

Perspectives

Newsletter of the ASA Theory Section

www.asatheory.org

A Message from the Editors

Conceptual borrowing from neighboring fields has always been a productive source of innovation in social science, from Spencer's, Durkheim's and Schaffle's appropriation of the "organism metaphor" to conceptualize social structure (Levine 1995), to Levi-Strauss's importation of structural models from mathematics and linguistics to the understanding of the rules of kinship (Levi-Strauss 1969) and later myth in general (Levi-Strauss 1963), to Parson's (1951) appropriation of systems theory to conceive of the functioning of social systems. The analogical borrowing of concepts and ideas from other disciplines, however productive and generative of new insights, opens up the question of the specific *role* that these intellectual tools play in substantive sociological theorizing. There are two primary ways in which we can conceive of this role. One is to consider these models as purely *analogical*. The other is consider them as having direct *substantive* implications for the subject matter of interest.

The analogical approach treats the specific domain in question as *partially independent*

ent from the domain from which the models and metaphors are being borrowed. When the Because models and metaphors are conceived as purely analogical, the analyst has a lot of freedom in how *loose* or how *tight* she considers the analogy. For instance, as Reed points out below, while thinking of culture as "language" in a strict sense may be limiting, thinking of it in a loose sense can be productive. The flexibility offered by the analogical approach leaves room for different theorists to import the same concept yet generate radically different insights. Theoretical pluralism is even more pronounced between sociology and the field from which the social theorist borrowed the analogy, in this case the study of language in linguistics. Here the two disciplinary pursuits remain separate and each retains its partial autonomy and integrity.

In contrast to the analogical approach, the substantive approach presumes a borrowed concept can be thought of as more than an interesting tool with which to think about sociological puzzles. The analyst presumes

that the borrowed models and mechanisms refer to actual processes that are relevant for our conceptualization of, and sometimes *generative* of, the relevant phenomena in question. Through this type of borrowing the analyst attempts to claim that these extra-disciplinary processes *put constraints* on theorizing in the focal field. Such constraints may range from elucidating *how* the phenomena of interest are actually produced to *ruling out* certain proposals as to what these phenomena consist of, to suggesting what kinds of research streams are promising and which ones are not. For instance, importing linguistic models in a substantive fashion could suggest the need to account for "units of culture" that would logically follow from the discrete units of meaning that comprise language. Notice that here the conceptual borrowing from other fields does not leave the autonomy of the focal field intact; instead it opens the boundaries of the focus of investigation to the influence and tools outside of the previous scope of sociology. In other words, the *continued on page 13*

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Chair's Corner

Plans are shaping up nicely for Theory Section events at this year's ASA meetings. The section has two major events planned: our usual Theory Miniconference, to be held during the meetings themselves, and a Junior Theorists conference, to be held at Harvard on July 31, immediately prior to the meetings. You can read more about the Junior Theorists conference – which is being organized by Isaac Reed, Erika Summers-Effler, and Neil Gross – elsewhere in this newsletter.

As I've discussed earlier, the theme for this year's Theory Miniconference is "Theoretical Pragmatics, Methodological Challenges." Our conversations will focus on the diverse ways in which section members conceive of and practice the link between theory and method. I hope to highlight both the theoretical assumptions underlying choice of methodological techniques, as well as the practical challenges we face as we wrestle theoretically with the complexities of the empirical world.

We have five great panels lined up for the conference, which you can find listed ahead in the newsletter, with an additional open session to be determined soon. Each of the panels consists of theorists with quite different theoretical and methodological commitments. I'm anticipating provocative, self-reflective discussion by the panelists, *continued on page 12*

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Identity in Action

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Even as a self-proclaimed identity theorist, I find myself cringing at the mere mention of “identity” in public and, often, academic settings. The blame for this Pavlovian aversion does not rest on the speaker’s shoulders; but rather because even with the proliferation of identity theories and research, sociologists still have not fully grasped identity as an analytical construct. I believe that this confusion stems not from a lack of empirical findings or solid theorizing but instead from the absence of an adequate synthesis of the available conceptualizations. It seems to me that these connections have been overlooked because we have forgotten what a theory of identity is supposed to be.

At its roots a theory of identity is a theory of human action. The principal aim for the identity concept was to provide a locus for understanding what drove people to choose certain courses of actions instead of others. Yet most interpretations and classifications of identity theories have situated them as elaborations of George Herbert Mead’s ideas of the self¹. Focusing on the action aspect of identity theory, however, highlights the connection between identity as a concept and Parsons’ (1937) theory of action. Framing identity in this manner can help us see useful theoretical connections with other offshoots of Parsons’ action theory.

Specifically, I believe that unrealized synergies exist between the theory of identity developed by Sheldon Stryker (1968) and theories of culture, especially Ann Swidler’s theory of culture in action (1986; 2001). I contend that by connecting Stryker and Swidler’s theories, both of which

at their core are driven by Parsons’ basic question, will help us progress towards the goal of a complete theory of action. To understand this synthesis, I first will provide an overview of the foundations for and the major points of Stryker and Swidler’s theories, including a further discussion of their connection via Parsons. Then I will introduce the theoretical connection between the two that I believe will help develop a unified theory of action.

The Development of a Split Identity (Theory)

Sociological developments of identity can be divided into two camps by the fundamental distinction “between the self as *subject* or agent and the self as *object* of the person’s own knowledge and evaluation” (Rosenberg 1979, 6, emphasis added). Those directly following Mead chose to focus on the influence of social interactions on shaping the ego identity. Instead of making identity a key part of action, these theorists concentrated on how the person took his or her self as a reflexive object. As an exemplar of this approach, McCall and Simmons (1966) contend that identities are tied directly to roles (i.e., role-identities). Roles form the blueprint for action, while identities are the “improvisational” aspect of role behavior that is shaped through the rewards and sanctions of others’ reactions to the role performance. Individuals seek to execute the role successfully in order to increase the positive reaction of others (role-support). In this perspective we return to a model of individuals as maximizers, trying to obtain as much support for their role-identities as possible. Identity was not seen, however, as the locus from which courses of action were chosen or motivated, leaving the paramount question of human behavior unresolved.

It is within this context that the

other main stream of sociological identity theories developed, perhaps the most influential which is Stryker’s (1968; Stryker and Serpe 1994) identity theory. While the Interpretivists chose the “object” side of the identity coin, Stryker clearly focused on the “subject” side. He did so because beyond developing a theory of identity, Stryker is clearly interested in developing a theory of action, which led him to utilize several of Parsons’ key ideas.

The connection between Parsons and Stryker likely arose because their primary starting points—for Parsons utilitarianism and for Stryker interactionism—suffered from a similar flaw. Although agreeing largely with their general frameworks, both saw their respective footings as missing a systematic motivation for action. Parsons argued that utilitarianism was correct in positing individuals as goal-seeking but also criticized its inability to specify the origins of those goals. Parsons’ resolution was to claim that individuals’ goals and the means chosen to attain them are jointly determined by values, beliefs, and norms (Joas 1996).

In a strikingly similar move, Stryker sought to develop a place for the motivation of action within an interactionist framework. For Stryker the main gap in interactionist thought was its failure to take social structure seriously. His primary purpose was to develop a connection between the self and the social structure in such a way as to supply a systematic, predictive motivator of human action. This link was provided by his reformulation of identity.

Stryker’s identity theory contends that stronger commitment to an identity will increase the salience of that identity thereby making the individual more likely to engage in identity-
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consistent behavior. He defines commitment not as a psychological hierarchy but as the number and affective importance of network ties that depend upon a person enacting a given identity. A higher level of commitment, determined by one's place in the social structure, pushes that identity higher in a person's salience hierarchy. As opposed to previous theories' psychological rankings, such as importance or centrality, salience is defined behaviorally – as a measure of the likelihood of an identity being enacted *across* situations. Stryker and Serpe (1994) explained that salience operates like a cognitive schema; when an identity has a high salience people are likely to interpret situations according to the established norms of this identity and therefore use the identity in guiding their actions. Thus, the higher the salience of the identity, the more likely a person is to act in accordance with its expectations (i.e., spend more time in activities corresponding to that identity).

The substantive connection between Parsons and Stryker, although not stated explicitly, lies in the similarity between Parsons' concepts of values, norms, and beliefs and Stryker's reliance on "expectations of behavior" (roles). Roles can be seen as the coalescence of specific norms for behavior, and both believed that these were created and sustained through interaction². For Stryker's identity theory to work, individuals have to know what the goals and acceptable means for achieving them are for any given identity, and then the process of commitment and salience can determine which behaviors get enacted. Seen in this light, Stryker provided more specificity to the somewhat abstract action process outlined by Parsons.

Not surprisingly, the two share a fundamental fault as well. In providing an account of motivation that "object" theories of identity lack, both eliminated a space for a reflexive, subjective sense of self as an object³. To many, Stryker's theory is a blunt instrument, portraying individuals as automatons acting out the expectations of their network. Similar to the critique of Parsons' "cultural dopes," Stryker's conceptualization seems to portray actors as "structural dopes." It is this point that serves as the departure for Swidler's theory of culture in action.

Culture as the Informer of the Self

Before delving into the specifics of Swidler's argument, some might wonder why I do not simply connect the two main strands of identity theory to explain the self as both object and subject. This combination, however, would not avoid the inability of either type of identity theory to provide an answer for where the *substance* of the self as an object develops. Rosenberg (1979), for example, talks about the formation of an "ideal self" but does not discuss fully why one person's ideal self may be a Nobel laureate while another's is an Olympic swimmer.

The sociology of culture overcomes this oversight by explaining how culture places bounds on the "selves" that are available. For example Michele Lamont's (1992) research details how different national traditions and cultural productions permit particular types of self and limits others. She shows that in France to be an intellectual means to be ever questioning in search of a higher truth, whereas in the United States the intellectual self is comprised of accumulating facts and knowledge. She further explains, elaborating on Bourdieu, how social structures delimit the available selves, both in their specific content and the

ones an individual may be able to choose. This cultural perspective, therefore, offers insight into the development of the substance of particular selves, and it provides a framework for understanding why certain people may be more likely to take on specific types of selves (i.e., because they are the ones available).

If, however, we only relied on this bounding aspect of culture we would be left with Parsons' problem of the unmoved mover – culture thereby being reduced to pure structuralism. Swidler's theory of culture in action, however, rests on this fundamental disagreement with Parsons about what culture "does." According to Parsons, culture (as a collection of norms, values and beliefs) is able to get inside the person and serve as a driving force of action (i.e., it does not simply provide the options but also directs the choices). Swidler argues that this perspective is untenable because it is not supported empirically. Specifically, when people are asked why they did something (i.e., what motivated them), their explanations, although appealing to narratives about values and beliefs, are inconsistent and even contradictory. The lack of coherence in their accounts casts serious doubts on the existence of a unified culture somehow causing individuals' choices of action.

Just as Stryker turns away from a focus on the self as object, Swidler too looks outside the individual for the sources of motivation. She argues that institutions, both large (e.g., law) and small (e.g., networks), provide individuals with set of available choices and hold the power to penalize deviant behavior. But, one's place in the social structure also affords differential cultural "tools," which one can deploy to make sense of the choice he/she was subtly coerced to make (Vaisey forthcoming). For

Swidler, culture is in action when people use it to interpret and justify their action.

The tools that are chosen are not purely random but rather stem directly from the way in which individuals reflect on themselves. In *Talk of Love* she claims that the culture people use to explain why they are married (i.e., why they remain with only one partner) can be grouped into three types of selves: utilitarian, disciplined, and attuned. For example, she shows how for those in the disciplined group, marriage ceases to be about individual choices or pleasures but rather becomes an expression of one's commitment to Christian ideals. In this way culture forms the means by which one is capable of envisioning and interpreting the self as an object.

Though she deftly details how married individuals rely on various cultural stories of love to make sense of why they are married, she seems to imply that the "real" reason people marry is because institutions will zap them if they don't. This explanation creates a significant problem for Swidler's theory as a general theory of action. She does not provide a systematic understanding of why some people choose certain behaviors over others, or even why some people use the cultural tools they do. After all, some people do not marry and many others marry and divorce. Yet it is difficult to imagine a structural or institutional location, at least in America today, that would not hold up marriage as the cultural norm. In this way, Swidler ends up suffering from the same critique Parsons levied against utilitarianism. If the reason some people marry and others do not is purely random (allowing for the difference to be accounted for by agentic choice) then her theory has provided little in actually understanding human action. Conversely, if the

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two paths are not chosen at random but rather are completely determined by structural settings (completely eliminating agency) then actors become the exact type of “dopes” that she set out to refute.

Finding a Synthesis

As a review, we have a strong theory of identity that provides a mechanism for connecting the social structure to action (i.e., from commitment through identity salience). But it does not provide for the reflexive self a key to both identity and action theory. Then we have a strong theory of culture that clearly explains what shapes and how people use the available values, norms, and beliefs to think about “the self” as an object but cannot account fully for the different courses of action individuals pursue. The discussion here points toward two key parts of a more complete and integrated action theory.

First, commitment and salience provide the systematic motivator for both action *and* the use of particular cultural interpretations. By relying on the structural component of commitment and the action mechanism of salience, we eliminate the problem of treating ends as random. There is strong empirical support for the commitment-salience-behavior connection, but what I add here is the connection between the first two concepts and the cultural tool employed. One’s place in the social structure helps explain instrumental action through the impact of commitment on identity salience. But this relationship also patterns interpretive and expressive behavior.

As previously mentioned, theories of culture have shown how culture limits the potential selves that can be formed, but they do not explain how people choose out of the available options. Swidler does not, for example, explain why certain individuals may employ the “utilitarian” set of tools while others use the “disciplined.” I argue that identity salience highlights the pertinent and identity consistent aspects of a situation thereby providing the mechanism by which people select which culture tools are necessary. Individuals with a stronger religious commitment, for example, are more likely to interpret marriage in a manner consistent with this religious identity, meaning they are more likely to use the disciplined toolkit.

The theory, however, is not reducible to one’s structural location because the self as an object offers subjective reflexivity and

variation within cultural framings. The second main tenet of my argument is that taking the self as an object, here understood through Swidler’s theory of culture, is a vital aspect for explaining action. Even though her theory seems to emphasize justification or sense-making, I contend that this justification is a key piece in motivating action because it informs the individual’s identity. That is, when seen not as a justification of action but rather as a portrait of the reflexive self, culture becomes the tool by which people *interpret* their identity. By defining their identity through culture, people are inherently delineating the courses of action that are available and the ones that are most desirable.

For example, the way in which one interprets what it means to be “a wife,” or, in other words, the cultural tool they use to explain why they are “a wife,” likely sets the bounds on the acceptability of divorce. The set of cultural tools that form the “disciplined” self prohibit divorce from even being an option, making those who use it much less likely to pursue it as a course of action. But this does not mean that all those who use the disciplined tools do so in a uniform way. As Swidler describes, people make choices out of the available culture, but can do so in novel and unique ways to make sense of their situation. This ability of interpretation allows for variation within selves and provides avenues for innovative courses of action. Extending the example, a wife may rely primarily on her disciplined toolkit to understand marriage but may “borrow” some of the tools from the attuned repertoire, which will alter how she perceives herself as a wife and directly influence her behavior. From this standpoint, people are no longer dopes of any kind because room has been made for the exercise of agency through the reflexive definition of one’s identity.

Although preliminary, my own research on adolescent religious behavior supports this view. Using a longitudinal sample, it is clear that adolescents’ commitment (i.e., connection to religious parents, peers, and other adults) directly influences their salience (i.e., when in a tough situation how likely are you to do what God or scripture says is right), which in turn impacts how frequently they engage in religious activities. But what is most intriguing is the association between the first two factors

and how individuals perceive their religious identity (i.e., have you become more or less religious). Interestingly, adolescents who feel they have become more religious and those who claim to have become less religious both employ similar explanations for this change (e.g., experienced a death of a loved one). Yet, the connection between commitment and salience influences which of these cultural tools the individual employs, which in turn adds to the prediction of their religious behavior. Thus, not only does this synthesis add theoretical value it suggests a straightforward method for analyzing specific behaviors.

Conclusion

I have argued that explicitly linking identity theory and culture in action theory to their Parsonian roots reveals a novel connection that adds insights for a theory of action. Specifically, identity theory contributes the mechanisms for linking social structure to the self as a subject, while culture adds a more complete account of the ways that different cultural repertoires pattern the development of the self as object. The connection of the two helps overcome the primary flaws of each and creates a synthesis that provides a theoretical framework and empirically useful concepts to help us better understand human action. Surely more analytic work needs to be done to confirm the validity of this connection, but I hope bridging the gaps between these two strong fields will begin the research necessary to develop a more thorough theory of action.

NOTES

- 1 This is not to say that all of the theorists themselves saw their work as such, but the implementation and elaboration of their work has been guided by this interpretation.
- 2 I do not contend that Stryker’s description of roles is completely equivalent to Parsons’ explanation of norms and values. Rather I see the functions of these concepts within their theoretical frameworks as analytically equivalent, providing a point at which the two can be fruitfully connected.
- 3 Stryker explains that the successful enactment of identities improves one’s self-esteem. But this aspect is never central in his theory nor as fully developed or tested as the commitment-salience-behavior process.

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Language as a Metaphor for Culture and the Uses of Theory in Cultural Sociology

Isaac Reed

University of Colorado

Structuralism was defined by the use of language as a metaphor (or technically, a simile) for two of the classic objects of investigation in the modern human sciences: “Myth is like a language” (Levi-Strauss); “The unconscious is structured like a language” (Jacques Lacan). In so far as cultural sociologists have inherited the theoretical work of Roland Barthes and Marshall Sahlins that derives from the former metaphor, and combined it with the classical insights of Durkheim on symbols and social structure and Weber on subjectivity and social action, they have elaborated a broad theoretical perspective based on the metaphor that *culture* is like a language.

What does this entail? It entails, first of all, thinking about culture structurally in the way that linguists think about language synchronically. What, we want to ask, is the formal structure of a cultural formation? Does it divide the world into twos, or threes? Does it have a “master code” to which most designations and labels point back, denotatively? What are the narratives that we find, repeated over and over again, in the understandings of actors? We then add to this analysis an analysis of the content of these structures. Are the essential binaries moral, dividing the world into good and evil, or aesthetic, dividing the world according to norms of beauty—or do actors perhaps use the aesthetic to map the world when they want to pass moral judgment without appearing to do so? Here the questions quickly take on an ethnographic slant, and require thick description.

We can elaborate out from here: who are the typical protagonists of narrative (are they collective? Individual? Racially defined?); what are the associations between concepts that, though ultimately arbitrary, conventionally go together so often that, to the actors involved, they seem natural, almost definitional, with repeatable social consequences of exclusion (e.g. masculinity and violence, middle-class and emotional control)? And so on. But I want to point out here that all of this theoretical work of interpretation can operate on *culture*, and *not* on language. This is a commonly misunderstood point about the sociology of culture, studies of discourse, etc. Very often, the empirical materials of cultural analysis *include* human writing and speech, and in some cases—such as archival work in historical sociology—they are almost exclusively made up of written language. But this does not mean that the language or the talk itself is the ultimate object of analysis that the sociologist is attempting to grasp, and use in her explanations of social action. Much as a historical sociologist of class conflict might use written materials to posit (or dispute) the existence and efficacy of the working class in Britain in the 19th century, the cultural sociologist uses written and spoken materials—along with music, imagery, quantitative analysis of survey responses, and many other forms of evidence—to posit larger meanings which sit behind all of these things, and constitute culture.

Culture—like social structure, the economy, and political hierarchies—is not immediately visible, and is fundamentally collective in its instantiation. In this way, along with the more specific ones listed above, it is *like* a language. And a given cultural or “discursive” formation may include within its scope certain languages, used by certain people, at certain times and places. But it is surely not *reducible* to literal speech and writing, much as the economy is not reducible to the paper money that it uses to function. Culture is less concrete, and more powerful, than language. That is why we study it—because it is

a highly effective aspect of collective life that helps us explain why people do what they do.

The metaphorical nature of this format of analysis explains, in a general way, the utility and popularity of the term “discourse” in studies of culture and its social effects. The term, I believe, has a generalized connotative meaning of “that which, it is efficacious and relational meaning, acts a bit like a language, but is not only language.” But what are its more specific meanings, and what are the implications of these meanings for the production of sociological knowledge?

Jurgen Habermas uses the term to refer to the actual conversations that must take place if reason is to have public power, the speech acts by which humans are able to make, query, and defend validity claims. Here the opponent is John Rawls, who suggests in some of his work that justice can be arrived at through a monological thinking-through, guided by the veil of ignorance. One rational individual is enough to rethink justice.

Michel Foucault’s use of “discourse” is tricky, and I have often heard it described as “By ‘discourse,’ Foucault means discourse and practice,” or, “Foucault includes bodily practices in the term discourse.” This is frustrating, because then I want to know what “practice” is. Regardless, I think that Foucault used the term so frequently and so effectively because he wanted to reject the structuralist distinction between (a) the abstract possibilities of a system of meaning and (b) the specific empirical manifestations of this abstract system—between, for example, (a) all of the possible combinations of mythological protagonists and antagonists and (b) those that actually exist as recorded myths. Foucault argued, instead, that the systematics of discourse or *discursive formations* were historically emergent—meaning that, rather than being various examples of one abstract schema, systems of meaning were specific to certain historical eras, and had to be grasped as such, as opposed to through a single universal theory of the human mind, myth, and logical possibility. The opponent in this case is clearly Claude Levi-Strauss, who, as Clifford Geertz once put it, created with his anthropology, “an infernal culture machine. It annuls history, reduces sentiment to a shadow of the intellect, and replaces the particular minds of particular savages in particular jungles with the Savage Mind immanent in us all” (Geertz, 355).

So, then, with this use of the term discourse, we see a clear modification of the “culture is like a language” metaphor, because now the study of socially efficacious meaning is denuded of the search for a universal theory of mind, and distanced from the universalistic aims of some branches of twentieth century linguistics. Here the historical study of discursive formations meets up with the methodological insights of single-case analysis in qualitative sociology. Put informally: if you spend too much time looking for the universal mind, you might disable your ability to understand the people in front of your nose.

Now we have an explanation for the controversy that surrounds the term “discourse”: it activates the claim that culture is both more powerful than, and less “universal” than, language—at the same time as affirming that thinking that “culture is like a language” is a useful starting point. How is culture less universal than language? In the sense that we may not be able to grasp its inner workings, once and for all, and then map these out in a single unified theory of culture that imitates in its conceptual structure the theory of gravity. Indeed, it is exactly in grasping what makes this or that culture, this or that discursive formation, irreconcilably different from all the other ones we’ve seen,

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ASA THEORY EVENTS

THEORY MINI CONFERENCE 2008 THEORETICAL PRAGMATICS: METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Theory in Method: Representational Strategies and Challenges

Sunday, August 3, 2:30pm-4:10pm

Session organizer and presider: Andrew J. Perrin, *University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill*

Discussant: Joshua A. Guetzkow, *University of Arizona*

Beyond the Antinomies of Structure: Recovering the Insights of Methodological Structuralism

Omar A. Lizardo, *University of Notre Dame*

Writing Theory in(to) Autoethnography: The Case of LAST WRITES

Laurel Richardson, *The Ohio State University*

Garfinkel and Information Theory

Anne Warfield Rawls, *Bentley College*

Dilemmas of Theoretical Reduction: Why, How, and How Much?

Sunday, August 3, 4:30pm-6:10pm

Session organizer and presider: Ann Mische, *Rutgers University*

Discussant: John Levi Martin, *University of California, Berkeley*

Session description: In this panel, participants from diverse theoretical perspectives reflect on the simplifying representations that all research involves in order to reduce, focus, and illuminate the complex buzz of social life. To what degree are these simplifying models useful, revelatory, generative? Or to what degree do they obscure, rather than reveal, the dynamics of social life?

Process Isolation Is Not Reductionism: Yes, You Can Really Study an Army in the Laboratory

Alison Bianchi, *University of Iowa*

Boiling it Down and Blowing it Up: The Role of Formal Modeling in Theory Advancement

John Mohr, *University of California, Santa Barbara*

Ethnography as Experience: Visceral Complexity as a Path to Theoretical Elegance

Erika Summers-Effler, *University of Notre Dame*

Vicissitudes of Representation: Necessary Reductions, Suspensions, and Misrecognitions

Robin Wagner-Pacifici, *Swarthmore College*

Don't Bogart that Joint Homomorphic Reduction, Or, When You Turn Social Life into a Bunch of Ones and Zeros, From Where Do You Get the Ones?

John Levi Martin, *University of California, Berkeley*

Becoming Theoretical: Pragmatic Challenges

Monday, August 4, 10:30am-12:10pm

Session organizer, presider and discussant: Neil Gross, *Harvard University*

Session description: In this panel, younger scholars from a variety of theoretical perspectives reflect on the intellectual, institutional, and practical challenges they face as they attempt to become theorists while also engaging in substantive research of different sorts.

Note: Younger theorists are especially invited to attend this session and join in the discussion.

Theorizing Across Disciplines: The Joys and Perils of Social Psychological Theory

Steve Hitlin, *University of Iowa*

Feedback and Supplement: Theory and Methods in the Approach of Opaque Problems

Erin McDonnell, *Northwestern University*

Choosing the Kind of Theorist You Want to Be: Patterns of Valuation and Devaluation in the Theory Field

Omar Lizardo, *University of Notre Dame*

Keeping One's Distance: Odysseus and the Role of Ambiguity in the Making of Social Sciences (and Our Lives)

Delia Baldassarri, *Princeton University*

ASA THEORY EVENTS

THEORY MINI CONFERENCE 2008 THEORETICAL PRAGMATICS: METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Theoretical Careers: How Practice Shapes Ideas

Monday, August 4, 12:30pm-2:10pm

Organizer and presider: Ann Mische, *Rutgers University*

Session description: In this panel, senior scholars reflect on their own careers, discussing the ways in which their theoretical ideas have been shaped, channeled, and transformed by their methodological engagement with the empirical world.

The Self in a Social Ecology: Networks, Niches and Situated Identity

Lynn Smith-Lovin, *Duke University*

Phenomenology and Weber / Utopia and History

John R. Hall, *University of California, Davis*

Doing Research to Find Out, 'What My Dependent Variable Is'

Art Stinchcombe, *Northwestern University*

Theorizing: The Connection between Disconnected Projects

Diane Vaughan, *Columbia University*

Charles Tilly: The Struggle of Ideas and Practices

Jack Goldstone, *George Mason University*

Note: This panel will include a special remembrance of Charles Tilly, who was originally scheduled to speak on this panel.

Linking Theory and Method: Programs, Problems, and Possibilities

Monday, August 4, 2:30pm-4:10pm

Organizer and presider: Ann Mische, *Rutgers University*

Session description: In this panel, senior scholars reflect on how they link theory and method in their own work. They will discuss the problems and challenges they have encountered, along with where they think theoretical practitioners should be going in the future.

Reflections on the Relationship between Theory and Method in the Social Sciences

Michael Hechter, *Arizona State University*

What is the Evidence Doing? Irritations and Theoretical Defenses

Karin Knorr-Cetina, *University of Chicago*

Invisible Colleges and Theoretical Research Programs

Michael Lovaglia, *University of Iowa*

Linking Theory and Method and . . .

Emanuel Schegloff, *University of California, Los Angeles*

Cultural Mismatch and the Study of Institutions in Action

Ann Swidler, *University of California, Berkeley*

Reed, continued

that allows us to use it to explain a historical event, a repeated set of behaviors, a massive social transformation.

And this brings us back to the original structuralist project, and the various other attempts to grasp the essence of the human mind—including notorious intellectual figures of the twentieth century like Chomsky, Skinner, and Piaget. There may be a universal theory of the human mind, or a universal theory of linguistic structure, and if there is, it may be explainable in the terms of evolutionary psychology, or the requirements of linguistic communication, or the inevitable aspects of human interaction and co-presence, or something else. But the resolution of this debate seems relatively autonomous from what we are up to in cultural sociology—namely pushing the *metaphor* of culture as language (along with other metaphors—“culture as toolkit” comes to mind) as far as it will go, in the project of grasping the collective meanings of culture, so as to explain social action.

This means that theory works in a different way for cultural sociology than it did for Newton, or for Levi-Strauss. We will always have *theories* of culture, which must be used in the project of *understanding* cultural difference, which is, in principle, infinitely variable. This is the burden of an interpretive science: do not expect Newton, but rather take up our useful abstractions and venture into the world of signification, in hopes of grasping what “others, guarding other sheep in other valleys” (Geertz, 30) are up to. Some have taken this to indicate the “end of theory” in sociology, but it seems to me that precisely the opposite is true. If cultural differences are vast and yet cultural formations must be understood to explain social life, then we desperately need that notorious, conflicted, and complex cultural formation of abstractions useful for understanding others—*theory*.

ASA THEORY EVENTS

THEORY SECTION ROUNDTABLES

Monday, August 4, 8:30am - 9:30am, Hilton Boston Back Bay
Organized by Orville Lee, *New School for Social Research*

Table 01. Trust

Marriage, Trust and the Hazy Foundations of Placing Confidence in Social Systems
 Alexander Lascaux, *Plekhanov Russian Academy of Economics*
 Simmel on Trust and Social Groups
 Sandro Segre, *University of Genoa, Italy*

Table 02. Postmodern: Theoretical and Empirical

'Postmodern' Death and Bereavement
 Sarah L. MacMillen, *Duquesne University*
 A Subjective Universal: Max Weber and the Modern-Postmodern Divide
 Jarrett Alan Thibodeaux, *Vanderbilt University*
 The Spirit of Postmodernism
 J. Michael Ryan, *University of Maryland-College Park*

Table 03. Weber

Max Weber and a Fourth Type of Leadership
 Petra Aigner, *University of Linz, Austria; TCD, Trinity College Dublin*
 Weber and Modernization : A Tale of Two Theories
 Brandon Rama Vaidyanathan, *University of Notre Dame*, Michael J. Strand, *University of Notre Dame*

Table 04. Social Problems

A Functionalist View of Community Policing in the Minority Community
 Francis Marion Williams, *Bridgewater State College*
 Applying Du Boisian Theory to Experiences of People with Disabilities in Society and the Education System
 Amber Buckley-Shaklee, *University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*
 Pragmatist Philosophy and the Global Environmental Crisis
 Jerry L. Williams, *Stephen F. Austin State University*

Table 05. Classical Theory

At the Edge of Classicism: Adam Smith's Sentiments and Gabriel Tarde's Monads
 Alvaro A. Santana Acuna, *Harvard University*
 The Paradox of Solidarity and the Politics of Mosque-building: Re-aligning Durkheim and Ibn Khaldun
 Sharif Islam, *University of Illinois*

Table 06. Critical and Contemporary Theory

Critical Theory and the Issue of Socio-Historical Specificity
 Harry F. Dahms, *University of Tennessee, Knoxville*
 Sociologizing The Subject/Object Divide: Towards A Socio-Analytic Understanding of Passions
 Matthew J. Mahler, *State University of New York-Stony Brook*
 The Civil Sphere, Destructive Intrusion, and Narcissism
 Jeff Livesay, *Colorado College*

Table 07. Bourdieu

Does Habitus Matter? A Comparative Review of Bourdieu's Habitus and Simon's Bounded Rationality with Some Implications for Economic Sociology
 Francois H Collet, *ESADE, Universitat Ramon Lull*
 Pierre Bourdieu on Power
 David L. Swartz, *Boston University*

Table 08. Sociological Theory

Extending A Link Between Social Influence Network Theory And Status Characteristics Theory
 James Fisher Hollander, *Texas Instruments*
 Playing with Norms: Understanding the Antecedents and Legitimacy Consequences of Selective Conformity
 Guilhem Bascle, *HEC (Paris)*, Christiane Arndt, *Maastricht University*
 Rethinking Capital
 Kevin Payne, *Park University*

ASA THEORY EVENTS

THEORY SECTION ROUNDTABLES

Table 09. Reflections on the Theoretical Field

Fragmentation or Continuity? Central Themes in Classical and Contemporary Social Theory

Philip C. McCarty, *University of California-Santa Barbara*

Max Weber, Philosophy of History, and the Hazards of Internal Fragmentation of Social Theory

Reha Kadakal, *University of Chicago*

Reclaiming Adulthood as a Social Category: A Recognition-theoretical Approach.

Harry Blatterer, *Macquarie University*

Table 10. Theory and Method

Communicating Sociology to the Public with Stories of Patterns and Patterns of Stories.

Loren R. Demerath, *Centenary College of Louisiana*

The Rise and Relevance of Qualitative Research.

Pertti Alasuutari, *University of Tampere*

Violence and Pain in the Media: The Spectacle of Suffering Bodies.

Miranda Christou, *University of Cyprus*

The Revolutionary Action of Practicing Equality: A Symbolic Interactionist Examination of the Combahee River

Collective.

Adrienne N. Milner, *University of Miami*

Table 11. Foucault

Power, Structuralism and Emancipation in the Works of Burke and Foucault.

John Leveille, *West Chester University of Pennsylvania*

Developing the Sociology of Mind or Thinking.

Gordon William Gauchat, *University of Connecticut*, Casey A. Borch, *University of Alabama at Birmingham*

Table 12. Migration and Economy

Flexible Acculturation.

Hsiang-Chieh Lee, *University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign*

Integrating World-Systems and Life-Worlds: Towards the Development of an Analytical Framework to Study International Migration.

Cristian Alberto Dona, *Michigan State University*

The Gift of Partnership in a Post-Industrial Town: A "Patterned" Explanation of Post-Partisan Politics.

Josh Pacewicz, *University of Chicago*

OTHER THEORY SECTION ACTIVITIES

Friday, August 1, 10:30am–12:10pm

Section on Sociology of Culture Invited Session: Global Differences in Conceptualizing Culture (co-sponsored by the Theory Section)

Organizers: Mark D. Jacobs, *George Mason University*, Paul R. Lichterman, *University of Southern California*, and Ann Mische, *Rutgers University*

President: Paul R. Lichterman, *University of Southern California*

Discussant: Michele Lamont, *Harvard University*

Presenters: Thomas S. Eberle, *University of St. Gall*, Daniel Cefai, *University of Paris X-Nanterre, France*, Evelina Dagnino, *University of Campinas, Brazil*, Eiko Ikegami, *New School for Social Research, Graduate Faculty*

Friday, August 1, 6:30pm–8:10pm, Sheraton Boston

Joint Reception: Theory Section, Section on Comparative-Historical Sociology, and the Section on Sociology of Culture

Saturday, August 2, 2:30pm–4:10pm

Lewis A. Coser Memorial Lecture and Salon

President: Andrew J. Perrin, *University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill*

Presenter: 2007 Award Recipient, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Duke University*

2008 Award Recipient: Loic J. D. Wacquant, *University of California, Berkeley*

Session description: This session honors the recipient of the 2007 Lewis A. Coser Memorial Award, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, who will give memorial lecture. The 2008 award will be bestowed on Loic J. D. Wacquant. Professor Bonilla-Silva's lecture will be followed by a salon and reception with wine and food.

Monday, August 4, 9:30am–10:10am

Section on Theory Business Meeting

ASA THEORY EVENTS

JUNIOR THEORISTS' SYMPOSIUM

Thursday July 31, 8:14am - 4:15pm, Harvard University

Organized by Isaac Reed, *University of Colorado* and Erika Summers-Effler, *University of Notre Dame*

The Theory Section would like to invite all Section members to our second Junior Theorist Symposium, which will be held on July 31, immediately prior to the 2008 ASA meetings at Harvard University in Cambridge, MA. This conference features papers by scholars at a relatively early stage in their careers, with commentary by three senior social theorists. It's a wonderful chance to spot budding talent among upcoming theorists as well as to hear some of the emerging debates in the discipline. Thanks to Isaac Reed and Erika Summers-Effler for organizing the conference, as well as to the local support by Neil Gross and Michèle Lamont. All section members are enthusiastically invited to attend. For more information about the conference, please contact Isaac (isaac.reed@colorado.edu) or Erika (eeffler@nd.edu).

8:15-8:45 Breakfast

8:50-9:00 Opening remarks

9:00-10:50 Session 1: Legitimate Knowledge and Its Discontents

Heroes, Devotees, Addicts and Nostalgics. Repertoires of Engagement in the Quest for Self Transcendence

Claudio E. Benzecry, *University of Connecticut*

Toward a Theory of Scientific Legitimacy

Brian Dick, *University of California-Davis*

Theory: General, Middle Range, Variation-finding, Inspiring

Monika Krause, *New York University*

Think Tanks and the Production of Policy-knowledge in America: On the Notion of an Interstitial Field

Thomas Medvetz, *University of California, Berkeley*

Commentary on Papers from Session 1

Jeffrey Alexander, *Yale University*

11:10-1:00 Session 2: Selves and Social Situations

The Feeling Subject and the Reflexive Self: Bridging Cartesian Dualism

Michal Pagis, *University of Chicago*

Consumer Demand as Socially Constituted

Frederick Wherry, *University of Michigan*

The Hierarchy of Senses and Situated Punishment

King-To Yeung, *Princeton University*

Murder Matters: Fatal Physical Violence as a Form of Productive Power

Laurel Westbrook, *University of California-Berkeley*

Commentary on Papers from Session 2

Anne Rawls, *Bentley College*

1:00-2:30 Lunch

2:30-4:00 Session 3: Institutions and Organizations: New Theoretical Developments

Expanding the Terrain of Welfare State Theory: Core Concepts and New Policy Arenas

Tasleem J. Padamseem, *University of Michigan*

Adaptation, Reproduction and Social Change in the Institutional Analysis of Organizations: A Dual Cognition Model

Omar Lizardo, *University of Notre Dame*

Institutional Autonomy: Revisiting Old Institutional Analysis From the 'Inside Out'

Seth Abrutyn, *University of California-Riverside*

Commentary on Papers from Session 3

Randall Collins, *University of Pennsylvania*

4:00-4:15 Closing Remarks

Body, Psyche, and Culture in Durkheim, Mauss, and Alexander

Gabe Ignatow

University of North Texas

Biological and psychological factors played crucial roles at various points in Durkheim's sociology. In places he relied on LeBon's crowd psychology (Goldenweiser 1917) and even Mesmerism (Lindholm 1992; Pickering 1984: 382-95). He argued that anomie resulted from unrestrained and limitless desires, that the human body is a major source of cultural symbols, and that the body provides the means by which individuals transcend their egoistic selves and become attached to the symbolic order of society (Shilling 2005: 212; Shilling and Mellor 1998). Yet Durkheim equivocated about the role of biological and psychological factors in efforts to explain social facts. In *The Rules*, for example, he wrote of "individual natures" as "merely the indeterminate material which the social factor determines and transforms" (1982/1895: ch. 5).

Mauss seems to have recognized some of the inconsistencies in his uncle's treatment of bodily and psychological phenomena. Mauss often referred to emotions and the body in his writings, particularly in *Sociology and Psychology* (1979), and his ideas about the body were informed by his experiences in the trenches of World War I. As is detailed in Fournier's biography, "Besides his grief at the loss of friends and colleagues, Mauss also discussed the sentiments of fear and panic he had to endure, and his recognition of the physical and moral force of instinct, which animates or on the contrary discourages and isolates the individual during extreme moments" (Fournier 1994: qtd. in Probyn 2004: 234). He recalls how in the war he "experienced fear, and how it is reinforced by panic to the point that not only the group, but also the individual will itself, even the brute instinct of self-preservation, dissolve all at once" (1979: 14). In *Sociology and Psychology* (1979), Mauss refers to the "tripartite integration of the physiological-psychological-sociological" (Probyn 2004: 234). Within this complex, instinct is a driving force that can exceed human symbolic capacities. People communicate with symbols, but the only reason that we have symbols and can communicate with them is that we have instincts: the "exaltations and ecstasies which create symbols are proliferations of instinct" (1979: 16). In relation to this body-psyche linkage, the social cannot be seen as merely that which is imposed or internalized. The social, rather, needs to be understood as "truly internal, natural in the strong sense of the word" (Karsenti 1998: 77).

[W]e converge with physiology, the phenomena of bodily life, for it seems that between the social and the bodily layer of individual consciousness is very thin: laughter, tears, funerary laments, ritual ejaculations, are physiological reactions just as much as they are obligatory or necessary or suggested or employed by collectivities to a precise end, with a view to a kind of physical and moral discharge of its expectations, which are physical and moral too (Mauss 1979: 10).

In contrast to Durkheim's equivocations about the "organico-psyche," Mauss argues for collaboration between sociology and psychology. He presents a "very different picture of embodiment wherein the body does not fall away before the social, or become mere support for its static existence. The social here is charged by physicality" (Probyn 2004: 235). And it is Mauss's picture of embodiment that is borne out

by modern cognitive neuroscience and psychology, and it is therefore this picture that challenges contemporary cultural sociology. Yet cultural sociologists today have rarely followed Mauss's lead, and continue to snub psychology, along with cognitive neuroscience and biology. In so doing they risk the inadvertent retention of assumptions about the human mind that subsequent psychological research has called into question. To disregard psychology now is thus to weaken rather than strengthen the empirical status of sociology, which is not at all what Durkheim intended (Schmaus 2004: 22).

I would argue that the neo-Durkheimian cultural sociology developed by Jeffrey Alexander and his colleagues over the past two decades potentially provides an intellectual foundation for the development of a more psychologically aware cultural sociology. Alexander defines culture as "an organized set of meaningfully understood symbolic patterns" (1992: 295), systems of "symbolic codes which specify the good and the evil" (Alexander and Smith 1993: 196). Reading Durkheim's late work on religion through De Saussure, Levi-Strauss, and the "linguistic turn" (Alexander 2003: 5-6), neo-Durkheimian cultural sociologists investigate the binary cultural codes that structure social discourses. In arguing that systems of cultural symbols direct human behavior, neo-Durkheimians implicitly answer some of the recent criticisms of Smith (2003) and others who want cultural sociology to analyze individual motivation as a social product, to provide "richly culturalist" analyses of meaning, motivation, and moral order (Smith 2003: 143). However, I would argue that limitations and inconsistencies in neo-Durkheimians' understanding of psychology and cognition and their inattention to cognitive neuroscience, psychology, etc. restrict their ability to explore the puzzle of how culture works in everyday life.

Alexander's neo-Durkheimian cultural sociology certainly contains many psychological and emotional elements. Culture, for Alexander, is "indelibly penetrated by the nonrational," by "deeply irrational systems of psychological defense," and by "deep emotional impulses" (1992: 295-305). This is sociology with an Id: subjective and internal feelings—"massive ones"—often "seem to rule the world" (Alexander 2003: 3). So sociologists need to learn to trace "the moral textures and delicate emotional pathways by which individuals and groups come to be influenced by them" (2003: 5).

In places, Alexander claims his approach is a sociological version of Freudianism. Social structures have "compulsive power" because they are meaningful, even if these meanings are invisible. Sociologists must "learn how to make them visible," to replace the unconscious with the conscious. Cultural sociology "is a kind of social psychoanalysis. Its goal is to bring the social unconscious up for view. To reveal to men and women the myths that think them so that they can make new myths in turn" (Alexander 2003: 4). More recently, Alexander has incorporated other, non-Freudian psychological concepts into his evolving "cultural pragmatics." He has combined Durkheimian crowd psychology with the popular psychological theory of "flow" experience (Csikszentmihaly 1975). "Ritual effectiveness energizes participants and attaches them to each other," Alexander argues (2004: 527), but rituals are less common in modern societies, which are structurally differentiated and culturally fragmented. Yet even in modernity, ritual is possible because it engenders a psychological state of flow that "stitches seamlessly together the disconnected elements of cultural performance" (Alexander 2004: 548). In spite of its psychologism, neo-Durkheimian cultural sociology starts by "bracketing off naturalism" (McLennan 2005: 10) in all areas except perhaps as a minimum species characterization: for example, "human beings are story-telling
continued on next page

Ignatow, continued

animals" (Alexander 2004: 262). This is psychologism minus an encounter with modern psychology.

Neo-Durkheimians view systems of cultural symbols as highly structured and penetrated by emotions and bodily and psychological states, rather than as relatively disorganized and disembodied. Cultural symbols are not viewed as purely cognitive phenomena, but are presumed to be meaningful because they are stored in memory as cultural structures with emotional and bodily associations. In this way, having avoided cognitivist or "disembodied" readings of Durkheim (Shilling 2005: 213), neo-Durkheimian cultural sociology is theoretically positioned to make use of resources from contemporary cognitive neuroscience, psychology, and related disciplines. However, neo-Durkheimians have been slow to draw on these resources. Rather, they claim that humans' psychological make-up supports their vision of culture, occasionally referencing psychoanalysis while avoiding modern psychology and cognitive neuroscience. This is likely due to the interpretive, hermeneutical style of most neo-Durkheimian research, and to a generalized aversion on the part of many cultural sociologists to the kinds of positive methods that are highly valued in fields like cognitive science, neuroscience, and psychology. Yet psychologists long ago abandoned the crowd psychology and Mesmerism on which Durkheim relied (Goldenweiser 1917; Lindholm 1992; Pickering 1984: 382-395).

Sociologists are left without much of a sense of what people may feel upon encountering the sacred or the profane, of what sorts of bodily states and emotions come into play. Alexander's recent development of a "cultural pragmatics" provides a possible answer (Alexander 2004; Alexander, Giesen, and Mast 2006). As noted above, Alexander contrasts the seamless unity of "flow" experiences (Csikszentmihaly 1975) with the "fragmentation" of modern life. But this seems both psychologically narrow and needlessly dualist. Don't modern people feel "flow"? And what evidence do we have that pre-modern societies are more psychologically unified than modern societies? What's more, the psychological contrast is inconsistent with Alexander's explicit emphasis on psychological and cultural continuities between modern and pre-modern societies. "Was it Durkheim's death," he goes so far as to ask (2003: 8), that "prevented him...from demonstrating the continuity between the religion of early societies and the cultural life of later, more modern ones?"

Recent research in cognitive neuroscience and psychology on embodied cognition (Ignatow 2007) and emotions provides a much broader understanding of the interactions between psychic and cultural phenomena than we might get from Freud or Csikszentmihaly. Specifically, several emotional potentialities should be of more than passing interest to sociologists interested in the sacred and the profane, collective effervescence, and other Durkheimian psychological concepts. One such potentiality is that for arousal. Hormones from areas of the "low brain" like the hypothalamus have been demonstrated to be crucial to some aspects of both social and religious behavior, including partner loyalty and parenting behavior (Konner 2002: 325-26), and intense religious experiences (MacLean, Walton, and Wenneberg 1994; see Hammond 2003: 360-61). Such arousers are likely associated with experiences of both the right and left sacred, and resemble to some degree Durkheim's description of the subjective experience of collective effervescence.

A second emotional system relevant to Durkheimian sociology is that for contagion. Contagion sensitivity has been well studied by biologists, psychologists, and anthropologists, and would seem to be intrinsic to the experience of the pure and impure sacred. In the *Elementary Forms*, Durkheim argued that sacred objects are conceived of by members of a society in terms of laws of "magical thinking," what Frazer (1890/1959) called "contagion" and Mauss "similarity" (Mauss 1979). The law of contagion can be summarized by the formula "things which have once been in contact with each other continue ever afterwards to act on each other" (Frazer 1890/1959: 35). Contact with an object considered impure will transmit the impurity to the person, who cannot be rid of it without recourse to purification rituals. The law of similarity is based on the principle that "like produces like" (Frazer 1890/1959, p.35). For example, needles used to 'torture' an image of one's enemy are supposed to inflict similar suffering on the real person. The psychologists Paul Rozin and Carol Nemeroff have been studying purity and contagion phenomena since the 1980s, have found ample evidence of purity and contagion in modern culture, and have explained much about their biological and evolutionary background as mechanisms for avoiding pathogens and toxins (Rozin and Nemeroff 1990). Cultures the world over make use of these mechanisms by proscribing contact with sacred objects, focusing on boundaries and thresholds, and seriously sanctioning rule violations (Douglas 1966). Rituals are often performed with a sense of urgency due to an intuition, rooted in neural mechanisms dedicated to the avoidance of pathogens, that great danger would be incurred by not performing them (Boyer 2003: 121). Other bio-psychic phenomena, such as those of awe (Keltner and Haidt 2003) and disgust emotions (Haidt et al. 1993) would seem to play roles in the experience of the positive right sacred, the transgressive left sacred, and the profane (Riley 2005).

We now know quite a bit more about bodily and psychological processes involved in ritual behavior than did Durkheim, but what implications does this knowledge have for cultural sociology? I believe there are many, but for now I will sketch one possible research direction that results from updating the psychological foundations of neo-Durkheimian sociology. While neo-Durkheimians do theorize the interplay of psychic and cultural phenomena, rather than imagining that culture operates independently of the body and psyche, there is no justification for their exclusive focus on the sacred/profane binary (McLennan 2005: 7). Rather, binary cultural codes need to be seen as internalized within neural networks connecting bodily modalities, including, but not limited to, modalities for arousal, contagion, awe, and disgust. Sociologists cannot investigate these networks directly, but they can analyze discourses in terms of metaphors, semantic sequences, and other discursive structures that reveal "meaning structures" (Mohr 1998) internalized within these networks. The "cultural structures" that are analyzed by cultural sociologists need to be theorized with an eye to their internalization in neural networks. These networks connect bodily and cognitive modalities, and are shaped by past experience. A neo-Maussian cultural sociology, informed by cognitive neuroscience and psychology, will be better equipped to identify cultural structures in discourses and practices, and to explicate the ways culture informs the lives of living, breathing, feeling human beings.

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Chair, continued

as well as lively response from the audience. Since I've asked the panelists to reflect upon their personal experiences as theoretical practitioners, the panels will take the form of spirited conversations rather than formal presentations. While I'm sure we won't be able to reach a consensus on what constitutes theory or method (or the link between them), we can at least gain a better understanding of the contours, tensions, and possibilities of approaches that might be quite distinct from our own.

In the next newsletter, look for a reflection on the role of "tensions" – as opposed to the more commonly evoked "puzzles" – as a key orienting device in sociological theory building. This is a problem I've been wrestling with as I have taught theory and method this past year. In the meantime, enjoy the invigorating spring weather!

—Ann Mische

Ignatow, continued

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Editors, continued

substantive approach requires synthetic theorizing across disciplinary boundaries.

Although sociological theorists routinely engage in both analogical and substantive styles of borrowing of concepts, there has been little discussion about the consequences of these styles for the field of theory. We suggest that distinctions between analogical and substantive approaches to borrowing are central to some of the most important questions facing social theorists. How autonomous should our discipline be (an issue of paramount importance for some early social theorists [Durkheim 1982; Simmel 1909])? What counts as a proper sociological explanation? How can theorists who import concepts in different ways engage in genuine intellectual exchange, or do these early theoretical choices prevent such exchange?

The three essays in this issue offer different examples of borrowing concepts from other fields to engage a specific subfield in sociological theory—cultural sociology. We believe that the case of cultural sociology is a compelling one to explore these issues. Not only is it one of the most intellectually vibrant (and continually expanding) subfields of sociology, it has been a theoretically and disciplinarily “promiscuous” field from the start, with roots extending from anthropological theory (Geertz 1973) to cognitive science (DiMaggio 1997). Thus, it strikes us as a ripe and promising ground in which to explore analogical vs. substantive approaches to borrowing concepts and the implications of these approaches for the central questions of our field.

-- Dustin Kidd, Erika Summers-Effler, Omar Lizardo, Editors

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Longest, continued

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