

PERSPECTIVES

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Note from the Chair

Neil Gross, Colby College

Some section chairs, I have noticed, are as good at writing inspiring and informative pieces for their section's newsletters as they are at crafting powerful works of sociological scholarship. That's not me. Although a long time ago I had a stint editing *Perspectives*, I find the conventions of the genre elusive, and the pressure to say something profound about the state of the field too much to bear. I begin with this confession to forewarn you that what follows is neither well-composed nor profound. But perhaps it will do its job of giving you a sense for why I put together the panels I did for the meetings in Montreal.

Those of us in the theory community spend a fair bit of time scratching our heads over the strange position of theory in contemporary sociology. On the one side, there seems to be tremendous interest in theoretical matters. The Theory Section remains one of the larger sections of ASA. Theory journals routinely receive an abundance of high-quality submissions and command a broad audience of sociological readers. Year after year, the Junior Theorists Symposium is a dynamic event bustling with new talent. Theory remains a staple of the graduate and undergraduate curriculum, and woe to the manuscript submitted to our leading academic presses and generalist journals that does not demonstrate, to the satisfaction of reviewers, meaningful engagement with theory in some form or another.

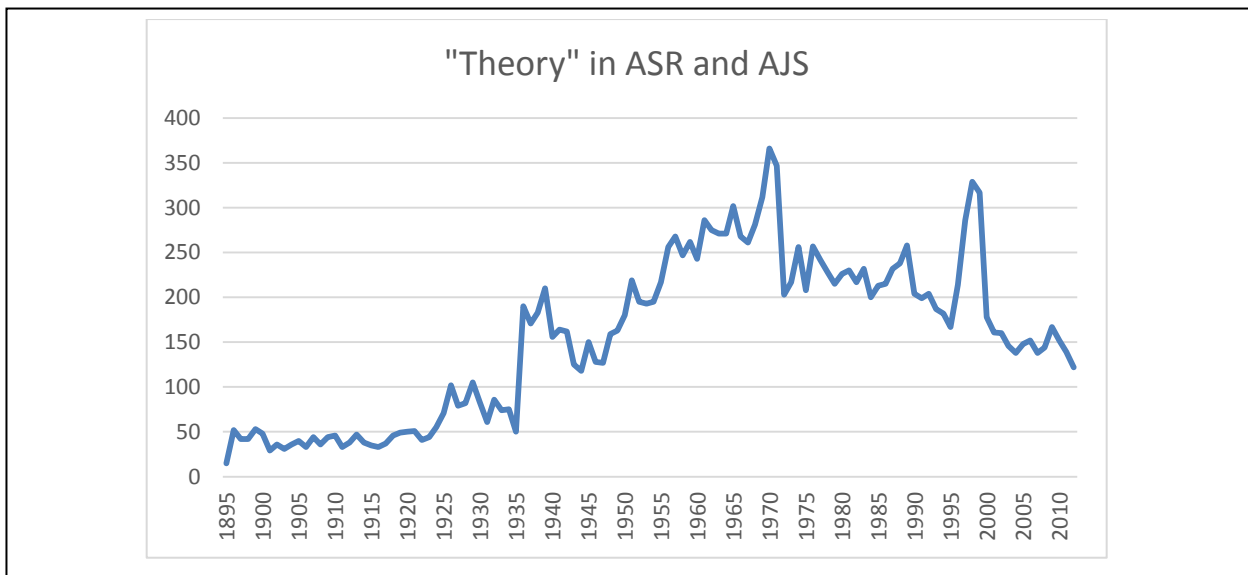
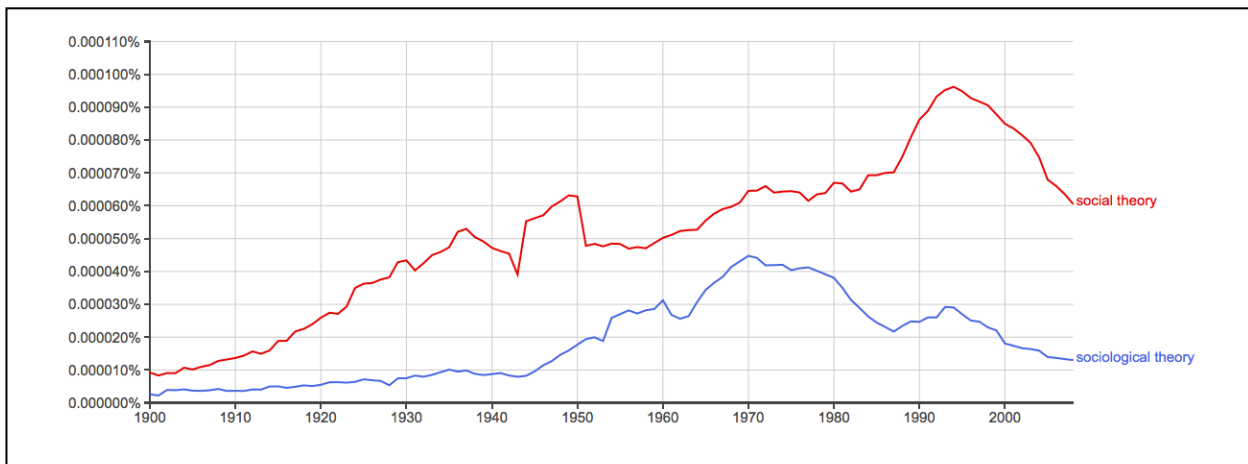
On the other side, there seems to be little interest in theoretical matters! One piece of evidence for this is that it can be hard for young sociologists who are theorists to find work. Every now and again, departments will

advertise for jobs in theory, but for the most part what they are looking for is someone who can *teach* theory, not someone who labors primarily in the theory area. Back in 2004, when she was chair of the section, Michèle Lamont observed that many of the faculty members teaching theory courses at prominent institutions were more affiliated with other subfields, such as political sociology, comparative-historical sociology, or the sociology of culture. That seems to me still true today, and to characterize the situation across various types of departments. Anticipating this job market, dissertation advisors and committee members regularly warn graduate students not to embark on projects that are primarily theoretical. One or two theory manuscripts is fine as part of a broader portfolio, advisors will say. But they'll quickly add that American sociology is an empiricist enterprise at heart, and that you need hard facts at your disposal if you're going to convince anyone to give you a job.

If you ask faculty members at top departments why they don't tend to hire people who are theorists first and foremost, they'll tell you it's because they expect every sociologist to be well-versed in theoretical matters, so that there's no need for specialists. But if it were true that everyone is well-versed in theory, conversations outside theory circles would be a lot more sophisticated. In the same vein, while peer reviewers might demand that all papers have a theoretical component, in practice that often means simply that empirical generalizations get dressed up to look as though they speak to deeper questions.

Consistent with the idea that theory isn't anywhere near the top of the disciplinary agenda today, a Google ngram search (American English corpus) for the phrases "sociological theory" and "social theory" suggests that, while interest in social theory—an interdisciplinary enterprise—has been growing over time, the level of interest in sociological theory is much lower today than at its peak in 1970 or so.

Erin McDonnell was kind enough to generate another graph that shows a similar pattern. This one displays the number of times the word "theory" appears over the years in the *American Sociological Review* and the *American Journal of Sociology*. The chart isn't adjusted for over-time changes in article length, etc., so take it with a grain of salt. The spike in theorizing in 1999 is because that's the year *The Matrix* came out. (You can't honestly tell me you're not a superfan!)



So is theory valued and respected in American sociology, or not so much? And how, in this mixed up context, might one go about making a career as a theorist?

I've planned two panels for Montreal that speak to these matters (in addition to open panels on classical and contemporary theory, organized by Natalie Ruiz-Junco and Aliza Luft, respectively; and roundtables organized by Alvaro Santana-Acuña). For the first, I've asked some widely admired, theoretically-savvy sociologists to share their thoughts on the state of theory and lessons they've learned about pathways toward successful careers in the theory area. We'll hear from Claire Decoteau (University of Illinois-Chicago), Julian Go (Boston University), Isaac Reed (University of Virginia), and Robin Wagner-Pacifici (New School for Social Research), and we'll be sure to leave plenty of time for an extended question and answer session with what I hope will be a large audience of graduate students and early-career scholars eager to talk these things through.

The second invited panel addresses the possibilities for publishing in theory. One can obviously place theoretical papers in journals like *Sociological Theory* and *Theory & Society*. But what are the best strategies for doing so? And what about in the top disciplinary journals? What, if any, are the viable paths to theoretical publication there? What if you want to publish a theory book? At what career stage is that possible or advisable, and how do such projects look from the standpoint of publishers? For this panel, we'll be joined by Mustafa Emirbayer, the editor of *Sociological Theory*; Omar Lizardo, one of the co-editors of the *American Sociological Review*; and Elisabeth Clemens, the new editor of the *American Journal of Sociology*. Eric Schwartz from

Columbia University Press will also be on hand to speak from the publisher side of things.

My hope is that these conversations—and they will be conversations, not formal panels—will give us all some insight into where theory in fact stands at this moment in the discipline's development. Please plan to come and take part in the discussion.

Of course, there will be other theory-related festivities in Montreal as well. This year's Junior Theorists' Symposium, organized by Shai Dromi (Harvard University) and Katrina Quisumbing King (University of Wisconsin-Madison), promises to be a terrific event. Shai and Katrina have lined up a star-studded cast of commentators and after-panelists, and I've heard tell of some exciting submissions in the works.

We're also aiming for a rollicking reception—at least as rollicking as you can get given the current state of the world.

See, I told you I wasn't very good at writing these things!

What Is Critical Realism?

*Margaret Archer, University College, London; Claire Decoteau, University of Illinois, Chicago
Philip Gorski, Yale University; Daniel Little, University of Michigan;
Doug Porpora, Drexel University; Timothy Rutzou, Yale University
Christian Smith, University of Notre Dame; George Steinmetz, University of Michigan;
Frédéric Vandenberghe, University of Rio de Janeiro*

Critical realism is a series of philosophical positions on a range of matters including ontology, causation, structure, persons, and forms of explanation. Emerging in the context of the post-positivist crises in the natural and social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s, critical realism represents a broad alliance of social theorists and researchers trying to develop a properly post-positivist social science. Critical realism situates itself as an alternative paradigm both to scientific forms of positivism concerned with regularities, regression-based variables models, and the quest for law-like forms; and also to the strong interpretivist or postmodern turn which denied explanation in favor of interpretation, with a focus on hermeneutics and description at the cost of causation.

Defining critical realism is not an easy task. While there is a pool of scholars that critical realists often draw upon (e.g. Archer 1982, 1995; Bhaskar 1975, 1979; Elder-Vass 2010; Gorski 2008, 2013a; Lawson 1997; Little 2016; Porpora 2015; Sayer 2000; Steinmetz 1998, 2003, 2014; Vandenberghe 2015) there is not one unitary framework, set of beliefs, methodology, or dogma that unites critical realists as a whole. Instead, critical realism is much more like a series of family resemblances in which there are various commonalities that exist between the members of a family, but these commonalities overlap and crisscross in different ways. There is not one common feature that defines a family, instead, it is a

heterogeneous assemblage of elements drawn from a relatively common “genetic” pool. Critical realism is a philosophical well from which Marxists, Bourdieusians, Habermasians, Latourians, and even poststructuralists have drawn. The reason for this is simple. Critical realism is not an empirical program; it is not a methodology; it is not even truly a theory, because it explains nothing. It is, rather, a meta-theoretical position: a reflexive philosophical stance concerned with providing a philosophically informed account of science and social science which can in turn inform our empirical investigations. We might think of this in terms of three layers: our empirical data, the theories that we draw upon to explain our empirical data, and our metatheories—the theory and the philosophy behind our theories.

While critical realism may be a heterogeneous series of positions, there is one loose genetic feature which unites it as a metatheory: a commitment to formulating a properly post-positivist philosophy. This commitment is often cast in the terms of a normative agenda for science and social science: ontological realism, epistemic relativism, judgmental rationality, and a cautious ethical naturalism.

Ontological Realism

At the heart of critical realism is realism about ontology—an inquiry into the nature of things. Ontological realism asserts that much of reality exists and operates independently of our awareness or knowledge of it. Reality does not

wholly answer to empirical surveying or hermeneutical examination. Historically, social science, rightly seeking to ground itself in empirical investigations, has paid attention to epistemology at the expense of ontology—that is to say, sociology has focused on how we know what we know, while questions about the nature of the known are largely treated as an afterthought. The result has been a focus on methods and forms of explanation, with insufficient (or naïve and misguided) attention to questions about what kind of entities actually exist in the social world and what are they like. This has often left sociology with what amounts to be an implicit realism when it comes to empirical data, an unexamined relativism when it comes to forms of explanation, and a certain skittishness to any claims about the nature of the world.

However, ontology is not easily thrust aside. Sociology (and the practice of sociology) relies on certain broad beliefs about the nature of the social world which inform our investigations. Sociologists operate with certain beliefs about the nature of order, structures, processes, persons, and causes. These beliefs are not reducible to our empirical data, and are often taken for granted when we construct our theories. Many of the determinate and important features of the world are not empirically verifiable or quantifiable, and may in fact resist articulation into theory, language, numbers, models, or empirical scrutiny. In such cases, these things can only be reconstructed through retroductive or abductive inferences; arguments which move from a social phenomena to a theory which is able to account for that phenomena. To do this, we require a toolbox stocked with conceptual resources that are appropriate and sensitive to the particular nature of things in the social world. Because of this, critical realists often concern themselves with relatively abstract or

philosophical questions that arise from, and undergird, our empirical investigations.

Critical realism is concerned with the nature of causation, agency, structure, and relations, and the implicit or explicit ontologies we are operating with. It asks what we mean by realism in the social world? Whether there are social kinds? Do capitalism, or classes, or the state, or empires exist as social entities? What constitutes a social entity? Are there consistent traits of fascism? Are there consistent traits of any social entity? These are not only questions which need to be the subject of empirical investigation, they are investigations undergirded by deeply philosophical ones. These meta-theoretical investigations have a bearing upon our accounts of the social world, but do not necessarily determine or legitimate any particular approach, or empirical investigation. While our models need to be answerable to empirical investigations, we need to be sufficiently “ontologically reflexive” and “vigilant” about our investigations. We need to examine our presuppositions about the nature of the social world and the ontological baggage behind the terms we use (structure, causation), and, in general, we need to have a means by which we can reflexively attend to what our accounts are claiming about the world (Rutzou 2016).

Critical realists are concerned with mapping the ontological character of social reality: those realities which produce the facts and events that we experience and empirically examine. In saying this, critical realists do not reject either interpretivism or statistical modeling wholesale. Instead, combining explanation and interpretation, the aim is an historical inquiry into artifacts, culture, social structures, persons, and what affects human action and interaction. However, critical realists approach causation critically, using the partial

regularities, facts, and events we encounter in the social world as a springboard or gateway to understand the complex, layered, and contingent processes or structures which cause those regularities, facts, and events. This must be done without reducing causation to constant conjunction forms in which event A is always followed by event B; but in order to do this, we require a thick and robust account of causation, structures, and processes which is able to do justice to the complexity and heterogeneity of the social world. In other words, we require a good account of the *nature* of the social world which does not naïvely import causal models from natural sciences.

Epistemic Relativism

Ontological realism is committed to the relatively autonomous existence of social reality and our investigations into the nature of reality; however, our knowledge about that reality is always historically, socially, and culturally situated. Knowledge is articulated from various standpoints according to various influences and interests, and is transformed by human activity—in other words, our knowledge is context-, concept-, and activity-dependent. Critical realists believe we cannot be naïve about this, and must embrace a form of epistemic relativism. Realism is not a high handed way of trumping interpretation or agents' understanding of the world, or claiming a privileged access to reality. There is no way of knowing the world except under particular, more or less historically transient descriptions. Our accounts are fallible, and while realism entails a commitment to truth, there are no truth values or criteria of rationality that exist outside of historical time. Because of this, all of our representations and our particular perspectives, have limitations. Science is fallible and scientific knowledge is always formulated in terms of conceptual frameworks

which are themselves not unique ways of parsing the empirical world. We are only ever able to get at the reality of things in different ways. Depth of insight generally comes at the cost of breadth of scope and vice versa.

This does not imply that knowledge is hopeless or the possibility of realism is a futile quest; it simply means that our representations of the world are always historical, perspectival, and fallible, entailing, among other things, the necessity of methodological pluralism. As such, ontological realism does not entail the “reality” of any of our constructions, putting a big stamp of approval on our accounts; neither does it justify a “derogation of the lay actor” (Porpora 2015). Rather, for critical realists, ontology must simply be understood as having a relative degree of autonomy from epistemology and interpretation.

Judgmental Rationality

Here we need a third term: judgmental rationality. Judgmental rationality, as opposed to judgmental relativism, simply suggests that being realists about ontology and relativists about epistemology, we must accordingly assert that there are criteria for judging which accounts about the world are better or worse. The goal of any investigation is the creation and relative stabilization of a descriptive or explanatory account which provides a plausible model of our object of inquiry. But not all accounts are created equal. We are able to, and required to, adjudicate between rival or competing accounts, and there are often relatively objective reasons for affirming one model over another. Critics of critical realism have been quick to attack the strong emphasis on ontological realism. There is perhaps something to this critique insofar as strong realisms *may* overstep their limits at the expense of the concept-dependence of the

social world, but the stakes here are not unimportant either. Does social science actually reveal something about the world? Can we adjudicate between accounts of reality? If so, how? Is our knowledge warranted? Are our explanations justified? Does social science progress? These are not easy questions, but they are questions which must be examined. Critical realists hold that it is possible for social science to refine and improve its knowledge about the real world over time, and to make claims about reality which are relatively justified, while still being historical, contingent, and changing.

Cautious Ethical Naturalism

Finally, given a commitment to realism, some critical realists also attempt to reconnect facts and values, resisting the overstated case for value neutrality and “objectivity” (Archer 2015; Gorski 2013b; Sayer 2011; Smith 2010, 2015). The simple equation of “is” and “ought” (the naturalist fallacy) must be avoided; however, a commitment to realism seems to entail the possibility of a cautious normative dimension to our knowledge. Facts and values are not insulated from one another (Gorski 2013b). While facts are, of course, “value-laden,” both in terms of the descriptions we provide and the phenomena we choose to investigate, what is less often noticed is the manner in which values are often “fact”-laden. For better or worse, values have a “factual” element to them which is grounded in certain ontological accounts about the nature of social world, such as an account of persons or social relations. This means that, in principle, values are open to *empirical* investigation and critique. As a result, in theory at least, insofar as values are concerned with a degree of both empirical and ontological investigation, the social sciences may be able to tell us something about the “good” life or the “good” society and

the conditions under which human beings can “flourish.” This, of course, is far more difficult than it sounds, and is a point of contention amongst critical realists. Not only is there no immediate passage between “is” and “ought” (what is and what should be), but the social world is inextricably and irreducibly historical, concept-dependent, and embroiled within power relations. As a result, any such ethical inquiry must inherently be both cautious and pluralist. However, such a cautious (and critical) ethical “naturalism,”—in conjunction with ontological realism, epistemic relativism, and judgmental rationality—opens up values for empirical and ontological investigation, and perhaps even situates sociology as a uniquely positioned discipline when it comes to the questions of values, politics, and ethics.

What, then, would an empirical project drawing upon critical realism look like? To cite some examples, it could use interviews to reconstruct the internal conversation of individuals as they reflexively interpret and navigate certain objective social structures in which they find themselves, focusing on critical decision-points in their lives (Archer 2003). It could be an ethnography that uses abduction, abstraction, and retroduction to explore the relationship between structure and agency in the health-seeking behavior of HIV-infected South Africans (Decoteau 2016). Critical realism can shed light on the methodological issues that have plagued social science since the beginning—problems such as studying unique events or small numbers of cases, and the logic of comparison (Steinmetz 1998, 2014). Such insights provide a warrant for a historical sociology that uses small-N case comparative analysis to reconstruct the complex, contingent, and conjunctural nature of causality and to overcome the problem of incommensurability between historical events (Steinmetz 1993), while resisting the search for

constant conjunctions (Steinmetz 2003). As these examples highlight, the broad framework of critical realism represents a generative schema capable of grounding a variety of empirical projects by providing a philosophically informed metatheory which is in accord with the best practices of sociology.

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THE 2016 JUNIOR THEORIST AWARD LECTURE
Of Scales and Standards

Claudio E. Benzecry, Northwestern University

Introduction

When studying globalization, the theory-method nexus has usually favored macro-level approaches. Even those that focus on the micro have emphasized it as an *explanandum* of the macro. Some scholars have worked to generate large-scale accounts of commodity production or network formation; others, the ethnographic yet “localized” study of how global forces act in one particular locale. A few recent studies have focused on the “production of” culture, knowledge, and subjects—or their contestation—by looking at the role of state and market actors in changing colonial and post-colonial contexts. Less attention has been given in sociology to “friction” (Tsing 2005), the contingency lurking within every link of the large-scale chains, the fact that each step along a commodity chain is an arena of its own, with actors *in micro* competing and collaborating in real time. So my question for this lecture is simple: what happens when we look at “the global” as something that needs to be maintained by actors worried in the quotidian about its potential breakdown?

I study how local actors work through these frictions in maintaining the global by examining the process of fitting shoes for a U.S. company in both New York and Dongguan, China. Doing so also underscores the close relationship between the production of scale—how the micro works in producing and “repairing” (Dominguez Rubio 2015) the global—and the production of standards—all the background work of calibrating to make sure a size-six shoe is a size-six shoe.

My larger research project aims to bring back into the sociology of (global) cultural production insights from the pragmatist-inspired sociology of work (Blumer 1969; Garfinkel 1967; Hughes 1971; Strauss 2001) that have since been developed and turned into common knowledge within the sociology of knowledge and Science and Technology Studies (STS). I’m thinking here of concepts like translation, inscription, invisible labor, immutable mobiles, infrastructure, or boundary objects. Low-level commodity production is not usually thought of as a place where knowledge is produced, but rather studied either through a global value chain approach or an attention to shop floor politics. In this unexpected match between the case and theory, I aim to de-familiarize the work of coordinating tacit and embodied forms of knowing. At the empirical level, I also aim to show all the non-managerial material care (Star 1995) that takes place within the mass production process itself.

Why Should We Care if Anna Is Busy?

Since 2013 I’ve been engaged in research on the development and design of women’s shoes for the U.S. mid-tier market. A key part of the development process involves alternating between online and face-to-face communication. The process of shoe-making begins with a sketch, which the sample room then uses to develop a prototype of the design using lesser or discarded materials. Throughout the process, which features an extensive exchange of images, shoes appear on the screen as tried on by the foot model in the sample room.

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sending photos with WM another fit gal Anna is busy.

Larry

3 Attachments

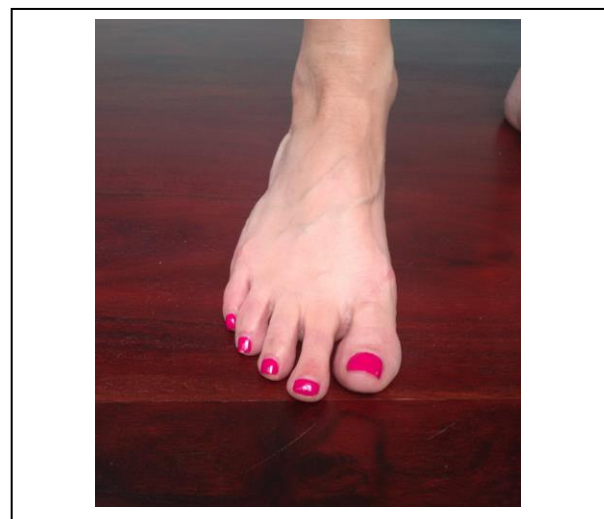


In order to guarantee that the designers know how the materials and the design react as shoes are worn, the sample rooms—and the offices U.S. companies have in China too—rely on a “fit girl” to try on the shoes. The fit model is so central to the project of standardization that when Anna, the fit girl of the sample room, is busy with some other brand, Larry—the office manager—lets the designers in New York City know that what they were looking at in the pictures is the foot of another model. In this way, Anna’s absence functions as what Bruno Latour has called a “tiny barrier.”

The “foot” stabilization—always working with the same model, whether face-to-face or online—allows for designers, technicians, and production managers on both sides of the world to be sure of what they are looking at when they receive a sheet with measurements, an image with a prototype, or a sample being tried on. This is a less obvious technical device through which procedures are black-boxed—i.e. made simple, settled (Latour 1987)—from a distance. It is also the kind of work that STS scholars have conceptualized as *invisible work* (Shapin 1979; Star and Strauss 1999). So what happens if we do an infrastructural inversion and foreground what usually appears in the background? Or to put it more bluntly, if we put women’s feet at the center of the fashion-making infrastructure?

Lasting Feet

Arlene, the fit model for another U.S. shoe company, puts her right foot on a table in Midtown Manhattan. Next to her sits Clint, a veteran technician in his 70s, who has been working in the industry for over 50 years. For outsiders like me, it is unclear why the industry does not utilize wooden or rubber mannequins or the “last” itself—a mechanical form that has a shape similar to that of a human foot used by shoemakers in manufacture—in order to measure how the shoe is coming out. For “shoe people,” the answer is obvious: it’s about affordances (Gibson 1979; Norman 2013); in other words, the possibilities of use allowed by an object. While the last manages to give you volume, Clint said, it’s a rigid object. On the



other hand, “the foot is malleable,” and “gives you information.” But desirable affordances can be entangled with other kinds of challenges. In this case: how to account for the quirks of a foot that is supposed to be standard, and how to use the information the malleable foot gives back to you?

In this example, when working with Arlene’s foot, Clint is constantly on the lookout for two different things. The first is that her foot over-pronates, which happens when the weight of her foot rolls inward and she tends to push off almost completely from the big toe and second toe. The second issue that concerns Clint is that her second toe is actually longer than her big toe, which throws the toes sweep away—a problem since molds, paper patterns and lasts are all made with a vision of how toes align. Technicians and fit models develop a work dynamic that turns them into a unit; as much as the model knows the peculiarities of her feet (or foot), the technicians know to make calculations based on how feet conform *and* depart from the standard measurement.

Experimental information that would be considered “noise” in other metrological contexts—as they relate to the various imperfections of the model in replicating the standard—are actually incorporated as vital data. The more technicians and models work together, the more designers get used to a particular foot, the more they transform that noise into a signal that guides how they manage the standard. Fit models embody a contradiction: each has a “perfect” foot that follows or is close to twelve different standard measurements, and yet technicians and designers have to learn how to work around the peculiarities of each “perfect” foot. Technicians and designers have a series of “tricks of the trade” (Becker 1998) for adjusting what does not seem to be, on a first

read, an exact match to the standard imagined for the product and market. Sometimes they allow for more space, leaving a small gap, to account for how “delicate” the feet of the model are in comparison to the imagined consumer; others cut around the insole at the circumference of the ball area to make the shoes more flexible if they feel too tight on the model; in some cases they learn when *not* to worry and feel free to ignore concerns about how tight the upper part of the shoe feels on the fit model if she has a slightly high arch or instep.

The measurements for a shoe’s volume are developed with a fit model, adjusted, and then miniaturized as an inscription and sent as precise specifications to a final production facility, where it is fabricated by machine. That last will be then brought back to the technician for corrections and approval. It’s only after the two rounds of fitting and corrections that the last will be mass-produced, as it is a key component of how shoes are put together in the assembly line, where they are used to give volume and shape to the shoe as the “upper”—the parts of the shoe that cover the toes, the top of the foot, the sides of the foot, and the back of the heel—gets glued on.

At this point, the transformation of what was, at first, a foot with its own quirks into a size six (238 or 240 mm), is final. What was a highly contingent process, full of small of procedures, adjustments, and the deployment of knowledge about deviations from the norm, eventually became a number. In adopting a numeric form, it becomes an immutable object inscribed onto paper and transported back to the center, where it may then be combined with other similar objects. Fit models, technicians, and designers work around the variations that would otherwise compromise the object, saving it from becoming a heterogeneity, and

turn it instead into an objective standard to be followed by large swaths of the female population.

Feet as Obligatory Passage Points

If, in the previous example, I’ve shown how a world is built around a foot, as we go from the measurements of a right foot to a standardized size six, I now want to show how to bring the world to the foot. For instance, in the case of Clint and Arlene, the approved samples have to be air-shipped between the U.S. and China twice; first when doing fitting, and second when they are confirmed by technicians, designers, and the sale team as those that will be produced as shoes to be sold in the US market. On the first trip, after having worked with the designer’s specifications on correcting the shoe, Clint sends the one “half-pair” (just one of the two shoes) to China, so the last-maker can compare what he is working on with what Clint has approved for fitting.

“After China works on it,” as Clint calls it, his Chinese counterparts send a pair of corrected samples back with the previous fit shoe he had sent. Arlene then tries on the pair again, and, after a few corrections, Clint sends them back

to Dongguan as the fit- and design-approved samples, which will be then sent to the factory for production. If everything goes perfectly, Clint finally destroys the first half-pair. He used to sign the shoes and mark them with a red dot, in order to surveil the veracity of the measurements in this global back-and-forth: if the sample that came back was unmarked, he would immediately know it wasn’t the one he had approved—yet another procedure to guarantee control and reproducibility at a distance. Recently, they did a casting that would enable them to replicate Arlene’s feet in China. They received at least 40 sheets with measurements of potential models in Dongguan, but all of them were turned down as none matched Arlene’s exact measurements (or her quirks).

The traffic in designers, technicians, prototypes, and samples is dictated by where the fitting models are located, and by whether the “feet” can be matched and coordinated across multiple locations. In some cases, this means that a U.S. fit model—who works not for fashion but for comfort brands—travels to Dongguan, as the local fit models have feet that are deemed “too delicate” for wider and larger kinds of shoes. In the case of the main design



team I've followed, the U.S.-based designers not only travel five to eight times a year (once for every collection) to work with their fit model, Anna, but they have also developed a cut-out of her right foot to work with in the New York office in her absence. The most extreme example of this was narrated to me by a former production manager for *Clarks*, who had to coordinate the five feet the company had in the world, in London and New York—where the designers were—as well as in northeast Brazil, Nicaragua, and Dongguan—where they had their development and production facilities. His work involved measuring the different feet every six months, and casting when one of the women needed to be replaced—or resigned. In fact, one of the major nuisances I've observed in fieldwork for those involved in producing reliable standards has been the agony of replacing a foot that was already fully accounted for within the development infrastructure.

This fast travel through a few cases gives us a comprehensive list of the requisite humans, tools, and tacit kinds of knowledge that help us to elucidate the range of activities needed to make standardization techniques work in different, highly localized settings. What all cases share is the centrality of the fitting feet within this particular section of the shoe-producing infrastructure. That feet act as an obligatory “passage point” (Callon 1986) makes evident the paradoxical centrality of a minor and invisible kind of labor, and of a particular kind of expertise: that of technicians and fit models together.

Some Concluding Thoughts

In my lecture, I've shown what happens when we study the dynamics of global shoe production through the right feet of the women who work as fit models. In doing so, I hope to

have sensitized the reader to this unexpected match between theory and case, as well as to cast some doubts about our taken-for-granted conceptualization of what counts as micro and macro. While the micro can be thought of as one fruitful avenue to explore empirically large aggregates (Collins 1981), what matters here—as Monika Krause (2012) recently signaled—is to muddle the easy distinctions between macro and micro. Eliding these taken-for-granted-distinctions is a theoretically fruitful avenue to show: 1) how face to face interactions can have large-scale consequences; 2) how power operates at the micro level; and 3) how interactions are within the realm of improvisation but also mediated and constrained. Moreover, instead of thinking of embodied and disembodied knowledge in opposition, I pursue a project that shows their complementarity and limits, engaging how this knowledge is produced through both mediated and face-to-face interaction.

In opening the black box of the input-output of a commodity chain and focusing on the work of producing the standard for women's shoes, I've shown the everyday agency involved in producing a scale. Doing so suggests that the global can fruitfully be studied as something other than a force, flow, or network. It also demonstrates a different kind of agency at the micro-level than the “resistance” usually emphasized in studies of globalization. In focusing instead on collaboration and repair, and doing this not at the level of elites, financiers (Knorr Cetina and Brueger 2002), or managers, but of craft workers for a low-level mass-produced commodity, could we bluntly say in consequence “global is as global does”? This way of looking at global processes would think of them as practical accomplishments that help people to coordinate their work across different geographical and temporal realms. To study the production of scale would

then be to study the series of skills that are necessary to maintain and repair this kind of coordination, skills which are developed over time and re-configured as people slowly inhabit their professional worlds. The sociological literatures on knowledge creation, global commodities, and materiality rarely intersect. There remains a wealth of possibilities for theoretical production at this juncture.

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CONFERENCE RECAP

The 2016 Junior Theorists' Symposium*A.K.M. Skarpelis, New York University**Clayton Childress, University of Toronto*

On Friday, August 19, at Seattle University, we had the pleasure of coordinating the tenth Junior Theorists' Symposium (JTS). We think it prudent not only to celebrate this year's event, but also to wax poetic about what we hope will be JTS' long and vibrant future. Rather than having a continuous leadership, JTS relies on a stewardship model in which the power to select papers and assemble panels fully rotates from year to year. By nature of its design, therefore, JTS is constantly evolving, and is heterodox in "its" interests and emphases. We believe JTS is all the stronger for this.

Evidence to this effect abounds: JTS was, it seems, the precursor to a wide swath of section pre-conferences that have come in its wake; JTS has become, it seems, increasingly a "big tent" affair that not only celebrates our vibrant section but also brings people into it; JTS continues to bring leading senior scholars and future generations of leading scholars into conversation with one another at the very early stages of the latter's work.

Rather than shying away from the heterodoxy of JTS, this year we leaned into it. We wanted big ideas, and were generally unconcerned with where they were coming from, where they were going, or what theoretical traditions they built upon. For that reason, rather than trying to create thematic panels, we assembled what we considered the most exciting précis, and let the thematic cards fall where they did—to be picked up and reordered by our truly amazing discussants: Ann Mische (University of Notre Dame), Tukufu Zuberi (University of Pennsylvania), and Mounira Charrad (University of Texas-Austin).

On our first panel of the day, Dan Menchik (Michigan State University) relied on ethnographic observations of medical professionals at work and at conferences to develop a theory of professional status competition that moved well beyond the economic underpinnings of Bourdieusian fields. Looking at medical professions, he finds that individuals compete in a political economy that operates through the mechanism of communication about competitors' technical and interpersonal practices across venues of interaction. Linsey Edwards Drummonds (Princeton University) showed that time is a neighborhood effect, and that simply living and navigating space in everyday life (think de Certeau) is unequally distributed block-by-block. Shai Dromi (Harvard University) and Sam Stabler (Yale University) convincingly argued (not a hollow statement—we were both convinced, and at least one of us entered as a skeptic of the claim) that even the most detached, mundane, or rote sociological claims-making is undergirded by moral values.

On our second panel, Abigail Sewell (Emory University) showed how large-scale patterns of mortgage lending and individual health outcomes met in meso-level neighborhood segregation, reifying racism in the process. Even symbolic interactionists who don't like talk of "levels" would have been hard-pressed to argue against how she deployed the concept. As part of the recent renaissance (re-examination? resuscitation?) of W.E.B. Du Bois, Katrina Quisumbing King (University of Wisconsin-Madison) offered a re-articulation of "the color line." She showed how, in its original

formulation, the concept was indelibly intertwined with the histories of imperialism and colonialism—aspects that are left out in many contemporary American discussions of race, which use a black/white binary as shorthand. Sunmin Kim (University of California-Berkeley) continued with the theme, using historical data on the Dillingham Commission to show that the practical application of racial categories and the racial ideologies that ostensibly undergird them don't align as neatly as they are often assumed to do, and that racial formation frequently is a contingent affair.

Anya Degensheim (Northwestern University) opened the third panel by using an analysis of terrorist entrapment cases to re-theorize our understanding of risk. Drawing on biopolitical theory, she found that surveillance in the age of big data not only allows the targeting of populations, but also hyper-individualization within them. Entrapment further becomes productive in its creation of criminal biographies as tools that advance cases. Patrick Bergemann (Columbia University) looked at how cooperation between people and authorities happens in repressive regimes. Using internal variation in the early years of the Spanish Inquisition and Romanov Russia, he developed two models of cooperation: one in which the authorities actively use incentives to elicit denunciations from the populace; and a second one, in which authorities more passively gain access to local negative networks, as individuals denounce their neighbors to achieve local advantage. Lastly, Chris Rea (UCLA) looked to what he terms *market reconstruction* processes, which he used to explain broad institutional shifts towards regulatory marketization in environmental regulation.

Our 2016 Junior Theorist Award recipient was Claudio Benzecry (Northwestern University; 2008 JTS presenter; 2009 JTS co-organizer; 2014 JTS after-panelist), who presented on his new project on the global shoe trade (see a version of his lecture above). How is standardization of “fit” achieved, and where does it break down in a global commodity chain? Are the feet of “fit-models” ambulatory platonic ideals, or genetic difference minimizers that allow for uniformity in the face of difference?

Our after-panel—a recent tradition instituted just three years ago by JTS co-organizers Dan Hirschman and Jordanna Matlon—was composed of Christopher Bail (Duke University), Tey Meadow (Columbia University), Ashley Mears (Boston University) and Frederick Wherry (Yale University; 2008 JTS presenter), who were tasked with discussing the relationship (ideal; lack thereof; in theory; in practice) between theory and method. The four panelists gave short papers and then engaged in a brief discussion and took questions from the audience. The papers complemented each other beautifully.

Frederick Wherry spoke of his recent collaborative research on debtors to delineate how theory shapes our research, in terms of the generation of data, our ability to recognize behaviors, and our ability to listen to evidence. We can hear what people say, but do we listen to what they mean? Drawing on mentors and peers—Alejandro Portes, Viviana Zelizer, and Nina Bandelj—he suggested several ways that theoretically-driven researchers can avoid occluding their perception through overly prescriptive theory, and instead fully observe our interlocutors' actual practices and meanings, even if these are not part of what our theoretical canon would allow us to see.

Ashley Mears explored the fuzzy boundaries between theory and methods and reminded us that a good number of theories—ANT, field theory, and postmodern theory—are in fact deeply empirical outlooks. The core of her argument centered around her observation that theory, for the most part, does not come first in research, but rather later, “after we have cut our teeth on the empirics” (and this she discerned for both ethnographic and quantitative work). While this non-linear research process is often acknowledged behind closed doors, it is rarely acknowledged in the “routinized simplicity of theory and method” in peer-reviewed publications. Instead, we go back and forth between theory and empirical materials, at best engaging in an abductive research process, in which theory and observations build up and complement each other. Yet, the discipline clings to the “performative deference to theory” that “simplifies the messiness of its relationship to methodology.”

Tey Meadow asked what to do with a theory—queer theory—that is anti-methodological in meaningful ways. Is this theory, one so centered around particular forms of political critique and intellectual practice, alien to most forms of sociological analysis? Meadow found that this need not be so, once one ceases to see sex, gender, and sexuality as concrete, binary variables that are joined together through normative relationships. Categories are power, and queer theory shows how they often produce inequalities notwithstanding researchers’ progressive intent. Using the example of David Valentine’s transgender research, Meadow showed how a diverse group of people are siphoned into the category of “transgender” for purposes of social acceptance and support. Despite progressive intent and political utility, this siphoning attaches a stigmatized label and imposes order upon

diverse groups that only sometimes appreciate that interpellation. Once we as researchers disrupt normative alignments and eschew mainstream categories and their relationships as starting assumptions, we can produce work that does justice to the strikingly complex division between concepts and categories that our interlocutors are trying to communicate to us.

Last, but not least, Chris Bail reflected on the invasion of big data on the social sciences, cautioning us that algorithms will find patterns that don’t exist in a meaningful sense in the real world. It was a point also referenced earlier in the day by Tukurfu Zuberi when he quipped, “if the data is talking to you, put it down and go to sleep. Data doesn’t talk.” Bail cautioned that the machines are coming, whether we like it or not, and our challenge is to use them ethically and responsibly, rather than letting them control us. In a provocative claim, Bail argued that if our literature reviews are constructed to fill structural holes between seemingly (but not quite) disparate theories, wouldn’t it be useful to both find and confirm the existence of these holes through automated textual processing? It was a supervised take on machine learning that is much less dystopian than it might have sounded to some theory enthusiasts.

In closing, we cannot be more excited to announce that we have passed the organizational baton for next year’s JTS in Montreal to Katrina Quisumbing King and Shai Dromi. We will be in attendance, and we hope you will be, too. JTS 2017 submissions are due February 20th (see the call for submissions below), and advance donations can be made to the juniortheorists@gmail.com account on paypal.

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

The 2017 Junior Theorists' Symposium

Montréal, Québec, Canada, August 11, 2017

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: February 20, 2017

We invite submissions of extended abstracts for the 11th Junior Theorists Symposium (JTS), to be held in Montréal, Québec, Canada, on August 11th, 2017, the day before the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association (ASA). The JTS is a one-day conference featuring the work of up-and-coming sociologists, sponsored in part by the Theory Section of the ASA. Since 2005, the conference has brought together early career-stage sociologists who engage in theoretical work, broadly defined.

It is our honour to announce that Richard Biernacki (University of California - San Diego), Julian Go (Boston University), and Joey Sprague (University of Kansas) will serve as discussants for this year's symposium. We are also pleased to hold an after-panel entitled, "Theory, the Good Society, and Positionality." The panel will feature Gabriel Abend (New York University), Seth Abrutyn (University of Memphis), Hae Yeon Choo (University of Toronto), and Claire Decoteau (University of Illinois at Chicago).

We invite all ABD graduate students, postdocs, and assistant professors who received their PhDs from 2013 onwards to submit up to a three-page précis (800-1000 words). The précis should include the key theoretical contribution of the paper and a general outline of the argument. Successful précis from last year's symposium can be viewed [here](#). Please note that the précis must

be for a paper that is *not* under review or forthcoming at a journal.

As in previous years, in order to encourage a wide range of submissions, we do not have a pre-specified theme for the conference. Instead, papers will be grouped into sessions based on emergent themes and discussants' areas of interest and expertise.

Please remove all identifying information from your précis and submit it via [this Google form](#). Shai Dromi (Harvard University) and Katrina Quisumbing King (University of Wisconsin - Madison) will review the anonymized submissions. You can also contact them at juniortheorists@gmail.com with any questions. The deadline is February 20. By mid-March we will extend up to 12 invitations to present at JTS 2016. Please plan to share a full paper by July 21, 2017. Presenters will be asked to attend the entire symposium and should plan accordingly.

Finally, for friends and supporters of JTS, we ask if you might consider donating either on-site, or through PayPal at [this link](#) or to the juniortheorists@gmail.com account. If you are submitting a proposal to JTS 2017, we kindly ask that should you wish to donate, you only do so after the final schedule has been announced.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Short Manuscript Submissions Welcome

Mustafa Emirbayer, University of Wisconsin, Madison
Editor, Sociological Theory

Ideas don't always come in standard-size packages, so why should journal articles always be the same length? At *Sociological Theory*, we welcome manuscripts as short as 4,500 words and as long as 14,500 words. (In a few cases, papers may even be allowed to exceed that upper limit, but only after an initial review.)

Short articles used to be the norm in sociology. Papers in the core journals of the discipline typically were ten pages in length or less, growing to the current standard length, roughly double that size, only after mid-century. Some papers, like one of my favorites, Herbert Blumer's "Race Prejudice as a Sense of Social Position," barely reached 4,500 words and filled up a mere four or five published pages. We need to recover the lost art of writing brief, densely packed journal articles. We need more flexibility, a greater range of acceptable, legitimate options, one

that reflects the wide diversity of ways in which good theorizing can be done. Sometimes good ideas fail to come out because authors feel they need to produce a standard-length paper in order to get them published. Sometimes good ideas would be better served by short, focused pieces than by articles that follow the conventional guidelines.

As editor of *ST*, I encourage you to give me your best theoretical ideas. If the most appropriate vehicle for doing so is a manuscript of no more than 4,500 words, then so much the better! It's the ideas that matter, not the format in which they're delivered.

Also, publishing the occasional short paper will allow us occasionally to publish longer pieces, on the model of *AJS* or *Theory and Society*. Again, something for everyone.

Member News and Notes

Fall 2016

BOOKS

- Cohen, Ira J. 2016. [*Solitary Action: Acting on Our Own in Everyday Life*](#). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kalberg, Stephen. 2016. [*The Social Thought of Max Weber*](#). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kemper, Theodore D. 2016. [*Elementary Forms of Social Relations: Status, Power, and Reference Groups*](#). New York: Routledge.
- Lidz, Victor, and Helmut Staubmann, eds. 2016. [*Talcott Parsons and Winston White: Values of American Society*](#). LIT: Verlag.
- Mayrl, Damon. 2016. [*Secular Conversions: Political Institutions and Religious Education in the United States and Australia, 1800-2000*](#). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- McDonnell, Terence E. 2016. [*Best Laid Plans: Cultural Entropy and the Unraveling of AIDS Media Campaigns*](#). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Roudometof, Victor. 2016. [*Glocalization: A Critical Introduction*](#). London: Routledge.
- Snyder, Benjamin H. 2016. [*The Disrupted Workplace: Time and the Moral Order of Flexible Capitalism*](#). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wiley, Norbert. 2016. [*Inner Speech and the Dialogical Self*](#). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

ARTICLES AND BOOK CHAPTERS

- Avishai, Orit. 2016. "Theorizing Gender from Religion Cases: Agency, Feminist Activism, and Masculinity." [*Sociology of Religion* 77\(3\): 261-79](#).
- Blute, Marion. 2015. "Modes of Variation and Their Implications for an Extended Evolutionary Synthesis." Pp. 59-75 in [*Handbook on Evolution and Society: Toward an Evolutionary Social Science*](#), edited by Jonathan H. Turner, Richard Machalek, and Alexandra Maryanski. CITY: Paradigm Publishers.
- Blute, Marion. 2016. "Density-Dependent Selection Revisited: Mechanisms Linking Explanantia and Explananda." [*Biological Theory* 11\(2\): 113-21](#).
- Gorski, Philip S. 2016. "Just How Pascalian are the *Pascalian Meditations*? Critical Reflections on the Theological Unconscious of Bourdieusian Theory." [*Sociology of Religion* 77\(3\): 280-96](#).
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- Jansen, Robert S. 2016. "Situated Political Innovation: Explaining the Historical Emergence of New Modes of Political Practice." [Theory and Society 45\(4\): 319-60.](#)
- Jasso, Guillermina. 2016. "(In)Equality and (In)Justice." [Civitas – Revista de Ciências Sociais 16\(2\): 189-217.](#)
- LaRossa, Ralph. 2016. "[Warfare and Parent Care: Armed Conflict and the Social Logic of Child and National Protection.](#)" Pp. 103-22 in *War and Family Life*, edited by Shelley MacDermid Wadsworth and David S. Riggs. New York: Springer.
- Marshall, Douglas A. 2016. "The Moral Origins of God: Darwin, Durkheim, and the Homo Duplex Theory of Theogenesis." [Frontiers in Sociology 1\(13\)](#), doi: 10.3389/fsoc.201600013
- Matlon, Jordanna. 2016. "Racial Capitalism and the Crisis of Black Masculinity." [American Sociological Review 81\(5\): 1014-38.](#)
- McDonnell, Erin Metz. 2016. "Conciliatory States: Elite Ethno-Demographics and the Puzzle of Public Goods within Diverse African States." [Comparative Political Studies 49\(11\): 1513-49.](#)
- Roudometof, Victor. 2015. "The Glocal and Global Studies." [Globalizations 12\(5\): 774-87.](#)
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- Winchester, Daniel. 2016. "Religion as Theoretical Case, Lens, and Resource for Critique: Three Ways Social Theory Can Learn from the Study of Religion." [Sociology of Religion 77\(3\): 241-60.](#)

MEMBER NEWS

Corey M. Abramson's recent book, [The End Game: How Inequality Shapes Our Final Years](#) (Harvard University Press 2015), was awarded the 2016 Outstanding Publication Award by the American Sociological Association section on Aging and the Life Course. *The End Game* was also selected for an author meets critic session at the 2016 ASA annual meeting in Seattle and featured in various media outlets including [The New York Times](#) and [The Atlantic](#). A Korean translation is forthcoming later this year.

Norbert Wiley gave one of the keynote addresses at the Pragmatism Today conference in Aarhus, Denmark in November.

Theory Section Award Announcements

The Theory Prize (Article in 2017)

The Theory Prize is given to recognize outstanding work in theory. In even-numbered years, it is given to a book, and in odd-numbered years, to an article; in both cases, eligible works are those published in the preceding four calendar years. This year the Prize will go to an article published during 2013, 2014, 2015, or 2016. To be considered for the award, a nominating letter must be sent by email to the chair of the committee by **March 1, 2017**. An electronic version of the nominated article must be sent to all committee members by the same date. Self-nominations are welcome.

Committee Chair: Kwai Ng, University of California, San Diego (kwng@mail.ucsd.edu)

Committee Members:

Hillary Angelo, University of California, Santa Cruz

(hangelo@ucsc.edu)

Jeanette Colyvas, Northwestern University

(j-colyvas@northwestern.edu)

Francesco Duina, Bates College

(fduina@bates.edu)

Karen Hegtvedt, Emory University

(khegtve@emory.edu)

Junior Theorist Award

The Junior Theorist Award honors the best paper each year submitted by an early-career sociologist. Self-nominations are invited by scholars who have received the Ph.D. but who, at the time of nomination, are not more than eight years beyond the calendar year in

which the Ph.D. was granted. Nominations should consist of one article written or published in the 12 months preceding the nominations deadline and a letter explaining how the paper advances sociological theorizing.

The winner will present a keynote address at the Junior Theorists Symposium the year after the award is given (2018). Please submit the article electronically to all members of the awards committee at the email addresses below by **March 1, 2017**.

Committee Chair: Julian Go, Boston University (juliango@bu.edu)

Committee Members:

Ben Carrington, University of Texas, Austin
(bcarrington@austin.utexas.edu)

Caroline Lee, Lafayette College
(leecw@lafayette.edu)

Anna Sun, Kenyon College
(suna@kenyon.edu)

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

The Shils-Coleman Award recognizes distinguished work in the theory area by a graduate student. Work may take the form of (a) a paper published or accepted for publication; (b) a paper presented at a professional meeting; or (c) a paper suitable for publication or presentation at a professional meeting. Papers must be authored solely by graduate students or jointly by graduate student collaborators.

Each year's selection committee has latitude in determining procedures for selecting the winner, including the option of awarding no prize if suitable work has not been nominated. The Shils-Coleman Award includes an award of \$500.00 for reimbursement of travel expenses for attending the annual ASA meeting. Please submit the article electronically to members of the selection committee at the email addresses below. Self-nominations are welcome. The deadline for submission is **March 1, 2017**.

Committee Chair: Ruth Braunstein,
University of Connecticut
(ruth.braunstein@uconn.edu)

Committee Members:

Matt Desan, University of Colorado, Boulder
(mathieu.desan@colorado.edu)

Dan Hirschman, Brown University
(daniel_hirschman@brown.edu)

Ellis Monk, Princeton University
(emonk@princeton.edu)

Lewis A. Coser Award for Theoretical Agenda Setting

The ASA Theory Section seeks nominations for the Lewis A. Coser Award for Theoretical Agenda Setting. This prize is intended to recognize a mid-career sociologist whose work holds great promise for setting the agenda in the field of sociology. While the award winner need not be a theorist, her or his work must exemplify the sociological ideals that Lewis Coser represented,

including resisting the fragmentation of sociology, maintaining the discipline's critical edge, and insuring the predominance of substance over method. Eligible candidates must be sociologists or do work that is of crucial importance to sociology. They must have received a Ph.D. no less than five and no more than twenty years before their candidacy. Nomination letters should make a strong substantive case for the nominee's selection and should discuss the nominee's work and his or her anticipated future trajectory. No self-nominations are allowed. After nomination, the Committee will solicit additional information for those candidates they consider appropriate for consideration, including published works and at least two additional letters of support from third parties. The Committee may decide in any given year that no nominee warrants the award, in which case it will not be awarded that year. Send nominations to the Chair of the Committee, Neil Gross (nlgross@colby.edu). The deadline for submissions is **March 1, 2017**.

Committee Chair: Neil Gross, Colby College
(nlgross@colby.edu)

Committee Members:

Isaac Ariail Reed, University of Virginia
(previous year's recipient)

David Lane, University of South Dakota (for the Society for the Study of Social Problems)

Christopher Uggen, University of Minnesota
(Vice President-Elect of the ASA)

Michèle Lamont, Harvard University
(President of the ASA)