

Perspectives

Newsletter of the ASA Theory Section

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Chair's Corner

The Craft of Theorizing

Richard Swedberg, *Cornell University*

Since a few years back the incoming Chair of our section suggests the theme for the mini-conference at the next annual meeting of the American Sociological Association. The theme I have chosen is *the craft of theorizing*, and I hope it will suit most of the members of our section. Next year, in Atlanta, there will be one invited session on this theme and three open sessions, including one for junior theorists. My hope is that this is a worthwhile topic, and that it will work as an inspiration, not only to reflect on theorizing but also to theorize.

So – what exactly does it mean, *the craft of theorizing*? One good thing with this project is that it is a bit vague and open to many and different answers. One would, for example, expect the craft of theorizing to demand different skills, depending on what type of sociological theory is involved. Theorizing in, say, a historical and comparative study may differ from how you go about theory in network analysis or in rational choice.

At the heart of the notion of a craft of theorizing is that theorizing represents a distinct skill or rather, a distinct set of skills. It is not the same as doing empirical work or using a method, even if theorizing usually goes together with these two activities.

The craft of theorizing is also something that has to be learned. You essentially learn theorizing by theorizing. Some of the things that one does

when theorizing are easy to describe, while others are hard to be explicit about. The overall goal is good sociological workmanship, of which theorizing is an independent and necessary part.

For those who are interested in exploring the historical side of the craft of theorizing, there are a few obvious references. One is the appendix to *The Sociological Imagination*, called “On Intellectual Craftmanship”. Mills describes how he does sociology, including theory, in vivid and personal detail. For the notion of craftmanship, see also Richard Sennet’s recent book, *The Craftsman* (2008).

The classics and earlier sociologists should also be part of the discussion. Durkheim created his own little sociological guild around *l'Année sociologique*, with himself as the grandmaster and Marcel Mauss and others as the apprentices. And what about Weber and Simmel? Weber crammed his mind full of history ever since he was a child and was, throughout his life, very methodical in his intellectual pursuits. But he also knew that ideas do not come when you want them to come. They arrive, as it were, “when smoking a cigar on the sofa” (“Science as a Vocation”).

And Simmel? We have his answer to a student who asked what qualifications Simmel wanted his students to have, in order to join his seminar in philosophy: “You have to be able to philosophize about everything in this room”. In sum: knowing a lot of history, being methodical, being flexible (and smoking cigars on the sofa) may all be of help in theorizing well.

While I do think that it is meaningful to speak about theorizing as a craft, I do not know exactly how to define the craft of theorizing. But I feel confident that this is something that we can solve collectively; and remember, there are more than 800 members in the Theory Section! So, I hope that each of you will send in your ideas and thoughts on the craft of theorizing to the Newsletter, and also submit papers to the three open sessions in Atlanta.

To start the discussion off, let me suggest some quick thoughts on topics that are closely and loosely related to the craft of theorizing:

Context of Discovery & Context of Presentation.

Sociologists need to be competent in presenting their ideas and in testing them, according to generally accepted criteria. But the context of presentation seems to have overtaken the context of discovery in mainstream sociology, not least in terms of energy and time. We may therefore at the present stage want to spend more time on the context of discovery. While much of what these days is called theory belongs to the context of presentation, theorizing belongs to the context of discovery.

Reason, Abduction, Intuition, Introspection

Reason is essential! The process of thinking can be characterized as a conversation with oneself (e.g. Mead) – and it is a conversation in which Reason has to be the judge. There is no way around this; everyone is his or her own judge – and also his or her own theoretician.

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What is Driving our Modern Social Imaginaries? Turning to Cultural and Environmental Sociology for Answers

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Our world is on the brink of planetary ecological catastrophe—at least according to thinkers ranging from mainstream environmentalists like James Gustave Speth to leading eco-socialists like John Bellamy Foster to politicians like Al Gore and intellectuals like the Union of Concerned Scientists.¹ But it didn't take them to convince me. I read about it every day in the news and on the Web—an infinite stream of reports coming in from the field of effects of world-system expansion. Every ocean, lake, stream, forest, mountain, desert, specie and existing or potential human or animal habitat on earth is already seen as threatened or will likely be soon. Against critics who dismiss this language of crisis as apocalyptic and millennial and thus irrational, Foster cites the Union of Concerned Scientists' 1992 "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity," signed by 1575 top-ranking members: "Human beings and the natural world are on a collision course. Human activities inflict harsh and often irreversible damage on the environment and on critical resources. If not checked, many of our current practices put at risk the future we wish for human society and the plant and animal kingdom, and may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner that we know. Fundamental changes are urgent if we are to avoid the collision our present course will bring."²

Sixteen years after this anxious appeal no fundamental changes have registered, at least not changes of the magnitude that Foster suggests is necessary, namely that of an ecological revolution similar in size and scope

to the so-called industrial and agricultural revolutions.³ Perhaps in this past election cycle, enough public and political attention has begun flowing into the possibilities of alternative fuels that we may just start hearing honest reports that a structural adjustment is underway. But the oil-driven rise of China, India, South America and across the global south puts a check on even this modicum of optimism; it signals rather the built-in momentum of global warming, collapsing fisheries, deforestation, and species decline. It seems in other words to confirm the Union of Concerned Scientists worst fears. The urban lifeworld is also in trouble, as Mike Davis plainly argues in his aptly titled *Planet of Slums* (2006). In the final analysis, modern oil-driven industrial capitalism is structured for infinite growth by global market competition, and that makes it increasingly at odds with both planetary ecological sustainability and social justice, as does expansion of the chemical, nuclear, mining, forestry and corporate agricultural industries, in spite of their now nearly universal self-identification as advocates of sustainability. The fatal collision of human beings and the natural world seems to be well underway and is likely irreversible within any relevant timeframe.⁴ In the 21st century social theory will have to respond to this changing planet by seeking better explanations of what is driving these changes.

In this essay I outline what I've been able to accomplish in this direction by bringing Cultural and Environmental Sociology together. Like Jason Kaufman, who mentioned his methodological "preference for well told stories" over merely empirical explanatory arguments at the 2008 culture section mini-conference at the ASA,

and with in league with John Bellamy Foster's penchant for hard-nosed political economic examination of the ecological consequences of capitalism, I will end by proposing a few initiatives for embodying the strengths of cultural and environmental sociology in well-told stories about the *places being made by our modern social imaginaries*.⁵

By way of harnessing the linguistic force of one of the best told and retold social scientific stories of all time, we could say that another spectre is haunting modernity. Like the one Marx heralded in the Manifesto, the new spectre enters the public sphere with a vengeance just like alienated and exploited labor did in the 19th century; it presents another angry face with another, expanded set of monstrous grievances. It represents new collective subject forged by the fires of capitalist accumulation in general, just like labor did. As labor exploitation was to socialism in the late 19th and 20th centuries (and we know how that changed the world!), world-system expansion is to environmentalism in the 21st Century. But the new environmentalism is built on and within the world that labor struggle helped build. It does not eclipse labor but sublates it in the Hegelian sense (*aufheben*)—environmentalism overcomes that conflict by containing it; it dissolves it while preserving it in itself. Because environmentalism without class will surely falter, its only hope is to imbibe and raise labor struggle to a higher level.⁶ Whatever we do, our central task must be to chip away at the artificial division between these two struggles.

A sober look at how the new environmentalism grows will bear this out. Notice for example how the new spectre is forced to borrow a face.

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The advance guard of aggrieved parties do not and cannot speak for themselves, as workers were forced to and learned how to do. Dying birds and suffocating waters do not self-organize and raise their own consciousness. But people identify with species and with natural places. They take up the causes and produce the images and stories people need to recognize themselves in the new specter's face. On August 27, 2008, for example, I found two such images in the New York Times: "Arctic Sea Ice Drops to Second Lowest Level on Record" (Associated Press) and "World Bank Finds That Adjustment Places More in Steep Poverty" (Reuters). In the first a senior scientist at The National Snow and Ice Data Center, Mark Serreze, speaks up for the ice and the species it supports, reporting that with Arctic sea ice down to 1.65 million square miles, there's less white ice to reflect the sun and more dark water to absorb its heat: "We could very well be in that quick slide downward in terms of passing a tipping point," he said, "It's tipping now. We're seeing it happen now." A family of polar bears was spotted swimming north in the open sea heading for sea ice; they can sometimes make it one hundred miles, but this time the spotters knew it would be an impossible 400 mile swim. In the second report we learn that the World Bank has adjusted its monetary measure of extreme poverty up from \$1/day to \$1.25/day, in order to reflect better price data. Thus, not 1 billion but 1.4 billion world citizens are extremely impoverished. Who will speak for them?

Images like these surface everyday in the global semiosphere, helping call up and sustain the new environmentalism as a movement public, and the Web and YouTube make the global semiosphere in which this public is possible more imag-

istic than ever. By dint of such storied images the peoples' attentions are united as such, as collective consciousness, the disparate elements of which thus become capable of recognizing their common cause. Such technologies transform public spheres, making it easier for what Mustafa Emirbayer and Mimi Sheller have called *psychical working alliances* to organize themselves in the name of species and places and ecologies that have for so long been the sink of externalized cost and stood namelessly by as their values were blasted into circulation.⁷ We should extend this idea to social movements in general and learn to describe them as *psychical publics*, and to subject them to the level of scrutiny that Habermas, Charles Taylor, Craig Calhoun and Michael Warner, among others, have prescribed for the public sphere in general.⁸ As Niklas Luhman said, what people know of the world they know through mass media.⁹ For this reason, mass media are and will increasingly become the medium of the planetary eco-public spectre that will, if we're lucky, force capital to adapt to the changing planet.

Already we see the imminence of the task laid out. To grasp the crisis we must deftly handle the market, the state, the public and mass media—the institutional engines of modernity, in other words, and do so with a supple and deep theory of the embodied subject while we're at it, a social agent overflowing with life energy and interests and instincts and desire. On top of everything we have to remember what psychoanalysis has taught us. It looks like we need a total theory to proceed—or at least a concept of the *totality* that can help us describe the institutions we find running on the psychical energies and producing *all of the values* we encounter accumulating in modern everyday lifeworlds.

Values? We must set aside old prejudices against the term and work against the political and methodological impulse to separate the moral

from economic and aesthetic orders long enough to begin an inquiry into their origins. Environment and labor; planetary ecology and the planetary poor and working folk (the *Multitude*, as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt have described it)—these are the two sources of value and therefore the two historic sinks for the costs that capital by definition must set aside in order to constitute itself as such, as capital, in order to grow and accumulate.¹⁰ As the sources of value—the energies—that are fueling the expansion of the modern world-system, social theory must better learn to investigate the processes by which they are transformed into capital, converted from the outside to the inside of the system.

The answer, I suggest, lies in the way we conceive of society as a system of relatively autonomous institutions, in which distinct institutions become engines of distinct processes of valuation, the performance and delivery of distinct and often contrary values, and where by value we must signify both use and exchange in the economic sense *and* interested attributions of *the good* in the conventional normative sense. This will take us back to the juridical origins of the institutional set-up that Jurgen Habermas spoke so clearly about in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Modern constitutions, he explained, set the public sphere up as a fourth estate, checking and balancing state power and relatively autonomous to forces of both market and political spheres, and modernity appears as the epoch defined by this uniquely powerful institutional dynamo.¹¹ Here's where we turn to cultural sociology.

Cultural sociology teaches us this—that we are never in the world directly, but rather we are always already *in the world* by way of being in institutions, for example the institutional set-up we call the *modern social imaginary*. As human beings

we encounter objective forces of nature and society from our positions within these various overlapping and mutually constitutive institutional domains—into which we have been born and within which and through which we emerge as thinking things.

Language of course is the primary cultural institution through which we think and it should be the model on which we base our descriptions of every other institution. For example, we can apply the basic tenets of structural linguistics to our use of psychological terms in describing the how power operates in the family as a conduit for collective representations to enter into and shape the developing organism's psychical structure. The infant's identification with its primary care givers is both visual and linguistic, but its conceptual meaning is very largely linguistic and is best described as such, in terms of the objective conditions and structures of language that the subject is invited and compelled to take up and use in the process creating a self-identity. This institutional description applies for the entire modern social imaginary—in fact, I think it is what gives the term *imaginary* its currency among theorists today. It stands in for depth psychological treatment of attitudes and desires. It makes the material world of institutions into a dynamic and morally fueled engine of practice, rather than just an inert world of physical structures overlaid by mental forms variously conceived as beliefs, values, ideas or some other kind of mental stuff.

My point here is that the concept of modern social imaginaries combines the best cultural sociology of institutions with practice theory and allows us to talk about the production and reproduction of the powerfully unequal hierarchies that dominate our social worlds, without going over into the kind of *sociologism* that Bourdieu and Giddens and Ortner and Geertz, among so

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many others, have warned against for so long.

We have learned too much about this from Pierre Bourdieu to conveniently summarize, but if we must reduce his lesson to a slogan (as for example we can reduce Marx's culturalism to that remark in the 18th Brumaire, Men Make their own history, but not under conditions of their own choosing), we could say this: Habitus generates and empowers every field (of power), but only under the conditions of possibility offered for use by that very field (of power). As individuals we internalize the social (field[s]) because, from the first to last instance, it is the condition of possibilities for our communicating and being social. But it does not determine any action of ours in a concrete sense; rather by failing to do so it constitutes people as subjects, agents as free to act, free to invoke the rules, free to say whatever they like on condition that they invoke the conventions of the field the way that speakers must invoke the conventions vocabulary and grammar.

In this regard we cannot forget the introductory remarks of Emile Durkheim in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (New York: The Free Press, 1966, 2-3), which should remain a principal guide for cultural sociologists: "The system of signs that I use to express my thought, the system of currency I employ to pay my debts, the instruments of credit I utilize in my commercial relations, the practices of my profession, etc., function independently of my use of them. And these statements can be repeated for each member of society. Here, then, are ways of acting, thinking and feeling that present the noteworthy property of existing outside the individual consciousness.... a category of facts with very distinctive characteristics; it consists of ways of acting, thinking and feeling, external to the individual and endowed with a power of coercion, by reason of which they control him. These ways of thinking cannot be confused with biological phenomena, since they consist of representations and of actions; nor with psychological phenomena, which exist only in the individual consciousness and through it." In other words, they are not just imaginary—they are the social imaginary.

The point here is that institutions are a form of material cultural production; that means that they are each and all *processes of valuation*; they are the source of all values. This sheds cultural light on the fabulous formulation of Marx: labor is the source of all value(s). This remains a true statement, but it must be stressed that that subjects are

never just laboring on the world directly, but rather their labor is *mediated* by institutions (you will recall Marx in the *Grundrisse* -- "All production is the appropriation of nature by and individual in and through a *specific form of society*" (emphasis mine), and where we understand society in the cultural, sociological sense of a system of institutions).

In this way of thinking, the modern social imaginary is the institutional order of rights-based markets, publics, and polity through which and by means of which individual labors are objectified in the world as value.

I first confronted the challenge of describing cultural institutions and the reproduction of inequality during years of graduate training in cultural sociology. My principal foil at the time was Pierre Bourdieu, whose grand theoretical synthesis I put to work as best I could in an urban ethnography of the options exchange in San Francisco.¹² The question driving me was apropos the setting: how was self-identity produced and reproduced in this urban scene, at the heart of the capitalist system? And to what effect? The question at base was a question of desire—how do people make their lives and realize their dreams at the center of the world financial forces? The answer of course was—they live under the cultural conditions of possibility of the organizational workplace, conceived as a field (of power). Objective institutional orders of values and ideas embodied in practices are what traders use to make their lives. Cultural production and reproduction of masculine domination of this social world is allegorical of the logic of fields in general. The case of the options trading floor is emblematic.

What I learned from Bourdieu was invaluable—thinking dialectically is no easy task and Bourdieu is certainly a master. But as I observed the professionalization of Bourdieu studies in America I became increasingly alienated—it seemed to me obvious that too many of the problems and debates in this subfield of cultural sociology were not passing the relevancy test: they did not rise to the challenge of facing the most serious social problems I was watching develop. It was also my privilege during these years to be teaching at the University of California, Santa Barbara, very near to what turned out to be one of the great and truly emblematic environmental movements of our time: the redwood timber wars.

After publishing my MA on Bourdieu I committed myself to bring-

ing cultural theory into dialog with environmental sociology and history in an empirical case study of this local struggle—the redwood timber wars in the Humboldt Bay region of Northern California would be my testing grounds for what I believe is a necessary fusion of the disciplines.

I present the extended single case study in *Trouble in the Forest: Violence, Archive and Memory in the Making of California's Redwood Timber Wars—1850 to the Present* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009). It's a long story—so here I can only give the briefest outline: When the global extraction corporation Maxxam leveraged the locally-owned, family controlled and widely respected Pacific Lumber of northern California for \$900 million, using junk bonds floated on the Reagan deregulated financial markets during the hostile take-over frenzy of the mid-1980s, it brought a savage new round of globalization to the redwoods. The new owner, Charles Hurwitz, immediately started liquidating his assets to cover the debt, spelling destruction for final one percent of the ancient redwoods—ninety-six percent of which had already been cut and three percent having already been preserved in parks. Local citizens responded by forming up a network of forest defense social movement groups ranging from Sierra Club chapters to legal watchdog and timber harvest plan monitors to radical environmentalists organized in a quasi-cell structure for direct-action civil disobedience. For twenty years they prowled the bay redwood region's public sphere, making labor and environmental conflict the defining characteristic of politics, with campaigns like Save Headwaters Forest campaign, Redwood Summer, Earth First! & IWW Local #1, Julia Butterfly's Luna tree-sit, the Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment, which brought United Steel Workers and forest defenders together at the Battle in Seattle, 1999.

In late 1999 I moved to Humboldt for two years of participant observation and ethnographic research, living and working in Humboldt while engaging in the forest defense and the Seattle confrontations with the World Trade Organization. Seeking a sense of the cultural engines of this long running conflict and trying to fathom what it might mean for the 21st century—what does it tell us about culture and globalization in the age of environmental crisis and information revolution?—I immersed myself in the regional archives and struggled to build a theoretical framework broad enough for the story I wanted to tell.

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That is when I turned to the culturalist concept of modern social imaginaries, with its powerful, institutional analysis of the nation's rights-driven social machinery of imbricated markets, publics, polities—an institutional set-up founded in the durable text of the Constitutional and reinforced throughout founding speech. But as I encountered it, this essentially liberal political economic perspective did not have all the conceptual tools I needed to describe and interpret the timber wars—I also needed environmental theory and finally psychoanalytic sociology in order to create the fullest and most dynamic description of the scene, and to tell the story in a way that I felt stayed most true to the passionate politics of my research subjects on all sides of the struggle and to my own experience (as a field researcher submitting myself to all the forces at work in this field of power).

Here's how I posed the question: could I reconcile the concept of modern social imaginaries with the first and second internal contradictions of capitalism, as it has been specified by environmental theorists, namely James O'Connor and John Bellamy Foster? First—begin with Taylor, who defines our various modern social imaginary in terms of their principal institutional spheres—the markets, publics, polity that are driven by rights discourse and which constitute our most dearly held patterns of everyday life. Then acknowledge that planetary ecological crisis is forcing us to reevaluate the growing domination of the market in this arrangement. We need some way to recognize and study how it is that the market achieves this domination. It has to do with the structure of capitalism, and so we turn to critical (and political) economics. This comes to us from everywhere, but let's pay close attention to the first section of Marx's manifesto and to the developing scholarship of the social ecologists, especially O'Connor, Foster, and Speth as representatives of the field.

The story of Maxxam in Humboldt and the ensuing timber wars exemplifies the method. The story is emblematic of myriad places around the globe. Here as elsewhere a local instantiation of the modern social imaginary is entering into its epoch of second contradictions, an epoch in which the success of capital in exercising great power over labor, in the service of accumulation, and is through that process producing increasing accumulations of externalized social costs of production, raising costs of production for everyone in the region. Everywhere the circumstances are similar to Humboldt: crises are striking at capital are not

only from the demand side but from the supply side as well. We are faced with market gluts and food riots at a time when world food production has never been greater (suggesting that the ongoing cycle of demand or realization crises are still at the basis of world-system expansion); but think also of the dead zones in the seas, like in the gulf of Mexico, and consequently the generalized crisis of the oceans, in which the very success of the so-called green revolution in the food system it literally leading to eutrophication of vast sections of the ocean, extinguishing life over vast areas, raising the costs of fishing and sea food for everyone, etc.

And in the growing resource wars, of which the fisheries are but a single example, the great capitalist powers are still coming into conflict in the colonial territories just as Marx understood they would—the structure of competition is still chasing capital (the bourgeoisie) all over the globe (in search of cheaper prices for labor and resources); for example in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan; Sudan; Georgia, etc.

In summary—capital in general and the industrializing nations in particular are getting squeezed by environmental limits that show up as rising costs and environmental protests over diminishing qualities of life.

We should not be distracted or fooled by the (relative) absence or lack of mass ecological street protest. The various wars are sucking up so much of the available psychical energy that would otherwise be flowing into these collective subjects. When and if these wars ever subside we can expect a tide of attention to flow back into efforts at ecological stabilization. But we must also recognize that our information society has given us a new form of social movement—the network form. Instead of looking merely to the streets we have to see the flood of human attention being channeled through hyperspace networks into the collective subjects of emergent civil society. The network society is more highly democratized and sociology has to integrate this new media dimension of public formation more deeply into its assumptions by putting media on the same footing as race class and gender; media are as constitutive of the fundamental inequalities, integrations, and conflicts that interest us as are the other great structures of social life.

This is part of what Charles Taylor means to do, I think, when he puts public spheres among the principal institutions of the modern social imaginary. Yes market accumulation begins to overpower the planet, but

publics accumulate meaning-making possibilities in the same proportion, and the state, necessarily responsive to both through the electoral process, completes our integrated historical understanding what is *driving* our modern social imaginaries. Environmental publics, for example, as they emerge in distinct places around local issues, as for example in the defense of Headwaters Grove from the Maxxam corporation in Humboldt.

Now let us return to the second contradiction again: John Bellamy Foster explains how the first contradiction in capitalism squeezes profits and leads to a demand or realization crises that compel capital to reorganize in order to regain profitability, under pain of revolt by the exploited laboring classes. Meanwhile, the second contradiction leads to ecological crisis as capital undermines its own *conditions of production*—that is, it eventually destroys “[1] the personal conditions of production associated with the reproduction of human labor power, [2] the external-natural conditions of production (forests, oil fields, water supplies, bird species, etc.) and [3] the general-communal conditions of production (i.e., the built environment, for example, cities, including their urban infrastructure)” to such an extent that it generates an underproduction of capital, a second type of crisis that squeezes capital from the supply side.

One problem, notes Foster, is that this second contradiction does not generate an automatic feedback mechanism forcing capitalism to adjust to the destruction of laboring communities and environments, as does the first contradiction, which forces rising wages and thus limits to inequality in the division of wealth. Says Foster, “There is no ecological counterpart to the business cycle.” Rather, he says, nothing prevents capital from profiting anew from such destruction, for example with new industries of ‘waste management.’ But new social movements like the forest defense can do some of this work on a local basis by making themselves into precisely the kinds of feedback mechanisms Foster says are necessary. Their ability to generate counter-publics that represent a political constituency for regulations can ease competitive pressures to degrade these conditions of production. Foster knows this but fears that capital can easily move from place to place and remain profitable—there is no feedback mechanism “for capitalism as a whole.”¹³

But I contend that the accumulation of places like Humboldt and the emergence of the so-called movement of movements in global civil society amount to a mechanism that is already shaping the reorganization of *capitalism*

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as a whole.

This is clearly not an optimistic diagnosis, as it shifts the burden of reorganization to political conditions outside the business cycle. The theory of second contradictions produces nothing so optimistic as the long held faith, in certain quarters, that the ongoing deformation of labor would spur revolt and destroy the inequality and demand crises generated by capital accumulation; but it does sensitize us to emergent ecological-political-economic conditions of opposition to neoliberal and corporate-led globalization.

So, this is one way that cultural and environmental sociology can be brought successfully together—by using the concept of modern social imaginaries to explain how the energies alienated from labor and nature accumulate to capital and drives the (social) imaginary(s); environmental theory targets the growth machine, exposing and analyzing the internal contradictions within the capitalist engines of perpetual growth that are promising destruction of human labor, the urban as well as wild or natural places in which it is nested (the urban and beyond), and nature. This is how and where the twin specters emerge.

But where, again, do these two great common subjects promise to emerge and finally, ultimately, to merge? In the public sphere, as a new public sphere, a new practice of public culture. This is what I call an *emergent global civil society*; it is a cultural space of power in which the psychical energies of the global multitude, the dangerous classes, the working classes and poor peoples and peoples otherwise aggrieved and the peoples that identify their own fates with the fate of dying species and lakes and rivers, etc.—these dangerous classes are, in other words, still being socialized. We could say they are be (re) organized by the crises, called up into ever greater collectivities that we will have to start describing as psychical publics. Self-identification of labor and environmental interests, in contradiction to unchecked capitalist accumulation, is already beginning to constitute a broader and more polyvocal but unified subject for regulatory check of the constant waste flow of the planetary body politic. Social theory can and should, I believe, advance this development by putting its considerable energy and talent to the task. I have tried to contribute to that effort with *Trouble in the Forest*.

One final note, in order to end on an upbeat: In order to achieve this fusion, cultural and environmental sociologists must come together on the Kantian psychological grounds that Sigmund

Freud understood quite well, the ground on which we base our understanding of every individual as a communicative organism: “In our science, as in others,” Freud wrote, “the problem is the same: behind the attributes (qualities) of the object under examination which are presented directly to our perception, we have to discover something else which is more independent of the particular receptive capacity of our sense organs and which approximates more closely to what may be supposed to be the real state of affairs. We have no hope of being able to reach the latter itself, since it is evident that everything new that we have inferred must nevertheless be translated back into the language of our perceptions, from which it is simply impossible to free ourselves.... Reality will remain ‘unknowable.’”¹⁴

Teresa Brennan, author of *Globalization and its Terrors*, made an impressive move in this direction with her 2003 book *History After Lacan*. The foundational fantasy of subjectivity, she said, understood as the process of establishing the modern person’s ego as a primary identification of the subject as a sensual experience of unitary power, proceeds by way of its alienation from the (m)other. But her lucid explanation of Jacques Lacan’s mirror argument pushes the argument: We have to understand that this *Other* is the generalized other, certainly, but conceived not just as a mental or psychological other but the objective world itself—as living nature, she says; living nature is *the other* over and against which the modern individual, and by extension the collective subject(s) of modern life, perforce sets itself against in its foundational fantasy and therefore throughout its ascendance into a life of mastery.

Mastery over self, other, and nature are all driven by the same psychical energies and processes. Just like the individual subject’s emergent ego pushes itself up and constitutes itself as such by separating from the mother, alternately tenderly loving her and aggressively seeking to dominate her in the psychical dance of ambivalence which marks one of Freud’s enduring contributions to psychology, so it is with collective modernity’s alternately loving and brutal ascendance to complete mastery over living nature. Brennan has anchored this modern tendency within the very structure of the ego, locating a profound engine of human mastery in the spectacle of consumption and the careless destruction of living nature it simultaneously

requires, reproduces, drives and ultimately masks.

Cultural and environmental sociologists alike must come to understand this collective ego as a shared morphological imaginary through which and by which the subject’s world will be synthesized into the subject’s *experience*. This morphological imaginary is nothing less than the subject’s principal guide of action. It is, in the final analysis, the source and prism of all those labor energies we discover directed at nature and blasting it into values that accumulate in the world-system of capital, as capital, and thus ultimately as that world-system itself; it is therefore also the source of those bodily oriented mental attentions that get channeled through psychical public sphere specters of labor and environmental grievance into increasingly direct contradistinction to unfettered accumulation; it is, in other words, precisely what is driving our modern social imaginaries into increasingly planetary formations of public culture. At whatever difficulty, we will have to continue work on conceiving of emergent global civil society in these terms.

I think that if we tuned our historical and cultural methodologies to these environmental and labor energy channels we would find the same kind of public culture that I found accumulating in Humboldt County accumulating all over the world. Stories of the oil wars of the Niger Delta, the rubber wars of the Amazon and the coal wars of Appalachia would be equally illustrative and provide a comparative angle on expanding world-system and emergent global civil society. How does the ongoing human rights revolution tie these disparate scenes and histories together? How do these variant, place-based instantiations of the modern social imaginary reflect the universal form and substrate of subjectivity that social psychology from Freud to Lacan and Brennan have done to so much to reveal? How close will this line of research bring us to the great metanarratives that we were taught, for a while, to avoid in the last quarter of the 20th century, but which the great current economic crisis in the capitalist world system seems to indicate might be in need of staging a comeback? And how much of Polanyi, Marcuse, Adorno, Habermas and Benjamin will we find to have already been there when we finally arrive with our dog-eared copies of Marx and Freud?

Notes on last page

Swedberg, continued

But there is also the fact that good ideas cannot be produced when we so desire. They just pop up (or not), in a process that the great Charles Pierce calls abduction. To this we must add intuition, which involves more search and sensitivity than abduction. Intuition is sometimes there when you need it and sometimes not. Is it a gift or is it a skill that can be taught and improved? The answer is important.

And when we talk about different ways of giving birth to theory, why not also take a new look at introspection, as a potentially useful technique within the context of discovery? From Durkheim and onwards, sociologists have regarded introspection with hostility, mainly because it often replaced serious empirical research among the early social scientists. Today however, when most sociologists agree that empirical research must be an integral part of sociology, we are in a position to reconsider the issue of introspection.

Muses, Friends and Other Sources of Theoretical Inspiration

Once you speak about intuition, the figure of the muse is not far away – the person whose presence and being inspires us to theorize extra well. A muse can be described as a form of interaction where inspiration only goes one way. In this sense the process can be described as a form of asymmetric social action (Weber). But social science is also full of examples where inspiration goes both ways in the interaction. Here are some: Beaumont and Tocqueville, Marx and Engels, Sartre and de Beauvoir, Alva and Gunnar Myrdal. Should this be a topic for sociologists: Who becomes a muse and when...?

Resources: A Room of One's Own – and More!

Where exactly do we do our theorizing – in our studies, in our offices or somewhere else? What does the architecture of places where one can do good theorizing look like? Like Wittgenstein's hut in Norway or the scriptorium of the past? Does theorizing also have its own interior design? Where, for example, do you find those arm-chairs that old-style theorists loved so much? And how about a desk like the one that C. Wright Mills let build, with a separate box for each chapter in the book he was writing?

We know, from Virginia Woolf, that a room of one's own ("with a lock on the door") is needed for someone to produce good fiction. Is this also true for theorizing in sociology? For theorizing by graduate students? One more thing: Virginia Woolf did not only mention a room of one's own. She also said that you need *some money* – money for food, rent, books, peace of mind...

Paper, Pens, Desks, Computers

Some people theorize while sitting absolutely still and doing nothing. Others prefer to write – with or without special pens, in special note books or on plain sheets of paper. Do you use the computer or do you like to write on those slanted writing desks that the medieval monks had? Maybe we need an anthropology of theorizing, that looks at the materiality of theorizing as well as its cultural side.

Skills and A Few Tricks of Theorizing

Theory construction has its own important literature, by Stinchcombe and others, which needs to be carefully studied. There also exist some quick tricks of theorizing or warm-up exercises before the main Act of Theorizing can begin. Here are a few:

1. *Pluralize!*

You don't have to work out your own theory of Love, Trust or Capitalism – just add an "s" and you are on the way! There are different kinds of love, different kinds of trust and varieties of capitalism.

2. *Generalize!*

The analysis of some topic often invites to a theoretical insight that has a natural fit with the data. A good theory, however, also covers situations that one intuitively would not apply it to. Simmel liked to speak about "forms"; and it is a good term in this context. Stripping the theoretical statement down to its bare bones is also a good exercise, which makes it possible to judge its generality and usefulness.

3. *Turn what you study into a social relationship!*

According to one of the great theorists in our discipline, capital is not an object but a social relationship; and according to another, the stranger is not a person but a relationship. This trick also works elsewhere: many things can be conceptualized as social relationships. But how about theory itself – is that a relationship as well? Or is it rather a language game – one that by definition encompasses *both* what is being said *and* what is being done?

4. *Change nouns into verbs!*

Weber tried to avoid nouns in his theoretical sociology and made an effort to replace them with verbs (Ch. 1, *Economy and Society*). Gurwitsch and Giddens say that we should speak of "structuration", not of "structures". Do we similarly want to speak of theorizing or of theory – of the process of doing theory or just the end product?

Descriptions, Concepts, Explanations (Small and Big)

Description can be seen as a kind of theory and vice versa. Being able to extract a concept from a mass of empirical material also represents a very useful skill for a theorist. Sociologists

do not read Kierkegaard, which is a pity because he is the most nimble and light-footed theoretician I have ever come across. Consider some of his most handsome concepts: *existence, dread, repetition*. With a little effort, all of them can also be turned into sociology.

Sociologists not only describe and construct concepts, they also explain; and a classic rule is that social facts are explained through other social facts. Or more precisely, social facts are basically explained through "the constitution of the internal social milieu" (Durkheim, *Rules*). Explanations can be small or big, and they sometimes involve a distinct social mechanism. While it is easy to get caught up in a discussion of what is distinctive about a social mechanism, what is really hard is to suggest a new one.

Theorizing, from this perspective essentially consists of three parts: it begins with a description (1), proceeds with the creation of concepts (2), and ends with the explanation (3). Each of the three tasks demands its own set of skills and also represents a fine accomplishment in its own right, when executed well. Theorists who excel in all three of these tasks are, like Keynes' "good economists", few and far between. Good theoreticians are "the rarest of birds" (Keynes, *Essays in Biography*).

Teaching the Craft of Theorizing

One can learn the craft of theorizing, but can one also teach it? If the answer is 'yes' – and this is a question that needs discussion – why not take some advice from the most famous teacher of all times? According to Socrates, the teacher should act as a mid-wife and as a stingray; and this may also be true for the teaching of the craft of theorizing. Your task is to help the students give birth, not clone yourself. You are only to assist, and see to it that all goes well – that the child is delivered healthy, kicking and screaming!

You are also to act as a stingray – to stop the students from thinking what is being thought by everybody else, and to start thinking for themselves. So-called normal science is, from this perspective, norm-based science or repetitive science.

And what about the teacher? The teacher is sterile, according to Socrates – something that is worth figuring out what it means. He or she is also supposed to be a gadfly. A gadfly is the fly that buzzes in the ear of the big ox called Power. A lazy whack of the tail of the ox is enough to send the little insect flying – but it always returns. And it keeps buzzing.

Theorizing Never Ends!

There is no special end to this short article – theorizing never ends! There is no true or final theory. We will theorize to the end because the task of theorizing never ends. Because we love to theorize and because good theorizing is thinking in ever new ways.

Theory Section Announcements

ASA Annual Meeting 2010 Theory Section Preview

The theme for this summer's mini conference will be "The Craft of Theorizing". The theme was chosen for two reasons. First, it has a direct and important message: there is a distinct skill to be able to come up with good theories. Second, the theme is vague enough to invite many different interpretations. As always, scholars from all theoretical perspectives are welcome. The one invited session and three open sessions are described below, as is the Coser Memorial Lecture and Salon. Kindly note that applications to the open sessions must be made through ASA's system of application and CANNOT be made by contacting the organizer.

On the Craft of Theorizing – Reflections & Ideas. *Invited Session*

Organizer: *Richard Swedberg, Cornell University*

Invited participants have been asked to give their view on the topic, drawing on their own personal and professional experiences and/or on those of others.

On the Craft of Theorizing – The Past/The Present/The Future. *Open session*

Organizer: *Lyn Spillman, University of Notre Dame*

The focus of this session is on how to theorize, or the craft of theorizing, has been understood in the past; how it is understood today; and/or how it should be understood in the future. Participants from different theoretical perspectives are invited to submit papers.

On the Craft of Theorizing: Everyday Life and Theorizing. *Open session*

Organizer: *Anne Rawls, Bentley University*

Papers in this session will discuss the broad topic of theorizing and everyday life – how to theorize everyday life; how everyday life influences theorizing and related issues. Participants from different theoretical perspectives are invited to submit papers.

On The Craft of Theorizing: Young Theorists/New Ideas. *Open session*

Organizer: *Monika Krause, University of Kent*

This session is primarily aimed at young theorists and especially open to new perspectives on how to theorize and the craft of theorizing. Participants from different theoretical perspectives are encouraged to submit papers.

Lewis A. Coser Memorial Lecture and Salon.

This session honors *Mustafa Emirbayer*, the recipient of the 2009 Lewis A. Coser Award. The recipient will give a memorial lecture, followed by a salon.

Officer and Award Nominee Suggestions Needed

Your suggestions for new Theory section officers as well as candidates for the 2010 Coser Award are needed. Please send suggestions for (1) a new Chair-elect, (2) a new council member and (3) a new student representative to the Chair of the Nomination Committee: Greta Krippner at krippner@umich.edu. Suggestions for the Lewis A. Coser Award for Theoretical Agenda Setting should be sent to Richard Swedberg at rs328@cornell.edu. The exact rules for who can be nominated and how the nomination should be done are as follows: "Eligible candidates must be sociologists or do work that is of crucial importance to sociology. They must have received a Ph.D. no less than five and no more than twenty years before their candidacy. Nomination letters should make a strong substantive case for the nominee's selection and should discuss the nominee's work and his or her anticipated future trajectory. No self-nominations are allowed. Committee members may nominate candidates." For additional information, see the Theory section website: www.asatheory.org.

Theory Section Announcements

Calls for Papers and Abstracts

Call for Abstracts. Junior Theorists Symposium. August 13, 2010, Emory University.

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. This conference features scholars at a relatively early stage in their careers, and brings together sociologists who are engaged in original theoretical work as part of their ongoing research. The forum will include up to 12 presentations organized into three sessions. There is no pre-specified theme for the conference. Instead, accepted papers will be grouped based on how they speak to one another. Past thematic groupings have included: Knowledge; Practice; Politics; Selves and Social Situations; Institutions and Organizations; Identity, Race, and Interaction; and What is Social Theory?

Neil Gross (University of British Columbia), Michèle Lamont (Harvard), and Andreas Wimmer (UCLA) will comment on the presentations. We invite all ABD students, postdocs, and Assistant Professors up through their 3rd year to submit abstracts. Complete information for submitting the abstract will consist of: (1) name and contact information of the author; (2) title of the presentation; (3) a 250-word abstract; (4) three or more keywords descriptive of the presentation. Please send submissions to the organizers: Claire Laurier Decoteau, University of Illinois (decoteau@uic.edu) and Robert Jansen, University of Michigan (rsjansen@umich.edu). The deadline for submission is December 15, and invitations to present will be extended by January 31. Please plan to share a full paper by July 1, 2010.

Call for Papers. Michigan Social Theory Conference. March 12-13, 2010, University of Michigan.

The aim of the Michigan Social Theory Conference is to showcase graduate student work that integrates theoretical and practical aspects of the analysis of social problems and puzzles. We solicit papers from graduate students interested in using theory to illuminate observable aspects of social, political and economic behaviors and practices. In sum, we seek new ways of thinking about how theory and empirical data work together to inform social scientific studies. Our scope is broad: we hope to feature sociologists, social workers, political scientists, economists, anthropologists, and policy scholars, though this list is not exhaustive.

The two-day conference will comprise six panels focused on aspects of the material world that social theory has often ignored or found difficult to incorporate: Space, the Body, Time, Visuality, Memory and Technology. For more information on the panels and the abstract requirements, please visit <http://sitemaker.umich.edu/theory/home>. Direct questions to: theoryconference@umich.edu. The deadline for submission of abstracts is December 15.

Call for Papers. Session on Theoretical Integration, sponsored by the Research Committee on Social Psychology of the International Sociological Association. July 11-17, 2010, ISA World Congress of Sociology in Gothenburg, Sweden.

The growing interest in theoretical unification in sociology suggests the possibility of accelerating progress in unification across disparate topical domains and diverse approaches. This session builds on two earlier sessions at the Conference on Social Justice in a Changing World, University of Bremen, Germany, March 2005., and at the Biennial Meeting of the International Society for Justice Research, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany, 2006 which produced a set of papers published in *Social Justice Research* in 2007. Abstracts are solicited for a session reporting new integration endeavors and results across sociology. Please send abstracts by November 15th to all three Organizers: Guillermina Jasso, New York University, USA, gjl@nyu.edu; Ali Kazemi, University of Skovde, Sweden, ali.kazemi@his.se; and Kjell Tornblom, University of Skovde, Sweden, kjell.tornblom@his.se.

Call for Chapters. Current Perspectives in Social Theory: Theorizing the Dynamics of Social Processes, Volume 27.

Current Perspectives in Social Theory invites the submission of papers dedicated to theorizing the dynamics of specific social, cultural, political, and/or economic processes. Papers addressing the nature and importance of "process" in studying modern (industrialized, post-industrial, capitalist, postmodern, globalizing, etc.) societies are welcome – at macro, meso, or micro-scale (or, better yet, at cross or inter-scale). Submissions can have a formally, socially, or critically theoretical orientation. Preference will be given to papers that accomplish one (or more) of the following:

1. invent, develop, and/or demonstrate a theory (or theories) of a specific process (or interrelated processes), with sufficient clarity and scope to serve as an exemplar of such theorizing
2. identify, illustrate by example, and analyze specific problems, including problems of conceptualization and measurement, associated with theorizing the dynamics of social, cultural, political, and/or economic processes
3. connect theorizations of process across different disciplines of inquiry, including physical, chemical, and biological sciences insofar as the connections are shown to be relevant to and involve specific processes in social, cultural, political, and/or economic arenas (e.g. diffusion processes, hysteretic processes, aggregation processes).

Use of formal modeling techniques is acceptable (conditional on effective didactic quality in presentation), and should be addressed to more than the cognoscenti few. Priority will be given to intellectual integrity (rather than ideological orientation). We are eager to support venturesome projects of creative impulse, imagination, and insight – projects that show promise of being fruitfully wrong if not impeccably right. If you are interested in this call, we urge you to contact either or both of us at the earliest convenience, with a general description of the paper you have in mind. The deadline for submissions is January 31, 2010. Harry F. Dahms, Editor (hdahms@utk.edu), Lawrence Hazelrigg, Associate Editor (lhazelri@fsu.edu)

Book Review: *Social Structures*, John Levi Martin

Michael Strand

University of Notre Dame

What is social structure? Few questions have garnered as much interest in the history of sociological theory. Among the more prominent answers finds social structure defined as a system that is self-reproducing and functionally integrated; a quality of the social environment determined by the parameters of individual characteristics; a pattern of interaction ties and relations between units; a system of relations between social positions organized for a purpose; a transformable pattern of binary relations that is objectified in cultural objects and forms of social organization; a coupling of cultural rules and material resources. The “first principle” sensibility that underlies these statements makes it seem not unreasonable to claim that, whether *de facto* or *de jure*, social structure constitutes the primary subject matter of the discipline.

With the amount of theoretical attention the issue has received over the years it might come as some surprise that John Levi Martin’s (2009) recent book should take up the gauntlet once again. But if a premise can be found to underlie this wide-ranging study, it is one that justifies returning to the breach. Theories of structure in sociology concentrate on two questions: 1) the emergence of structure (how it comes to be) and 2) the substance of structure (what it is). Most approaches focus on one side or the other, and only with great difficulty bring the two sides together (in a series of problematic “fudges” that try to go from the what to the how, or the how to the what: cf. Martin 2001). The Holy Grail is an approach that, killing two birds with one stone, answers both questions compatibly (if not at the same time).

For Martin, such an approach has remained elusive because the implications of Simmel’s formal sociology have been hitherto neglected in theoretical discussions of social structure. Network analysts incorporate the theoretical insights of triads, numbers and the “webs” of group-affiliations. Cultural sociologists remain enamored of Simmel’s impressionistic analyses of “objective culture.” But the discipline has not yet capitalized on the possibilities presented by “social forms” (like conflict, exchange, domination) for developing a stronger view of social structure.

Martin arrives at the laconic (but indicative) title “Social Structures” (the plural is important) for a book that adopts a similar perspective as the one that underpins Simmel’s sociology of social forms. Similar to Simmel’s account of the “crystallization” of social forms from “immediate interactions,” Martin de-

scribes how social structures emerge as the crystallization of the structural tendencies immanent to specific types of “local” relationships. Similar to Simmel’s attempt to delimit the “autonomous” properties of social forms, Martin argues that “any useful definition of social structure has to allow for regularities that are *not* institutions, and that do *not* arise because interactants understand their normative responsibility to act in a certain way” (p. 7; emphasis original).

To put it baldly, then, Martin contends that, in order to capture the formal and irreducible kernel at the heart of social structures, sociologists should start conceiving of them in terms provided by the concept of social forms. Here, social structures (at least of the “single-stranded” variety) are taken to be the “objective content,” or immanent “structural tendencies,” present in social relationships, which social actors enlist, in the course of association, to realize complex and stable forms of social organization.

The key to this argument is the idea of “structural tendencies.” As Martin suggests, this term is best understood in terms of the “felt difficulty” that arises when participants violate the “content” of a relationship—or the sort of thing that happens when you claim two best friends but, in doing so, violate the reciprocity demanded by both (p. 20). That it is even possible to be dissonant with a *relationship* suggests that it possesses its own inertia. The most important thing about these structural tendencies is that, as social forms, the same ones present in local relationships are also found in structures of greater concatenation. Thus, a clique of 4 people resembles a clique of 4,000 (which is why the latter is impossible). What emerges from local relationships is the same kernel of structure apparent at more global levels. This is not only because what is “structural” about relationships remains the same regardless of the level at which they are found, it is also because social actors, at different levels, understand them using the same “heuristics.” Consequently, if a major problem of prior structural theories lay in moving between “the what and the how” while maintaining parsimony and contiguity in the meantime, then Martin accomplishes this feat with the view that formal properties define structures, and structural tendencies, in turn, define those formal properties.

This speaks to another reason for Martin’s attraction to Simmel. The discoveries of cognitive science, and the opportunities they open for sociological theory, warrants a return to the structural implications of the concept of social forms. Most structural theories retain a view of cognition that imputes

implausible properties to human actors. They do this in order to account for the emergence of structural complexity—their true focus—on the scale that sociological methods are good at identifying. But if humans are actually as simple as cognitive science shows them to be (cf. Cowan 2001) this introduces a problem concerning structural emergence: How can sociologists account for structural complexity without, at the same time, resorting to implausible psychology?

Taking a cue from Herbert Simon (1962), Martin argues that the complexity of human social behavior can be accounted for in the same way that one might account for the complex movements of an ant walking across a beach. In both cases, the source of the complexity comes not from the agent, but from the *environment*. Access to the properties stored there allows ant and human alike to demonstrate behaviors they would otherwise be incapable of performing. As far as humankind goes, Martin hits upon social structures—understood through the lens of social forms—as a primary source of external cognitive support. In this instance, if social structures are forms, and intrinsic structural tendencies characterize those forms, then those tendencies persist as a kind of *scaffolding* around which complex types of social organization, and the regularity and predictability of everyday life, ultimately subsist.

In this way, Martin avoids a second major problem in prior structural theories: the tendency to equate social structure with constraint. Several of the definitions mentioned above converge on the root metaphor that “society is a building” and that social structure subsequently represents the ceilings and frames that determine nonrandom behavior. In this case, structure is a constraining force that limits the possibilities of action. But if Foucault once problematized a similar “repressive hypothesis” when it came to power, then Martin makes a similar move in terms of structure. Structural forms emerge from the tendencies immanent to relationships, and in this capacity they serve as the plinth that buttresses the development of complex forms of social organization. In other words, structures support action, rather than contain it. Instead of a man in a building, or a ball in a box, imagine a kid, on a chair, *for* a cookie jar. If determination remains, then it exercises a *constitutive* rather than constraining effect.

Most of Martin’s book is dedicated to wide-ranging, though carefully nuanced, empirical discussions concerned with identifying different types of social structures (for instance, cliques, exchange structures, influence trisets, command trees). This is expected—the burden is on him to prove the redundancy of structures despite a multitude of other differences. So his discussions draw from a range of

continued on next page

Strand, continued

historical, anthropological and sociological cases. They are beyond the scope of this essay to review, but suffice it to discuss Martin's primary empirical claim: that the major factor in "the formation of large-scale social structures involves patronage triangles being concatenated into pyramids, and transitivity being introduced ... Other structures are, by and large, doomed from the start to stay small" (p. 333).

Such is the master recipe for the production of nation-states, armies and political parties. Martin defines concatenation in terms similar to Harrison White. It refers to the relationships that occur *between* different specific relationships as they are linked together through third parties. In this instance, different patronage triangles—defined by a single patron and clients who are not aware of their structural equivalence—are joined to other patronage triangles by linking patrons together in a pyramid headed by a master patron. Here, transitivity refers to the direction of the specific relationships. The classic (feudal) patronage relation is *antitransitive*, which means that while a Duke might pay homage to a King, the King does not thereby control the Duke's retinue. Martin finds that the introduction of transitivity to this relationship—which alters the structural tendencies of patronage in terms of the King now controlling the Duke's retinue—provides the structural basis necessary for the emergence of modern nation-states.

Thus, in medieval Europe, the collapse of the Roman Empire first severed transitive relationships, allowing patronage triangles to spring up amid the conditions of "serious material inequality." But with the reintroduction of transitivity—under pressures for more efficient command structures in periods of conflict—these triangles were concatenated into expansive pyramids, providing the formal molding for the subsequent return of the "macro" in European modernity (chap. 7). Martin finds a similar process at work in the post-colonial United States, where a combination of New York City's "vertical" patronage blocs with the "horizontal" interest group factions of Virginia fueled the rise of national political parties (chap. 8).

Note that much of Martin's account rests on the description of inadequacies, at the *formal* level, of alternative ways of realizing "large-scale social structures," other than through manipulated patronage relationships. In this instance, if you want to create the potential for the emergence of large-scale social structure, simply inject transitivity into a preexisting antitransitive relationship. The effect should obtain regardless of the content involved. Thus, for both nation-states and national political parties, emergence rests on the basis of the structural *form* provided, at least initially, by patronage relationships. In this regard, the form provides the lodestone that ties these types of complex organization together.

A key component of Martin's argument is that actors have access to the "logic" of the structural tendencies of relationships, which they understand in terms of simple "heuristics." For instance, patronage structures produce the heuristics "do not accept influence from someone lower than yourself" and "do not accept a client who already has a patron" (pp. 194-195). Actors can decouple these tendencies from their basis in structural forms and use them to reorganize relationships, or even create new ones, found in other domains. Indeed, this is what happened with the case of nation-states and political parties, as a transitive heuristic was applied to an existing antitransitive relationship in order to establish the conditions necessary for the emergence of these large-scale social structures. Such is the basis for Martin's view of institutions—or "free-floating heuristics"—and his iteration of Simmel's view of the "duality" of structure: this time between structural tendencies and their institutional logics.

This account of subjective meaning is important for Martin's redefinition of social structures in terms of social forms, but a problem arises in his account of the transmission

that takes place between actors and structures. Simmel does not establish how social forms can have a cognitive presence. At times (Simmel 1971 [1894]: 35), he even argues against having to provide any psychological location for social forms whatsoever. So if we understand social structures in terms of social forms, how are we then to account for the cognitive presence of heuristics, or the ability of actors to harness the tendencies provided by structural forms?

Martin often enlists the help of Durkheim to address the difficulties that emerge from Simmel's absent discussion of transmission. The former's conception of institutionalization is found compatible with the latter's. And Durkheim even provides an emphasis on the cognitive basis of structural forms. But outside an account of the antagonistic encounters, submissive behavior and self-confidence that produces recognition of "pecking orders" (pp. 104-150) the book finds no further discussion of the *practices* that might underpin the cognition of social structures. Of course, Martin often references the ability of actors to "intuit" the logic of structural tendencies (p. 337). If stated elliptically, perhaps this might address the missing account of transmission. However, he never really establishes what he means by the phrase, leaving the reader to conceive only of something like a behaviorist model of simple exposure to "regularity" as providing the basis for the knowledge of structures.

This presents a problem insofar Martin's contribution consists largely of his ability to incorporate a cognitive aspect to theories of social structure. Indeed, by incorporating cognition, he provides as robust a definition of the term "institution" as found among the best of the new institutionalists (cf. DiMaggio and Powell 1991). In this regard, if structure consists, fundamentally, of a *logic* (rooted in the tendencies of a form), then it can transcend social levels with relative ease, as observed in the variety of heuristics that guide tie-formation in associations related to friendship and alliance (p. 68). Moreover, the Holy Grail of structural theories—linking emergence to substance—is probably obtained most easily simply by eliminating the difference between the two sides, and showing how emergence is also presence. As Durkheim initially realized, the best way to reveal the identity of the emergence and substance of social structure is through the structuring force of representations (1984[1893]: 61). Cognition (or, more specifically, *embodiment*) is central to both arguments, as Martin recognizes, but absent a more thorough account of transmission—or how the objective facts of structure get "into" actors—we still do not capture the kind of contribution it makes.

Nevertheless, to Martin's great credit he identifies the problem and develops a strong solution. The major problem relating to the concept of structure—present in sociology, chemistry, physics, biology, neuroscience, engineering and beyond—is to account for the emergence of structures, with clearly delimited properties, from the interaction of component parts (Sawyer 2001). Martin presents what is likely the strongest approach to this problem in sociological theory to date. Revitalizing the discussion of social forms as they relate to this issue is an innovative and signal contribution—the problematic cognitive implications notwithstanding. Most notably, theorizing social structures in terms of social forms seems to open the potential for incorporating, to a greater extent, the possibilities opened by methods derived from graph theory and other "qualitative mathematics" into the sociological analysis of structures. Indeed, the great appeal of network analysis (and Simmel) rests on its ability to identify a sociological "domain of necessity" that is *not quantitative*, or a matter of variable magnitudes (cf. Levi-Strauss 1955: 585). But how can we extrapolate this insight beyond network structures? Martin's book provides a solid theoretical basis for moving in that direction.

References available from the author

Young Theorist Spotlight: Matthew Mahler

Matthew Mahler is a PhD candidate at State University of New York at Stony Brook. His primary research interests are in the areas of political and cultural sociology, classical and contemporary theory, embodiment and passion, and the symbiotic and ever contentious relationship between the worlds of official politics and journalism. His current research is dedicated to developing an embodied sociology of culture and cognition.

His dissertation, which is based on the first long-term participant observation ethnography of professional politics, analyses the embodied foundations of political practice and political reason. Drawing on insights from cognitive anthropology, cognitive science, sociological practice theory, and philosophical phenomenology, it challenges the notion that political practice is best explained by identifying the underlying propositions that are said to shape the calculations politicians make or determine which rules and symbolic norms they follow. Instead, it argues that the logic of political practice is best captured through an embodied understanding of practice that problematizes the category of passion, or politicians' modality of engagement with the world. Using the category of passion to analyze political practice, Mahler shows that, for politicians, the appeal of practicing politics is to be found in the ability their phenomenal bodies have to evoke a world in which they have immanent powers and are advocates for or defenders of the universal. As the same time as this mode of engagement manifests itself in a sense of belief and of doing good, Mahler shows that it simultaneously manifests itself in a cynicism and awareness among politicians that, within the oppositional structure of politics, other political agents fail to recognize their status as immanent beings.

For this research, Mahler received the Mildred Weisinger Dissertation Fellowship at Stony Brook, which is awarded to one graduate student each year from the College of Arts and Sciences at Stony Brook based on the scholarly promise of their dissertation.

Mahler is also in the midst of a collaborative cross-national research project with Javier Auyero in which they analyze the often (in)visible connections between official and unofficial political actors – or “the gray zone of politics” – through which, officially sanctioned, or minimally, tacitly supported, political dirty tricks are carried out by unofficial political actors. Based on Auyero's research on Argentinean politics, Mahler's research on national politics in the United States, and other research documenting the cross-national intractability of political “dirty tricks,” they examine the ways in which the tightly wound interconnection between belief and cynicism in politics shapes politicians' lived sense that political dirty tricks are often a deviance born of necessity – that if such acts are not carried out than the opposition will be left free to carry out their own political tricks or will be left unpunished for their own political transgressions.

Mahler's publications include *New Perspectives in Political Ethnography* (edited with Lauren Joseph and Javier Auyero; Springer) and *Classical Sociology Theory* (with Michael Kimmel; Oxford University Press). His work has also appeared in *Qualitative Sociology* and the *American Behavioral Scientist*.



Widick, continued

Notes

1 See James Gustave Speth, *The Bridge at the Edge of the World: Capitalism, The Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability* (2008, New Haven: Yale University Press).

2 John Bellamy Foster, *Ecology Against Capitalism*, (2002, New York: Monthly Review Press, 73).

3 *Ibid.*

4 See John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark and Richard York, “Ecology: The Moment of Truth—An Introduction,” *Monthly Review*, July-August 2008. This July-August issue of the *Monthly Review* is a good place to begin a fresh cataloging of planetary ecological ailments; it includes essays by Foster (“Peak Oil and Energy Imperialism”) and Brett Clark and Rebecca Clausen (“The Oceanic Crisis” Capitalism and the Degradation of Marine Ecosystems”).

5 Jason Kaufman (Harvard). Mini-Conference Paper.

6 John Bellamy Foster, *The Limits of Environmentalism without Class: Lessons from the Ancient Forest Struggle of the Pacific Northwest*, Monthly Review Press, 1993.

7 On psychical energies and the formation of psychical publics, see Mustafa Emirbayer and Mimi Sheller, “Publics in History,” *Theory and Society* 27 (1998), 738: “We define publics as open-ended flows of communication that enable socially distant interlocutors to bridge social-network positions, formulate collective orientations, and generate psychical “working alliances,” in pursuit of influence over issues of common concern.”

8 See Taylor, Calhoun and Warner in *Public Culture* 14, no. 1, 2002.

9 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

10 Speth, *The Bridge at the end of the world*, 47, section “The Growth Imperative”, citing Daniel Bell's *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism: Economic growth has been called “the secular religion of the advancing industrial societies.”*

11 Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989[1962], 83, but see especially n. 60).

12 See my “Flesh and the Free Market: (On Taking Bourdieu to the options exchange),” *Theory Society* 32, 5-6:679-723).

13 In “Capitalism and Ecology: The Nature of the Contradiction” (*Monthly Review* 54, no. 4, September 2002).

14 *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1938), 53.