber's or Peter M. Blau's theoretical work on the same process, but it is theoretical in the sense of using concepts and noting relations among them. It is a basis to encourage further exploration of what sociological theorists have learned. Our practical business person, if he or she wanted a better understanding of conditions under which that process occurs, could study sociological theory on the topic.

Sociological theory is the very heart of our scholarly discipline, for it contains all we know about our field. Even when nobody has tried to develop systematic theory for a kind of situation, anyone who has to deal with any situation uses theoretical ideas. When a practical person wants to understand a social situation better, that means improving the theoretical understanding of it. Or, as I sometimes tell my students, you cannot escape sociological theory, and you really wouldn't want to escape it if you have to live in the social world.

For this issue of Perspectives *I asked several European theorists to give their view of the state of the American theory enterprise. I am grateful to Gerard Delanty and Patrick Baert for responding. –Ed.*

Varieties of Social Theory Today
Gerard Delanty
University of Liverpool

Social theory means different things to different people, but the term is Anglo-American and is not easily translated into, for example, European traditions. In the United States my impression is that it is partly another term for sociological theory but is also in competition with it. This is not specific to the U.S. of course, for there is generally a certain association of social theory with sociological theory, that is with a specific sociological mode of theorising concerned with, for example, middle-range theorizing about social change and sophisticated causal models relating to macro societal processes. However, my sense of the current appeal of the term social theory in the U.S. and elsewhere in the English-speaking world is that it suggests a growing interdisciplinary kind of sociology and possibly one that is post-disciplinary. But there is a tension between sociological theory, which is linked to empirical research and evidence-based theorizing, on the one side, and on the other a more speculative culturally oriented social theory, which in the U.S. is found mostly outside sociology in the humanities.

It is possible to speculate that the turn to social theory is a consequence of the heavily empirical nature of American sociology where theory has generally been understood in neo-positivist terms as hypothesis testing and possibly more broadly a concern with macro-theorizing. Social theory might thus be a post-disciplinary retreat into philosophy, identity politics and cultural theory–a kind of residual grand theory. This is a contrast with European trends, although I hasten to add that stark contrasts cannot be made. In Germany the tradition of *Gesellschaft Theorie* has always been central to the self-understanding of the discipline of sociology. In France, in contrast, social theory as such is an unfamiliar term, but this is because sociology is already theoretical and much of what is called social theory elsewhere would be simply associated with philosophy. In the UK today social theory has become a major part of a post-disciplinary kind of sociology, but has an unclear relation to the qualitative and quantitative traditions and to sociological theory in the more

specific sense of the term. Today in the UK there are practically three kinds of sociology: qualitative sociology, which is undoubtedly the real strength of British sociology when it comes to micro-analysis; quantitative analysis (without which no macro sociology is possible); and a diffuse entity called social theory which is often simply general sociology. But social theory is an undeniable part of sociology and more broadly has a certain prestige in British social science. In fact much of British social theory of course occurs too outside sociology, for example in cultural studies and in cultural history, but in my guess to a lesser extent than in the U.S. In the Scandinavian countries, on the other hand, where sociology is more empirical, social theory has a relatively marginal role within sociology.

In contrast, it seems to me, in the United States social theory occurs more or less exclusively within sociology as a narrow sociological theory and under the rubric of cultural theory in the humanities (comparative literature, cultural studies, history for example). The result is a certain disjuncture. There are not as far as I know any American social theory journals. *Theory and Society*, for instance, is largely sociological and not primarily concerned with anything that looks like grand theory. *Sociological Theory* is clearly specifically sociological and does not tread on the territory of, for example, social and political thought. My impression too is that social theory in the U.S. is largely driven by the teaching needs of sociology, rather than having a wider relevance to research or as an academic activity in its own right, aside from efforts, at best pointless, to interpret European social theory. Interestingly there are quite a few political theory journals, which do not appear to encroach upon social theory. This suggests that American social theory has an uncertain position and one confined to post-disciplinary sociology. Since sociology in the U.S. is predominantly discipline-based, social theory is probably condemned to a marginal existence.

In Europe, on the other hand, it is possible to speak of social theory in a different and stronger sense than simply post-disciplinary sociology. There is a tradition of European social theory that while heavily influenced by sociology is more than sociology and has its roots in the Enlightenment. There are several national journals devoted to this kind of social theory. On a cross-national level, there is the *European Journal of Social Theory*. In Germany since the Frankfurt School, a philosophical kind of sociology, often inseparable from "general sociology," has generally provided the basis for much of what we today call social theory. This tradition, which was part of an attempt to re-orient sociology from positivism, has been very much connected to Western Marxism and a view of the sociologist as critical intellectual in the public sphere. This is a tradition that was absent in the more professionalized ethos of American sociology and which only today is coming more to the fore. However, it most not be forgotten that this older conception of social theory was connected with a major methodological drive to re-orient the social sciences. We are not in this situation today. The current situation is characterized by post-disciplinary developments and a related plurality of theoretical and methodological approaches.

Now while it is true that in Europe this philosophical sociology, which was part of "Grand Social Theory," became marginalized or was directed into cultural critique, it continued to have an important influence, despite, I would say, its methodological impotence. Social theory is one of the main products of this tradition and which became the basis of an interdisciplinary social theory which is not at all exclusively part of the sociological tradition. This understanding of the term *social theory* as a form of critical intellectual engagement pertains to the theoretical dimensions of all the social sciences. This is what the *European Journal of Social Theory* caters to and which I would simply call critical social philosophy of the present. So the understanding of theory here is closer to the notion of reflection and thus entails an unavoidable degree of philosophy. One only has to consider the reception of Foucault within European sociology to find a marked contrast with American sociology, where he has a much lesser role (although one outmatched by the tremendous reception of his work in the humanities).

It is undeniably the case that this particular genre of an inter-disciplinary social theory is heavily dominated by sociologists even though it includes a broader field and has a strongly philosophical aspect to it. In Britain it would include historians such as Peter Burke, social policy theorists going back to T. H. Marshall, anthropologists including the iconoclastic thinker Ernst Gellner, political theorists such as Quentin Skinner, and sociologists such as Anthony Giddens and Bryan Turner. However, it must be noted that European social theory does not exist in the sense of a social theory that is specifically European as opposed to American. But social theory in Europe is certainly enjoying

considerable revival today, not least due to the proliferation of the social sciences in central and eastern Europe and the need for continued reflection on the ever-changing nature of modernity. The European Sociological Association is one such expression of this development.

I am not sure how far this has developed in the U.S., where I sense that the preference for social theory over sociological theory is indicative of a concern with new sociological concerns, in particular those related to issues of culture and globalization. Thus for example textbook anthologies such as Charles Lemert's *Social Theory: The Classic and Multicultural Readings* or Jeffrey Alexander's and Steven Seidman's *New Social Theory Reader* or George Ritzer's various collections are interdisciplinary and not narrowly sociological. While a contrast might be made with the two-volume *Classical and Contemporary Sociological Theory* edited by Craig Calhoun and others, here too social theory is essentially sociological. The point I am making is that social theory in the U.S. occurs mostly outside sociology and within sociology it is in competition with an established tradition of sociological theory.

There is also a peculiar kind of Anglo-American social theory which will typically be associated with the undergraduate teaching programs where social theory is simply the history of sociology. It is not easy to explain why it is that the history of sociology must live on a social theory. It is certainly one of the most influential understandings of social theory. Related to this is the tendency for social theory to be reduced to a critical commentary on European theorists. It would be unfortunate if this kind of social theory as a mere reinterpretation of classic authors were to become a sub-speciality within sociology. Although the history of a discipline and the constant reinterpretation of the classics is important, social theory is more than this.

Social theory thus occupies an uncertain ground between, on the one hand, the domain of a post-disciplinary sociology and on the other an interdisciplinary mode of theorizing that is connected to political (what kind of society?) and philosophical questions (the nature of truth, questions of method and knowledge). In this sense it has a less clear-cut identity than the more discipline-specific endeavors of political theory and sociological theory. As a critical social philosophy, social theory concerns reflection on society in the broadest possible sense of the term. It is then probably best distinguished from sociological theory in the narrow

sense and from the history of sociology. But sociology cannot avoid it if it is to be of public relevance.

The worst kind of social theory is an obscurantist mode of theorizing in which theory becomes its own referent and where any connection with empirical research and evidence-based arguments is abandoned. European social theory is more prone to this pitfall. The sociological tradition, in particular in the best American tradition, offers a safeguard against this tendency which arises out of the confluence of culture theory with philosophy. The sociological foundations of social theory provide an important corrective to many over-theorized arguments about a wide range of topics. Many of the claims made by theorists are unsubstantiated by evidence. For this reason social theory must be grounded in the social sciences, not necessarily sociology. Rather than retreating into the philosophical abstractions of cultural theory, social theory must situate itself within the social sciences.

What is needed is a cosmopolitan kind of social theory that is capable of making sense of major social transformations, which are global as opposed to national or even Western. Philosophy in alliance with Marxism once offered the animus for an older European social theory. With the demise of this tradition and the absence of a methodological alternative to the neo-positivism that provides a workable feature of much of current social science, social theory is in danger of falling into a kind of solipsism characterized by an obsessive concern with classical sociology. Social theory must recover the social and articulate some of the key commonalities of the social sciences if it is to offer a critical interpretation of the present. Surely one of the most important challenges is to link the interdisciplinary field of social theory to the middle range models of sociological theory as well as to empirical social research. It is in this context that there can be fruitful dialogue between European social theory and American sociological theory.

Letter from Europe
Patrick Baert
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Neil Gross persuaded me to write this contribution by claiming that the newsletter goes to more than 600 members who actually read it. Realizing that this meant that my piece would have at least 600 more readers than the usual article, how could I say no?

I was asked to comment on (a) the state of American sociological theory, and (b) what might be done to improve dialogue between American and European social theorists. Let me take each of these points in turn:

(a) Commentaries on American sociological theory risk portraying too much homogeneity within the United States. They also often rely on alleged differences with theory from other parts of the world, in particular Europe. By the same token, we have to be wary of attributing too much similarity across European theory. Be that as it may, the American insistence on 'sociological' rather than 'social' theory captures an important distinction. For better or for worse, sociology in the States is more professionalized than in most parts of Europe, and this implies clearer boundaries with other disciplines (e.g., politics, philosophy) and other professions (e.g., journalism). It is therefore not surprising that Americans prefer to use 'sociological theory.' First, it indicates that theorizing is directed towards (and often subordinated to) *empirical* research. Theory is supposed to provide a framework from which empirical hypotheses can be inferred. Secondly, this form of theorizing deals with *sociological* phenomena. Sociological theory is supposed to be distinct from other types of theory such as anthropological or economic theory. Both sociological and empirical considerations seem to be strong in the writings of, for instance, Jeffrey Alexander (2003), Randall Collins (1998, 2004), and Jonathan Turner (2002, 2003). Again, we have to be careful not to present a monolithic picture. Some American theorists also target a broader audience (e.g., Levine 1996; Turner 1994), especially when dealing with central political issues, such as new media, gender, sexual politics, or ethnicity (e.g., Agger 2004; Calhoun 1995; Fraser 1989, 1994; Poster 2001; Seidman 1996, 1997, 2003), although, significantly, few of these theorists have been trained or teach in American sociology departments.

The European preference for 'social theory' reflects a weaker professional identity among sociologists and, in general, less strict boundaries between the different disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Unlike sociological theory, social theory is wedded neither to empirical research nor to sociology. Although social theory *can be* geared toward empirical sociology, it does not have to be. Sometimes debates in social theory are purely conceptual and philosophical, with very little empirical payoff, although this type of theorizing is becoming less common (infra). Most importantly, when social theory does deal with empirical phenomena, it is not limited to sociology. Social theory has become the catalyst and facilitator of communication between the social sciences. It occupies the space where cross-disciplinary debates are initiated, encouraged and coordinated. This is very different from sociological theory, which is tied to one discipline (Baert 2005b).

It is worth elaborating on the recent engagement of European social theory with empirical phenomena because it challenges the widespread notion that European social theory is a very abstract affair. During the last two decades, a substantial number of European social theorists have taken an empirical turn. They have moved away from the view that it is possible or desirable to develop an all-embracing theoretical frame of reference that can be applied to numerous cultural settings. Instead, theorists reflect critically on the nature of modernity and contemporary society (for example, Bauman 2000, 2003, 2005; Beck 1999, 2000; Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994; Urry 2002, 2004). This type of intellectual enterprise is an interesting, albeit curious, mixture of theory and empirical research. It is not an entirely new genre (see, for instance, Adorno and Horkheimer 1947[1944]) nor exclusively European, though its American version (see, for instance, Riesman 2001[1952]; Lash 1979, 1995; Ritzer 1996, 1998) is more strongly embedded in detailed empirical analysis. There is no doubt, however, that this genre has become a dominant intellectual endeavor among European theorists. Empirical research, then, is no longer used to test the validity or applicability of a grand theory, but helps us instead to reassess the present and see it in a different light. In contrast with grand theory, this type of social theory is more immediately relevant to contemporary societal concerns and, indeed, more people read it, although the drawback is that some of it has a slapdash quality.

(b) I have a problem with the question as it is phrased. Don't get me wrong: I am all in favor of dialogue, but while I acknowledge that more could be done to improve transatlantic communication, the most striking observation to be made is that theorists tend to communicate exclusively with like-minded theorists (regardless of nationality). In general, people are stuck in their entrenched positions and develop institutional networks that confirm and reproduce the views they already hold. The question is how to improve dialogue *in general*, how to ensure that people are willing to adopt new perspectives and to be receptive to new experiences. I have been arguing recently that the answer to this question is to be found in a new research program that

combines the strengths of American pragmatism and Continental hermeneutics. What we need is not so much a new theory, but a new way of thinking about the relationship between theory and research, one that promotes dialogue and theoretical innovation.

I have argued that part of the solution lies in rethinking the relationship between theory and empirical research (Baert 2005b). This means abandoning two dominant views, which I call the deductive-nomological model and the representational model. The former conceives of theory as a conceptual framework from which empirical hypotheses can be inferred. Empirical research is conceived as an adjudicating device, allowing us to decide on the cognitive validity of the hypotheses. According to the representational model, theory provides conceptual tools for the complete and accurate mapping of the social. Instead of adjudicating, empirical research is used to show the applicability of a theory.

Both models are very different, but both have a tendency to lead to intellectual ossification (Baert 2005b). The deductive-nomological model only encourages theoretical change if we are faced with numerous empirical falsifications. Because of the uncertainty as to what amounts to an empirical refutation and because of the entrenched nature of research programs, conceptual change is, in practice, limited. The representational model is even worse. It uses empirical research only to apply, confirm and ultimately reproduce a given theoretical framework. Both models fail to realize the extent to which a confrontation with empirical phenomena can help us develop a new vocabulary, to adopt a new theoretical perspective.

I have been arguing that the solution lies in merging insights from contemporary American pragmatism with Continental European hermeneutics–that is, combining new pragmatism and old Europe (see also Baert 2004, Baert 2005a). Pragmatism rejects the spectator theory of knowledge, which assumes that knowledge somehow captures or mirrors the essence of the external world. Instead, pragmatists insist that knowledge is active–it brings about changes–hence their insistence that knowledge ties in with cognitive interests. Knowledge can achieve various cognitive interests, of which explanation-prediction is only one such objective. Knowledge can also aim at *Verstehen*, self-emancipation and, crucially, self-understanding. I have recently written about how self-understanding ought to be taken more seriously as a cognitive interest (Baert 2003, 2005b). By self-understanding, I mean the process by which

we develop reflexivity, reassessing our cultural presuppositions and ourselves. By self-referential knowledge acquisition, I refer to the type of research that pursues such self-understanding. Self-referential knowledge acquisition ties in with Gadamer's notion of understanding in that it recognizes that (a) researchers draw on their cultural presuppositions to make sense of what they study, and (b) the confrontation with the research object enables researchers to articulate and reinterpret the very same presuppositions. Knowledge is, then, no longer a one-way process but resembles something like a conversation (Baert 2005c). But whereas Gadamer sees this dialogical model in ontological terms, I argue that there is virtue in pursuing it as a *methodological* device. Much can be learned from *actively* pursuing this dialogue. We acknowledge that we can only get access to phenomena by relying on our presuppositions, but we also realize that we have to keep an open mind so that our presuppositions can be affected and challenged by what we study. Such a dynamic interaction between theory and empirical research can help to neutralize the inward-looking nature of most contemporary theory formation and thus help facilitate conversation between researchers (see also Baert 2005b).

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Bergesen will reply in the next issue of Perspectives. –Ed.

Mead vs. Chomsky

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In the September 2004 issue of *Sociological Theory*, Albert J. Bergesen wrote an article titled "Chomsky vs. Mead," which calls into question the enduring relevance of Mead's theory of mind, language, and self in light of evidence provided by studies in linguistics and developmental cognitive psychology. Statements like this are representative of a growing trend of scholarship that makes use of evidence from psychology and the natural sciences to challenge sociological explanations of human behavior. Pinker's (2002) work, for example, gives compelling evidence for a range of innate features of human behavior, and can be seen as a direct challenge to the tendency to reduce human nature entirely to a social construction. It is true that Pinker gives us good reason to take seriously the findings of evolutionary biology, genetics, neural science, and cognitive psychology for the genetic roots of a remarkable range of human dispositions and behavior. We believe that an understanding of these innate features of emotion, sex, aggression, impulsiveness, and so on could be extremely helpful for sociologists in their conceptualizations of human group life. However, we argue that Bergesen's more specific call for sociologists to accept the existence of a Chomskian grammar template is ill-advised, and is unsuccessful in discrediting the use of Meadian theory by those interested in conceptualizing the development of mind and self.

Bergesen (2004) considers a number of Meadian hypotheses, which are evaluated against relevant empirical evidence. His overall argument is that the empirical support for Chomskian notions of a pre-socialized "mental architecture" (p. 358) challenges Meadian assumptions of the mind as a "blank slate" that is formed exclusively through the process of social interaction. Bergesen recommends that symbolic interactionists (and sociologists generally) rethink these assumptions about the plasticity of mind. We argue that contrary to popular opinion in the social sciences, Mead never held a "blank slate" view of the mind, and that the evidence presented by Bergesen does not detract from the importance of Meadian theory to the sociology of mind and self. Further, we show that there is no evidence to suggest that universal syntax, if it exists at all, affects or

provides for the content of meaning stored within these syntactic forms. Meaning is left as emergent as it has always been. As such, we are left to wonder what such a highly speculative set of Chomskian assumptions has to offer sociological research.

It has been a longstanding problem for sociologists to confuse Mead's actual thoughts on the generation of mind and self with those proposed by symbolic interactionist offshoots. This general issue of "followers" reinterpreting an original set of theoretical propositions in ways inconsistent with the paradigmatic exemplar can be seen throughout sociology (e.g., consider examples from the neo-Marxist and neo-Freudian traditions). Blumer's (1969) presentation of Mead does seem to reduce the generation of mind and self purely to the social interactive process; however, this is an idea that is inconsistent with Mead's original vision. Bergesen has made this commonly committed error of conflating Blumerian symbolic interactionism with Mead's actual position on the generation of mind. Bergesen (2004, p. 358) writes: "[Mead] rooted mental structures (mind, self) in the flux of micro patterns of social interaction." Despite how Bergesen interprets this, when Mead (1934, p. 22) wrote that one ought to approach "consciousness itself from the viewpoint of action," he did not mean social interaction exclusively; for Mead, the mind emerged out of the full range of action in the perceptual world. Social interaction is simply the most primary and influential ingredient in this larger complex of meaning generation (see Joas, 1996). For Mead, mind (as the sphere of meaningful reflection) develops in tandem with selected or happened upon (emergent) experiences of the human organism, both perceptual and social.

Further, Mead explicitly recognized the human being as a biological organism as well as a social being, with the dialectic of innate impulse and socialized reflective thought culminating in action. Mead (1934, p. 348) stated quite clearly that "we act accordingly as biologic individuals, individuals made up of impulses sensitizing us to stimuli," listing such biological features as the maintenance of balance, perceptive spatial cognition, attack and defense, flight from danger, sex, securing and ingesting food, withdrawal from extreme temperatures, rest and sleep, and the adjustment to embodied habitats (pp. 348-349). Indeed, Mead certainly did not take the position that the whole being of a person is determined purely through the social process. His famous conception of the spontaneous "I" is rooted in the assumption of the biologic individual, allowing individual agency by the very fact that various parts of the brain (and thus the mind) for Mead, are

innate, and cannot be socialized. The mind emerges through the mutually influencing interplay of biological impulses and socialized responses through the pragmatic problem solving process. Bergesen's claim that Mead reduced mind to a purely social interactive process, or to a blank slate, is simply untrue.

Bergesen (p. 361) later calls into question Mead's claim that language arises out of a conversation of gestures. He reasons that since gestures are learned more from language than vice versa (citing Petitto, 1994), and gestures are less complex and do not develop at the rate of language, then the notion that language develops out of gestures is unfounded. We contend that the evidence presented by Bergesen does not prove his case, and that the gesture remains foundational to the development of language. Of course, language can evolve and grow with more complexity than gestures or indications. An indication cannot grow in complexity; the notion of "that is there and I am referring to it" cannot be made more intricate. Nonetheless, this phase is absolutely necessary for the initial generation and growth of language. Nouns such as "VCR," "laser disk," and "DVD" could only arise after the relevant indications to these very real objects in the world. Even abstract constructions such as "proportional representation," which evolve out of other word relations such as "democracy" and "pluralism," still require an indication to the word relations designated; and all words eventually root back to indications made in the space/time of the material world. Without concrete reference points with which language can indicate, it remains impossible to understand, and devoid of meaning.

This theory is illustrated by considering Bergesen's (2004, p. 363) problem of how it is that children never confuse "I" and "you." In a nutshell, Bergesen argues that there is no way to explain the meaning of "I" and "you" to a child, as there would be a series of sentences that look like "I am I and you are you, but you are not I, unless you are speaking to me, in which case I am now you" and so on, such that the child would have no way to decipher who (the parent or the child) represents "I" or "you." Bergesen argues that since the learning of these designations is impossible logically, the meanings must be built into the child. The child must automatically, through a template, understand that "I" and "you" are to be reversed depending on the speaker. Otherwise, Bergesen believes the child could never learn this obscure language rule. This example actually bolsters rather than weakens Meadian (gesture-response) theory of language acquisition. We have already established that there

must be a foundation of referents, built upon our perceptual interactions in the world of space/time, for language to make sense. Thus, only as a result of the parent emphasizing the meaning of "I" by pointing (gesturing) to herself, does the child understand that "I" is in reference to the speaker and "you" to the listener. Bergesen makes it appear difficult to switch referents in his example by considering the explanatory process using only language itself, which leads to an infinite regress. In line with Mead, we show that the concepts may only be explained, in the end, by recourse to gesture. This is a bold illustration of how words *do not* make sense innately, but that gesturing is a necessary step in grounding the *socially constructed* world of language into the world of embodied perceptual reality.

Let us now consider Bergesen's refutation of Mead's argument that language and symbols are a necessary condition for the emergence of mind. Bergesen insists that there are "numerous studies identifying quite mental operations that are performed by infants of only a few months of age, which suggests that "the existence of mind" exists prior to, not after, interaction" (p. 358). Bergesen presents an example of this from Wynn (1992), who shows that infants of only 4 months of age are capable of recognizing simple mathematical errors in an experiment using blocks and screens. Showing the babies 1+1=1 instead of 1+1=2 creates a delayed reaction in the babies, which leads to the distinct possibility that they recognize the logical flaw. This experiment appears to show that simple mental operations are possible before the onset of language or symbols. However, such operations are most likely occurring at the pre-social animalistic level of cognition. Indeed, Mead believed that rationality and basic mental operations are innate capabilities; if not, the acquisition of language and interaction would be impossible:

> Human intelligence, *by means of the physiological mechanism of the human central nervous system*, deliberately selects one from among the several alternative responses which are possible in the given problematic environmental situation; and if the given response which it selects is complex— i.e., is a set or chain or group or succession of simple responses—it can organize this set or chain of simple responses in such a way as to make possible the most adequate and harmonious solution by the individual of the given environmental problem. (Mead, 1934, p. 98, italics added)

Thus, Mead allows for simple rationalistic mental operations that are quite possible prior to social interaction. However, the existence of mental operations, for Mead, does not a mind make. Indeed, for the mind to be considered distinctly human, exercising at the level of what Mead referred to as "reflective intelligence," language and complex symbols are absolutely necessary. Without language, people cannot self-objectify, cannot self-communicate, and as such, cannot think beyond an animalistic level. These symbols and languages, if meaningful at all, can only come from the social and material environment of the socialized human. Indeed, without the necessary toolbox of mental categories and constructions, reflective, symbolic thought remains impossible.

Consider for example what sort of a mind results without socialization mediated through a developed language. Cases of feral children have demonstrated that a lack of language greatly impairs cognitive ability (Candland, 1993). The most well known examples are Amala and Kamala, the "wolf-children" who were discovered in India in 1920. Since these children were isolated entirely from human language, and were socialized purely within the limited symbols of wolves, they actually exhibited the behavior of the wolf group they were raised within. They would sleep folded over each other as wolves do, they would scratch at a door to be let in, and they would eat food out of bowls, and run on all fours. This is a stark example of how the mind develops without the symbolic language transmitted from a distinctly human community. Perhaps it is even more a demonstration of the remarkable flexibility of the human being (in contrast with other animals) to develop in line with the symbolic and behavioral input provided by their particular social group (in this case wolves).

A more recent example comes from Gordon's (2004) study of the Paraha tribe of the Brazilian Amazon. Their language does not contain words for numbers greater than two. Instead the language contains only "one," "two," and "many." Gordon's study of this tribe reveals that the lack of a counting system limits the ability of the members to enumerate exact quantities exceeding two or three items. In order to test basic counting, participants were presented with a number of items arranged on the ground above a centre line and were asked to arrange the same number of items below the line. They responded accurately up to two or three items but performance dropped considerably when more items were added. The Paraha are unable to count past three! Gordon concludes that the "split between exact enumeration ability for set sizes smaller than three and analog estimation for larger set sizes parallels findings from laboratory experiments with adults who are prevented from explicit counting; studies of numerical abilities in prelinguistic infants, monkeys, birds, and rodents; and in recent studies using brain-imaging techniques" (p. 498). As Mead would predict, without the symbolic system of language in place (in this case a number system), counting becomes impossible, except at the level of animal cognition (as Wynn's [1992] findings of the counting ability of infants supports). This is strong evidence for the Meadian prediction that without the necessary symbolic system in place, abstract thought is impossible.

Bergesen continues to maintain the notion that language is innate by questioning Bourdieu's (1977) theory that children's syntax acquisition is a process of rule learning. He argues that Bourdieu is wrong in assuming that the learning of language syntax involves only the systematic practice of applying socially constructed rules. Bergesen (p. 364) introduces two sentences in an effort to prove the alleged impossibility of reducing syntax to the following of rules: These are (A) "The dog is in the backyard," and (B) "The dog that is sleeping is in the backyard." He argues that if one is to change the statement of fact into a question, and if one were to follow a Bourdieu-inspired rule to do this, one might follow the rule of taking the first "is" encountered (reading from left to right), and moving it to the front of the sentence. Thus, (A) would turn into "Is the dog in the backyard?" However, (B) would then read "Is the dog that sleeping is in the backyard?" which breaks the English grammar rule. Bergesen concludes that children's "principles of grammar are not procedures worked out in the process of 'mutual adjustment' within the overall social act. The more reasonable hypothesis is that they are principles given by our mind/brain" (p. 365). On a second glance though, we see that Bergesen did not look hard enough for the Bourdieuian rule at work in this particular case. If the rule is that one moves the *last* "is" encountered to the beginning of the sentence rather than the *first* "is," the problem is solved. With one rule, both sentences are changed from a statement to a question without breaking any rules of grammar. Even if all language variations cannot be reduced to one set of rules, there is no reason why more "particularized" language rules cannot emerge, which can then be learned and applied over time. The fact that there are individuals who can function as "human calculators," squaring and taking the root of large numbers in a matter of

seconds, does not preclude the need for these mathematical operations to take place. Similarly, while children are able to learn nuanced syntax rules very quickly, this does not necessarily imply that they have a built-in syntax in place.

Bergesen's (pp. 365-366) evidence that children seem to learn language at the same rate, no matter the reinforcement or sanction provided by parents, merits more serious consideration. The fact that the rate at which language is learned is much faster than would be predicted by simple learning theory may suggest evidence for a certain "hardwired" pre-social mechanism that allows for rapid language acquisition. As well, the case of feral children mentioned earlier (Candland, 1993) suggests that there is a developmental "window" for learning language; if that window is missed, language acquisition is severely handicapped. All of this evidence points to a mechanized mental process of language acquisition that is both pre-given and innate. Despite this apparent innateness of certain hardwired mental capacities for learning language, there is no proof that we have any *particular* syntax rules and combinations embedded in the psyche prior to socialization. Indeed, the burden of proof falls on universalists such as Chomsky to show what parts of syntax and grammar are in fact common to all groups. Much evidence in the study of linguistic evolution suggests that a universal syntax for humans is unlikely. Lieberman (2003, p. 6) argues "the human brain cannot contain a detailed, genetically determined universal grammar. We are not 'preloaded' with a 'Chomsky operating system.'" Thus, the "universalist" view is not one that is accepted by all linguists, and the jury is out on the truth of Chomsky's highly speculative position.

The larger question we are left with has to do with what this all means for the actual content (meaning) of our language, and hence, the way we think. In other words, even if Chomsky's grammar templates do exist, how would it change the sociological study of language, meaning, or the way we think or make choices? As Mead argues, while the physiological mechanism that allows for the development of mind out of experience is innately given, this does little to effect the generation of the self-reflective mind as it grows in tandem with lived social and perceptual experience. While the structuring of language may overlap to some degree as a function of the pre-existing innate mental operations that allow it to form, this holds no sway over the content of meaning generated. Meaning is left as fluid and environmentally dependent as it has always been. As Pinker

(2002) has noted, "the repertoire of sentences is theoretically infinite… [and as such] the number of possible thoughts or intentions is infinite too" (p. 37). As sociologists, we are interested in language only insofar as it uncovers the operational meanings for those who use it. As such, language has been of interest to sociologists as a way to gain insight into such central concerns as knowledge, culture, and ideology. Let us not forget that our emphasis on the social was initially introduced as a vital corrective to individualistic accounts of genetic or psychological theories that pay insufficient attention to the effects of environment and culture. If we are most interested in language insofar as it lends insight into the generation of meaning vis-à-vis social experience, how would the assumption of a Chomskian template in any way affect the way sociologists conduct research?

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American Sociological Association Theory Section

JUNIOR THEORISTS SYMPOSIUM

University of Pennsylvania, McNeil Building
Room 286-287, 3718 Locust Walk, Philadelphia, PA
Friday, August 12, 2005

Organized by Mathieu Deflem, Marion Fourcade-Gourinchas,
and Neil Gross, on behalf of the ASA Theory Section

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The Junior Theorists Symposium is a special one-day conference for up-and-coming theorists, organized by the Theory Section of the American Sociological Association. The Symposium will take place at the University of Pennsylvania on Friday, August 12, 2005, the day before the start of the ASA annual meeting.

The conference features advanced graduate students and recent PhDs presenting papers that speak to the present and future of sociological theory—where it is now, and where it should go from here. The panelists will discuss what they see as the most theoretically significant aspects of their current sociological research and will explain why their work may represent an important step for sociological theory. Offering original frameworks, the panelists will provide an assessment of the current state of sociological theory as seen from the vantage point of new entrants to the field.

The Symposium consists of three thematically linked panels. Following the presentations in each panel, three senior scholars will comment on the various presentations.

The Junior Theorists Symposium 2005 is hosted by
the Department of Sociology, University of Pennsylvania.
The Symposium is open to all ASA members. No registration needed!

PROGRAM

Introduction   Murray Webster, University of North Carolina, Charlotte,
                           ASA Theory Section Chair 2004-2005

Panel 1   -   What is Sociological Theory?

Chair: Mathieu Deflem, University of South Carolina

Participants:
     Isaac Reed, Yale University
     Robb Willer, Cornell University
     Erika Summers-Effler, University of Notre Dame
     Gabi Abend, Northwestern University

Discussant:
     Charles Camic, University of Wisconsin, Madison

Panel 2   -   Theorizing Identity, Race, & Interaction

Chair: Neil Gross, Harvard University

Participants:
     Scott Leon Washington, Princeton University
     Simone Polillo, University of Pennsylvania
     Pierre-Antoine Kremp, Princeton University
     Kwai Ng, University of California, San Diego

Discussant:
     Randall Collins, University of Pennsylvania

Panel 3   -   Comparative and Global Theorizing

Chair: Marion Fourcade-Gourinchas, University of California, Berkeley

Participants:
     Matthias Koenig, Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg
     Alexandra Kowalski, New York University
     Fuyuki Kurasawa, York University, Toronto
      Jonathan VanAntwerpen, University of California, Berkeley

Discussant:
     Michèle Lamont, Harvard University

ABSTRACTS

Panel 1   -   What is Sociological Theory?

Isaac Reed, Yale University
Three Models of Knowledge in Social Science: Realist, Normative, Interpretive

After positivism, postmodernism, and orthodox Marxism, three epistemological approaches have reformulated our thinking about the status and nature of sociological knowledge. Realism has reorganized scientific sociology, offering a strong sense of the structured nature of social reality and a post-positivist account of sociological explanation. A set of normative debates has reinvigorated the sense of theory as a meditation on ethical validity and immanent critique, and explored the political valences of sociological research. But realism runs aground on questions of culture and ideology, while normative theories lack "empirical" purchase. How can we articulate epistemologically our intuitive sense that the sociological imagination is empirically oriented, theoretically rigorous, and normatively driven? An interpretive perspective on socio-historical knowledge radically reorients our conception of the epistemological premises according to which social inquiry operates. Regarding social relations as always already embedded in historically particular orders of meaning, the social investigator comes to a comprehension of social context only by working in, with and through these orders of meaning —and thus exists at the conjuncture of two structuring sets of internalities: that of her or his own contexts of social meaning, and those of the subjects of investigation. Research, then, proceeds in a tacking back and forth between these contexts, and thus has as its goals the reconstruction of the structured contexts of a set of actions and effects, on the one hand, and the reconstruction of the meaning of these events for the structured social contexts of investigation, on the other. It is the interrelations between these two activities that have to be teased out in outlining the possibilities for theory and research from an interpretive perspective. Then we can show how recognizing the positionality and embeddedness of sociological knowledge does not entail relativism, and how a commitment to interpretation does not necessitate a phenomenological bias.

Robb Willer, Cornell University
Flexibility in the Sociologist's Theoretical Toolkit

I argue that sociologists benefit from selecting the theoretical method providing the most apparent leverage on a given research question, rather than locking in to a single approach. In my research I employ a range of formal (simulation, mathematical modeling, and propositional theory) as well as less formal (discovery-driven empirical observations, testing isolated general propositions) theoretical methods. Each method is most appropriate for certain classes of questions, though substantial overlap exists as well. I attempt to investigate phenomena of broad interest, implementing the theoretical approach most appropriate for a given research question. As a result, my research exemplifies varying levels of formality. Four ongoing research projects illustrate the approach. An ongoing project on "altruistic contagion" is exploratory, attempting to empirically uncover a phenomenon not known to exist now (non-theoretical). My study of masculine overcompensation tests a theoretical proposition derived from identity and gender research (informal theory). My dissertation research on status and collective action integrates concepts and propositions from existing theoretical research programs in social psychology and collective action to propose and test a relatively broad theoretical account of status effects on cooperation (formal theory). Fourth, my research on dynamic networks with Arnout van de Rijt uses mathematical modeling and simulation to explore the possibility that network dynamics are shaped by governing "metanetworks" (mathematical theory and simulation). The contrast between my research on altruistic contagion and metanetworks illustrates the difference between empirical and theoretical discovery. Finally, I discuss the benefits I have accrued from not locking in to a single theoretical or methodological approach.

Erika Summers-Effler, University of Notre Dame
Using Systems Logic in the Development of Social Theory

In the past twenty or more years much of the theoretical work in sociology has highlighted and described the complex relationships between elements of social life: structure and agency, structure and culture, micro and macro levels of social life, etc. With all of this emphasis on complexity, as well as the development of post modern theories, we might be tempted to forgo a predictive agenda for sociology. Rather than concluding that predictive agendas are impossible or overly simplistic, I suggest that we consider some of the conceptual tools that other fields, such as physics, engineering, and biology, have developed to generate predictive theory without undermining the potential for developing a deep understanding of complexity.

Gabi Abend, Northwestern University
The Meaning of Theory

I argue that the sense and reference of the expression 'sociological theory' are unclear, and that this is one of the main problems that should be resolved by the persons we call 'sociological theorists. That the term 'theory' conflates several different things often results in sociologists talking past one another. I distinguish three of these things. By Theory1 I mean a somewhat general system of explanatory propositions. By Theory2 I mean a story that makes sense of a bit of the social world; and by Theory3 I mean an exegetical exercise. I take the sociological language to be a formal one, despite its being mostly made up of natural language pieces. Therefore, the meaning of its terms is fixed by the social practices that occur within the sociological community. In other words, by and large it is up to us to agree upon what it is to follow this particular rule. Given this relative autonomy, the question becomes by which criteria one determines what the term 'theory' ought to refer to. (More generally, the question is by which criteria one determines what any given term ought to refer to in something like the sociological language.) This is, of course, a very difficult question, which involves not only logical and semantic issues, but also pragmatic, institutional, and political ones. In this paper I make a small contribution to this big task. Specifically, I argue that our understanding of what it is for something to be a theory (and what it is for something to be 'theoretical') should make as few metaphysical demands as possible. This principle leads me to reject Theory1.

Panel 2 - Theorizing Identity, Race, & Interaction

Scott Leon Washington, Princeton University
Theoretical Commensuration and the Case for a Doubly Comparative Approach to Race

Reaching across subdisciplines and bringing to bear a rather broad body of knowledge on the subject, the present paper makes the case for a doubly comparative approach to race: one which is as comparative at the level of theory as it is at the level of research. In addition to maintaining a cross-cultural scope, it argues, scholars should seek to study race (not as a unitary concept, requiring its own body or brand of theory, but) as an analytically distinct subspecies of social classification, as a slippery standard of social "vision and division" just like, and yet unlike, any other. The implications of such a view are discussed at length-and, against the widespread tendency to treat race tautogorically (or to tackle race in its own terms), a platform is presented which pushes scholars to consider what the study of race might have to contribute to our understanding of social classification and, conversely, what our understanding of social classification might have to contribute to the study of race. Having situated the study of race, so to speak, suo loco, in its proper place, the paper moves on with a more general peek at the process of theoretical commensuration: a process which consists quite simply in "the comparison of different entities according to a common metric," or, in the present case, a conceptual metric which is at once pertinent and common to each of the entities compared. After discussing in greater detail the nature, the workings, and the (potential) payoffs of theoretical commensuration, the paper closes on a programmatic note, with a reaffirmation of its relevance to the paper's attempt to reconceptualize race as an analytically distinct subspecies of social classification.

Simone Polillo, University of Pennsylvania
The Self as a Network: The Effects of Rituals on Identity

Why do people engage in identity politics? Is identity politics always essentialist, so that those who practice it are bound to reproduce the very structures of domination that generated the identity? I suggest that to understand identity we need to have a theory of the self, and the paper is an attempt to build it. I argue that the self is structured like a network, and that it takes on different identities according to its internal configurations. I build on Wiley's neo-pragmatist theory of the semiotic self and network theory as recently conceptualized by Fuchs, as well as social movement literature on networks, self and identity (for example, Stryker) and interaction ritual theory (Collins). I suggest that the self is shaped by solidarity rituals (both internal and external), and power rituals, which interact to produce identities. In turn, such identities vary along two dimensions: the degree to which they are hold as "essences," i.e. natural and unquestioned descriptions of the self; and the degree to which they are motivated by solidarity and/or power, that is the extent to which they emerge from solidarity-building and egalitarian interactions or encounters between networks endowed with different levels of power. Thus, I give Wiley's Semiotic Self a more structuralist interpretation: I exploit his distinction among the different temporal orientations of the self (the me-past, I-present, you-future) to ask what kinds of social structures are more likely to generate them. I intend to discuss the implications of a network theory of the self for the debate on identity politics, and use historical illustrations from the early middle class women's movement in the US to demonstrate the ways in which essentialism and constructivism are produced at the level of the self through stratification on the power and status dimensions.

Pierre-Antoine Kremp, Princeton University
Social Networks and Fields Theory

This paper examines the problematic relations between two major conceptual and methodological frameworks that have been particularly useful in economic sociology: social networks and fields. Both approaches provide compelling representations of economic action that contribute to opening the black box of embeddedness. However, instead of being used as heuristic representations of social relations, that could be easily combined, fields and networks claim to be comprehensive sociological theories of economic phenomena. I show that these two approaches to economic sociology have been characterized by two symmetrical forms of reductionism. On the one hand, network analysis has tended to rely on a representation of economic phenomena that reduces embeddedness to the existence of interpersonal ties between actors and thus fails to take into account cultural meanings and power relations stemming from unequal social attributes (namely class, social origin or education). Heterogeneity between individuals is reinterpreted as and reduced to their particular positions within social networks and the network resources their positions allow them to mobilize. On the other hand, the sociology of fields has consistently defined fields as spaces of social relations. But more attention has been paid to the relations between different fields and to the relative definition of the social attributes of actors within each field than to the relations between the social actors themselves. I argue that combining the two heuristic representations can be both practically possible and theoretically fruitful, in so far as it could help overcome the symmetrical shortcomings of the two approaches: the unsatisfactory analysis of power relations and cultural meanings on the social network side; and the problematic ways in which social relations are dealt with on the fields side.

Kwai Ng, University of California, San Diego
Interaction and Mediation: A Note on Doing Sociology with Language

This paper attempts to show how future sociological research can understand more fully the working of language and its constituting role in social practices by suggesting one way in which sociologists can look beyond the semantic meaning of linguistic text —by looking into the linkage between text and context. In order to provide a grounding for my claim that language is socially constitutive, I argue that sociologists should go beyond the model of understanding language exclusively in terms of referential meaning, but also by taking seriously what Charles Sanders Peirce referred to as indexical meaning, i.e., meaning dependent upon the context in which language is used. Drawing from the sociological works on linguistic interactions, I argue that very often it is context that determines the nature of a text. I further argue that the success or failure in bringing about a particular context in one language has much to do with the social history of that language. In my research on legal bilingualism in Hong Kong, for example, I argue that language plays a pivotal role in the everyday enactment of formalism, a role that suggests language is more than a simple conduit. Specifically, the formality of the law is very much entrenched by the "purified" form of English used. I also found that the intense focus on transparent, referential meaning in English-language trials has much to do with the everyday context in which English is used in Hong Kong. However, the failure to impose the same linguistic order in Cantonese-language trials and their slippage to performative speeches can only be explained by the very different context in which Cantonese is used daily in the society. By investigating the indexical linkage between language and context, sociologists can understand more fully how social structure is at work locally and how interactions at a local level reproduce or, in some cases, transform the social.

Panel 3 - Comparative and Global Theorizing

Matthias Koenig, Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg
World Society and the Problem of Multiple Modernities

Contemporary debates in macro-sociological theory are characterized by two seemingly opposite trends. On the one hand, theorists increasingly focus on the dynamics and effects of "world society"; thus, the neo-institutionalist world polity approach sees isomorphic actor identities, interests, and functions, including those of the nation-state, as embedded in transnational institutional fields. On the other hand, proponents of the concept of "multiple modernities" have stressed the variability of institutional configurations at the level of both nation-state and, more importantly, civilizations, thus highlighting divergence and historical path-dependency of current institutional changes. The present paper suggests that a major challenge for future macro-sociological theory lies in the integration of these two literatures. The argument, which is based on historical-comparative research on institutional varieties and contemporary transformations of "secularism," proceeds in three steps. First, it is argued that theoretical cross-fertilization between the world society and multiple modernities approaches is possible to the degree that both regard modernity as an inherently cultural or symbolic construction, share a Weberian emphasis on historical contingency, and emphasize the political constitution of modern collectivities. Secondly, theoretical cross-fertilization is shown to be also necessary, in order to overcome internal inconsistencies within both approaches, such as the relationship between formal and activity structure or that between the global diffusion and local re-interpretation of modernity. Thirdly, it is argued that the integration of both approaches within a consistent analytical framework requires further theoretical elaboration. Attention needs to be shifted from questions of convergence or divergence to the mechanisms through which social order is (de)institutionalized across multiple levels. Emphasis must be given to agency and institutional contradictions as factors of social change within multi-level configurations. And, if sociological theory remains committed to understanding modernity as a common, yet variable human condition, it needs to move from cultural comparison to more reflexive forms of cultural translation.

Alexandra Kowalski, New York University
Cultural Capitalization and the Nation-state: Case and Concept in Sociological Theory

Borrowing from and adapting Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, my doctoral work on French cultural policy rests on the central idea that contemporary policies of culture and memory should be primarily understood as public forms of "cultural capitalization" (rather than as nostalgic rituals and/or purposefully "invented" ideologies). This paper proposes to reflect on the empirical and theoretical implications of concept-making (or re-making) through a presentation of the crafting and possible uses of the notion of cultural capitalization applied to concrete cases of public culture. I focus more particularly on the theoretical relationship between cultural capital and an institution that has become commonplace across nations in the world since the French Revolution: national surveys of art and architecture, whose meaning for the conceptualization of collective identity I seek to explore. My goal is twofold: to present the contribution of my study of cultural surveys to sociological theory; and to reflect on the contribution of theory-driven analysis to sociology as a field more generally.

Fuyuki Kurasawa, York University, Toronto
Sociological Theory's Turn To Global Justice: An Invitation, A Plea, Or, Perhaps, A Provocation

This paper urges sociological theorists to engage with one of the defining socio-political dynamics of our era, the project of global justice grounded in growing demands for the universal realization of human rights. If these issues have stimulated a veritable explosion of theorizing in various disciplines (most notably in political science, law, and international relations), sociology clearly finds itself behind the curve. To begin to address this situation while correcting the excessively formalistic character of much scholarship on global justice, I want to suggest that sociological theory's distinctive contribution lies in its ability to analyze modes of practice, that is to say, patterns of social action undertaken within a set of institutional fields within which campaigns for socio-economic and politico-civil rights are transposable from one setting to the next. Hence, the paper introduces the idea of the work of global justice, whereby the latter is understood less as an ideal than a kind of normative and political labour that is socially constructed through encounters with a host of perils. There are three notable features of the work of global justice: its intersubjectivity (it is underpinned by a process of recognition between parties); its publicity (it is undertaken in and depends upon public spheres); and its transnationalism (it is partly pursued in arenas beyond the nation-state). I also want to propose a conceptual framework that views seemingly disparate struggles for of global justice as forming an interconnected constellation of five practices: bearing witness (testimonial acts in the face of mass human rights violations), forgiveness (collective and individual attempts to forgive those responsible for such violations), foresight (preventing human-made catastrophes), care (assisting those in need), and solidarity (a sense of togetherness with and responsibility for all human beings). All in all, then, the paper challenges sociological theory to rediscover its normative and public orientation, in order to contribute to a better understanding of the current movement toward an alternative world order.

Jonathan VanAntwerpen, University of California, Berkeley
Theory at the Interstices

Where is sociological theory today? Where is it going, and where should it be going? My take on these questions is informed by my own intellectual trajectory, as an erstwhile political philosopher and would-be social and political theorist, and by my fledgling attempts to theorize at the crossroads of intellectual fields and academic disciplines, without falling through the institutional and discursive cracks that separate them. In that light, I want to figure sociological theory as an intellectual practice that might operate at the interstices and intersections of disciplines and sub-disciplines, intellectual fields and discursive formations. What might such locations afford the practice of sociological theory? And how might theorists in sociology negotiate these varied locations while remaining productively embedded within their own academic discipline? Such questions are not new to sociological theorists, although they have been answered differently in the course of our discipline's history. Rather than seeking to provide an overarching account of our sub-disciplinary situation, an exhaustive taxonomy of the current field of theory, or an all-encompassing vision of its future, I want to suggest one particular sort of cross-disciplinary location for contemporary sociological theorists, and to ask about the intellectual possibilities that the occupation of this location - and others like it - might afford. My reflections will draw on my own nascent efforts to theorize across disciplines, revolving around historical investigations into the emergence, transformation, and transnational proliferation of "truth and reconciliation." I will suggest that one way for sociologists to theorize across disciplines is to take other academic fields of "theory" —whether political, economic, literary, philosophical, historical, or otherwise— as subjects and objects of sociological analysis. While good examples of such sociological work already exist, providing the basis for further cross-disciplinary theoretical engagement, my specific emphasis will be on an engagement with the political theorists and others who occupy the interstitial field of transitional justice that is the subject of my own research.

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