
Theory RC16 Newsletter, Summer 2024

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Introduction

Editors' Introduction

Nick Osbaldiston & Frank Welz

While abstract submission for the *5th ISA Forum of Sociology*, Rabat, Morocco, July 6-11, 2025, is closed, submission for our coming *RC16 Sociological Theory Midterm Conference* is still open. But remember, the deadline is December 31, 2024, so do not miss out on this opportunity.

Therefore, this issue of our *Theory* newsletter mainly serves to remind you to submit an abstract for our midterm meeting on the intriguing topic of *Sociology of the Future/The Future of Sociology*. The meeting will be hosted from July 2 (evening) to July 4 (evening) 2025 at the University of Innsbruck, Austria.

What else can you do? We invite you to share the titles of any new books you have published since

2020, as we plan to give more prominence to theory books.

This *Theory* issue also includes an essay on *The Normative Project of Sociology*, written by one of the RC16 co-chairs, Frédéric Vandenberghe. Please send us your ideas if you would like to provide comments or write an alternative essay. You can find more topics we want to discuss on page 26.

Lastly, *Theory* features an interview about the *Research Center Social Theory* at the University of Innsbruck, which will serve as the host for our RC16 midterm conference. We hope it will bring you back to the first paragraph of these lines above!

Message from the Chairs

Frédéric Vandenberghe & Eleanor Townsley

Dear Theorists,

RC 16 was created in 1981 - well before the ISA invented its Forums. That explains why we will have two events taking place in close succession: Our traditional mid-term conference will occur in Innsbruck (Austria) from 2 till 4 July 2025. Our Theory Summit in the Alps will be organized by Frank Welz, one of the editors of our Newsletter. Please find more details on page 23 here.

The Forum of the ISA will take place in Rabat, immediately after the mid-term conference. We have organized some Joint Sessions with our friends from RC 35. You can find the provisional program [here](#).

As incoming chairs of RC 16, we invented two new events: The Distinguished Theory Lecture and the Theory Café. In an attempt to juggle the time constraints of intercontinental videoconferences, both events were fused in a moving tribute to the person, trajectory and work of Australia's prime theorist Raewyn Connell. Last March, she gave a lecture "Theorising in Troubled Times" on Zoom. The next day, we opened our Theory Café with a discussion of her contributions to masculinities, education and Southern Theory (s. page 7).

The idea of the Theory Café was already replicated. Our second Theory Café took place on the 4th December on Zoom. It was organised together with the Georg Simmel Gesellschaft around the question: *Georg Simmel: Social or cultural theorist?* It coincided with the opening of the Simmel Salon. Hans-Peter Müller has been the Salon master. Gregor Fitzzi talked about Simmel's social theory and Barbara Carnevali about his

cultural theory. If you want to organise another gathering of the Café online (with free drinks for all participants) or on stage in your own university), get in touch.

Finally, a word about politics. We were approached to endorse a statement of solidarity with the Palestinians. Other RC's have endorsed it, but we haven't, not because we are indifferent to the plight of the Palestinians, but because it didn't include a single reference to the 7th of October. When we asked the authors to change a single line, they refused. We agree with them that we urgently need to stop that war. But after the war, we will need to build peace. And to build peace, we will need the support of the Left and the Centre in Israel and the readers of Haaretz, the Guardian and the NYT all over the world. By refusing to acknowledge the pain of the Jews, the letter excluded them. That's why, unfortunately, we couldn't sign the letter of support. On a more personal and hopeful note, we support the initiative of [one home land and two states](#) with the right for Palestinians to live in Israel (without vote) and the right of Israelis to live in Palestine (without vote).

We thank Frank Welz and Nick Osbaldiston for putting together this edition of *Theory* and hope you will enjoy reading it.

Theorising in Troubled Times

The Normative Project of Sociology

Frédéric Vandenberghe¹

In “The Sacred Project of American Sociology”, Christian Smith (2014) paints a compelling picture of contemporary sociology.² It is certainly more than the scientific study of society. Sociology sees itself as a science, but mere explanation, interpretation and description of social life are not what motivates one to become a sociologist. If one wants to understand society as it is, it is also because the study of the great figures of sociology and the great problems of society corroborates the belief that society is not as it should be – it could be more just, equal and democratic, and also more inclusive and fraternal. Smith’s basic argument is that sociology, notwithstanding its atheist credentials, is a “sacred secular movement” that pursues a progressive “spiritual project” of human emancipation. The project is spiritual, because the left liberal-communitarian vision of the good, just and decent society it proposes focuses the mind, the will and the emotions on higher visions, deep meanings and more profound aspirations that make life worth living. The vision of a decent, just and solidary society that provides emancipation (liberty), redistribution (equality), recognition (difference) and solidarity (fraternity) to all motivates, mobilises and energises theorists and practitioners of the sociological creed to struggle to realise the promises of modernity that are built into the discipline.

Sociology developed out of the modern tradition of the Enlightenment as a civic approach that successively incorporated the aspirations of liberalism, socialism and Marxism (first modernity), functionalism, pragmatism and social democracy (second modernity) and, since the 1960’s, also the demands of the new social

movements (women and LGBT, anti-racism, eco-pax, etc.) that find expression in post-structuralism, post-colonialism and third-wave feminisms. I find Christian Smith’s depiction of the “spiritual project” of sociology convincing. Unlike him, however, I don’t want to dismiss it. Like him, I am a critical realist, but I am not a Catholic. I am a post-secular humanist with a mission. I fully subscribe to sociology’s spiritual project, though I wouldn’t call it like that. It is a normative project, a critical project if you want, but critique can never be an end in itself. Critique presupposes that society can be transformed. It is only a station towards the reconstruction of society, the transformation of culture and the renovation of the self. It only makes sense if it is part of a reconstructive theory of society.

This book reconnects the discipline of sociology to its origins in moral philosophy (*sensu lato*). I acknowledge there’s a rupture between sociology and philosophy. I nevertheless want to claim, as the title *Sociology as moral philosophy (and vice versa)* intimates, that sociology continues the project of moral philosophy by its own means, with its own concepts and methods, in its own theories. Moral philosophy in the broad sense of the term includes not only moral philosophy, but also practical philosophy, political philosophy and the philosophy of history. Up till today, sociology remains within the matrix of “post-Hegelian neo-Kantianism,” to borrow a brilliant but counterintuitive formulation from Paul Ricoeur. It is neo-Kantian not only because it formulates and formalizes its research with reference to a series of systematically integrated concepts that define what is social and how it is to be studied (epistemology), but also because it defends moral individualism as a critical yardstick. And it is post-Hegelian because it removes the dialectics of the absolute and restrains itself to an analysis of the historical development of the objective spirit in social institutions and social practices.

Portuguese in three or four volumes by the Ateliê de Humanidades in Rio de Janeiro.

¹ Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

² This essay is part of the Preface to the first volume of my Collected Papers that will be published in

Originally, sociology was not supposed to be a social scientific discipline among other disciplines. It was, for sure, a specialized discipline that studied social facts and social acts; however, it was also from the beginning a *superdiscipline* that federated neighbouring disciplines into a general sociology – today, we would say into a social theory. Both the French and the German traditions conceived of sociology as a super-discipline that orchestrated the production of social scientific knowledge and coordinated research among the disciplines of the social sciences into a morally righteous, politically engaged, empirical philosophy of history. That is what I mean by the normative project of sociology. The project advances along two lines: on the one hand, it uncovers structures of domination that thwart the self-realisation and self-determination of the actors; on the other hand, it also develops a theory of action that allows for the collective transformation of alienating structures. The perpetual return to questions of agency and structure is nothing else but a continuous attempt to keep the dialectics between social structures and transformative action alive. If an author like Zygmunt Bauman can say without contradiction that sociology is the “science of unfreedom” and “the science of freedom”, it is because sociology as I conceive it objectivates the social structures and reveals the generative mechanisms that trap the agents into reproduction with the intent to liberate them from unwanted determinations and thereby to open the way to emancipation. Where the agent was, the subject will become.

Between structure and agency, culture intervenes as the totality of meanings (ideas), values (ideals) and beliefs (affects) that motivate people from within to think what they think, do what they do and become who they are. Culture, which I understand hermeneutically as a set of symbolic worldviews (*Weltanschauungen*) in which the experiences of individuals come to collective expression, is what ultimately structures the practices and directs action towards its ends. With the rational determination of the ends and the opening towards the other, instrumental rationality (*Zweckrationalität*) is in principle, if not in practice, overcome. Sociology becomes moral sociology when it assumes that value rationality (*Wertrationalität*) is not an empty category. Like the means, the ends are subject to a rational

deliberation and moral evaluation. Even if they are grounded in moral sentiments, they are not necessarily irrational. The task of a moral sociology is to elucidate the worldviews, ideas and ideals - the Spirit, as Weber would say - that direct the actors' conduct and to make the norms, values and ends - the Ethic - that motivate the actors in everyday life explicit. The task, in other words, is to show the internal connection between the Spirit, Ethics and the rational conduct of life. If this sounds very much like Max Weber, it is not. It does neither disconnect interpretation from evaluation, nor evaluation from reason. Staying close to the actors' motivations, taking their reasons seriously, it does not reject philosophy with disdain, pushing it to the margins, but willingly transforms every actor into a quasi-philosopher, capable like everybody else of elucidating the normative grounds of their conduct and judging them in terms of their appropriateness and reasonability. If everybody continuously judges, criticises and evaluates what is going on, there's no reason to exempt the sociologist from doing the same. The sociologist lifts the reasons, motives and causes to a higher degree of reflexivity, giving a “best account” (C. Taylor) of the normative grounds of everyday ordinary action that does justice to their moral intuitions.

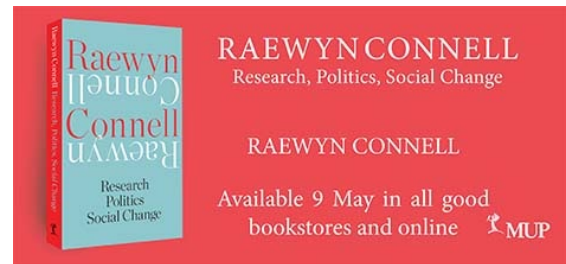
Reconstructive Social Theory is the title I've chosen for the publication. The first volume gathers various texts on social theory and moral philosophy that find their unity in a normative theory of action. In direct opposition to Max Weber's doctrine of value freedom, it justifies axiological engagement and develops moral sociology as an interpretative sociology of principles, norms and values that orient social action from within. If the first volume provides a phenomenological basis for an interpretative sociology of value rational action that continues by its own means the tradition of moral philosophy, the second volume is more resolutely hermeneutical and historical. It places sociology in the tradition of the *Geisteswissenschaften* and considers it now not only as the heir of moral philosophy, but also as a continuation the philosophy of history by its own means. It defends hermeneutics as the idealist version of critical realism and conceives of culture as the totality of values and meanings that disclose the world as a human world and make common

action possible. While the influence of Habermas and Bhaskar are still present, Hans-Georg Gadamer, George Herbert Mead and Karl Mannheim now become the protagonists of a historical idealist vision of history that underscores the importance of world-visions in our relations to the world. The relations of the self to itself, others and the world are explored in a lengthy investigation of the internal conversations we have with ourselves. World-relations are not limited to interhuman relations. In another chapter, I also analyse human-animal relations and multispecies ethnographies and interpret the current infatuation with life as a return to the romantic *Naturphilosophie* of the 19th Century. The third volume, provisionally entitled *Studies in the Sociology of the Mind*, contains various studies on the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler, Peter Berger and the hermeneutics of Simmel and Cassirer that form the philosophical background of my reconstructive social theory. There are so many

stations on the way of my philosophical *Bildung*. As a post-secular humanist, I also engage some religious themes in texts on the ontology of the gift, spiritual pragmatics, religious experiences and meditation, but always make sure to translate religious language into secular terms. This third volume may (or may not) eventually be followed by a fourth and last volume with more political texts in which I develop a “Habermasian position” (sic). In dialogue with Alain Caillé and Jürgen Habermas, but also with Axel Honneth, Ulrich Beck and Hartmut Rosa, I play out Mauss’ theory of the gift against Marx and present Caillé’s general sociology of the gift as a continuation of political philosophy by other means. I also explore the promises of associative socialism, the dangers of the risk society, the necessity of cosmopolitanism, the possibility of a recognition between states and conclude the whole series with an evaluation of the politics of cosmic resonance.

Report: The Annual Theory Lecture & The Theory Café with Raewyn Connell

In March 2024, the RC16 introduced two new forms of online communication on sociological theory, the *Distinguished Annual Theory Lecture*, and, in close connection, the *Theory Café*.



Distinguished Annual Theory Lecture 2024

Theorising To Some Purpose

In her Online talk on 13th March 2024, Raewyn Connell¹ argued for moving toward a more active conception of theory. She discussed theorising as a form of work, theorists as workers, and the communication of ideas as a core business. Within this framework, questions related to audiences and uses were vital. The talk described theoretical work as happening within a changing and contested global economy of knowledge, which is partly complicit with, and partly in friction with, global structures of power and exploitation.

The Theory Café

The Theory Café is a new ISA RC16 forum that aims to stimulate discussion about philosophical, theoretical, and moral issues in society and the social sciences.

The inaugural Café, coordinated by Eleanor Townsley,² included Raewyn Connell, Michael Meuser,³ and João Marcelo Ehlert Maia.⁴ The Café discussed various aspects of Raewyn Connell's lifework (masculinities, Southern theory, higher education). Her most recent book *Research, Politics, Social Change*, a Connell Reader, which republishes some of her most important articles, was at the centre of the debate.

The poster has a blue background. At the top left are the logos for ISA (International Sociological Association) and RC16 Sociological Theory. The main text reads: 'Distinguished Annual Theory Lecture: Raewyn Connell: Theorising To Some Purpose'. Below this, it lists the dates and times for the lecture in Sydney, Essen, Hong Kong, and New York. A circular portrait of Raewyn Connell is on the right. At the bottom, it says 'Join Zoom Meeting' with the URL 'https://mtholyoke.zoom.us/j/94738795449'.

The poster has a red background. At the top left are the logos for ISA (International Sociological Association) and RC16 Sociological Theory. The main text reads: 'Opening of Theory Café with Raewyn Connell'. Below this, it lists the dates and times for the opening in Sydney, Essen, Hong Kong, and New York. A circular portrait of Raewyn Connell is on the right. Below the times, it lists the participants: Raewyn Connell (Sydney), Eleanor Townsley (South Hadley), João Marcelo Ehlert Maia (FGV Rio de Janeiro), and Michael Meuser (Technical University Dortmund). At the bottom, it says 'Join Zoom Meeting' with the URL 'https://mtholyoke.zoom.us/j/8448590595?omn=99149834885'.

¹ University of Sydney, Australia

² Mount Holyoke College, USA

³ Technical University Dortmund, Germany

⁴ FGV Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



Yet then science, carved up into a host of detailed studies that have no link with one another, no longer forms a solid whole.
Émile Durkheim

Social Theory Today: An Interview with Frank Welz

Marília Pereira Bueno¹ & Lucas Fiaschetti Estevez²



Today, social theory faces an unprecedented crisis of its object – society. The understanding of totality, which was once the telos of its effort, now appears fragmented and traversed by profound regressive and disintegrative processes that undermine the bonds of solidarity at various levels and across continents. Hunger, a biological expression of sociological ills¹, is intensifying in various regions of the globe². The persistent deleterious effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the flourishing of denialism and conspiracy theories – both anti-scientific and obscurantist –, the resurgence of the far-right, populist regimes, and authoritarianism, the new transformations of capitalism in its neoliberal phase, the perennial migration crisis, the maintenance of considerable social strata in the most severe and stagnant poverty, conflicts and insecurities generated or exacerbated by climate change and the debates surrounding it, and the new demonstrations of state failures in containing internal and external

violence – the latter evident in wars that never cease to erupt. Therefore, the challenges posed to social theory lie in formulating diagnoses for an era that is not only fragmented and multifaceted but notably turbulent.³⁴

Despite all this, social theory stubbornly persists, fertile, plural, and diverse. In opening his *Negative Dialectics*, Theodor Adorno pronounces something about philosophy that seems to apply perfectly to any attempt at theoretical understanding of the social world and its contradictions. In a way, social theory, ‘which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed.’⁵ Given this initial diagnosis, we interviewed the host of ISA’s RC16 *Sociological Theory* 2025 midterm conference, Professor Frank Welz,⁶ about the place of social theory today and its most urgent tasks. Frank is the director of the *Social Theory Research Center* at the University of Innsbruck, founded in 2018

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¹ Castro, Josué de. 1953. *The Geography of Hunger*. London: Gollancz.

² According to the latest State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report published this month by five United Nations specialized agencies: <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/hunger-numbers-stubbornly-high-for-three-consecutive-years-as-global-crisis-deepen-un-report/en>

³ *Theorising in Troubled Times* - Annual Theory Lecture 2024. *Theory*. RC16 Newsletter, Winter 2023, 4.

⁴ Delmotte, Florence; Górnicka, Barbara (eds.) 2021. *Norbert Elias in Troubled Times*. Figurational Approaches to the Problems of the Twenty-first Century. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁵ Adorno, Theodor W. 2024. *Negative Dialectics*. London and New York: Routledge, 3.

⁶ [Frank Welz](#) was President of the *European Sociological Association* (ESA) and coordinator of ESA’s *Social Theory* Research Network. The interview was conducted in September 2024.

with an opening lecture by former RC16 chair Patrick Baert. The Center comprises 65 members from 15 departments and 110 further scholars interested in its activities. Its motto has been taken from Émile Durkheim: 'Yet then science, carved up into a host of detailed studies that have no link with one another, no longer forms a solid whole.'⁷

Tourism, Theory, or both?

(Q1) *Innsbruck attracts thousands of tourists with its natural beauty, but it also draws students and researchers with its academic environment and university. What opportunities are available for new students who want to study in Innsbruck? What does this small city, with its colorful houses by the river and at the foot of the Alps, have to offer to those venturing into the paths of contemporary social theory?*

(A) Although Innsbruck still has more tourist arrivals (1 million) than students (37,000), on the whole, you are right. The university undoubtedly serves as a key attraction. In general, it is one of the most international in Europe (52% international students). Due to its winter sports opportunities, it draws many students from Germany and elsewhere, including numerous professional athletes for whom it offers high-tech support. Specifically, our focus on social theory has different roots. When I was appointed in 2006, the department was small, without sociology degree programs. Launching a Master's program in 2008 based on general sociological and social theory was strategic, ensuring broad compatibility for graduates. Unlike other Austrian and German institutes facing low enrollment in their Master's programs — often due to overlap with Bachelor's content ('We do not like to study the same stuff twice') — our MA emphasis on *Social and Political Theory* kept our program distinct and appealing.

(Q2) *And your 'Research Center Social Theory' is an offspring of that?*

Besides about 80 disciplinary departments, the university is horizontally organized into 40 transdisciplinary *Research Centers* to enable

interdisciplinary collaboration. In general, from a German sociology background, I prefer the term



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sociological theory (like the ISA theory section is named) compared to the term *social theory* (ESA theory section), which hides the transdisciplinary roots and epistemological innovation of sociology, pushing the latter into a further niche. However, to bridge the gap between a dozen disciplines, we could not label our Center *Sociological*. '*Social*' theory is broader, and, to our surprise, our Center has been most attractive to many colleagues from other research units. In short, theory questions are crucial for all scholars.

Adorno, Foucault – who else?

(Q3) *Recently, you had two significant events in Innsbruck for social theory: one marking the 40th anniversary of Foucault's death⁸ and another on Adornian sociology.⁹ In these events, researchers from various parts of the world and with diverse backgrounds and academic levels could discuss, exchange impressions, and form 'small temporary societies,' which are never entirely dissolved at the end of the meetings. Beyond these occasions, what are the main initiatives of the*

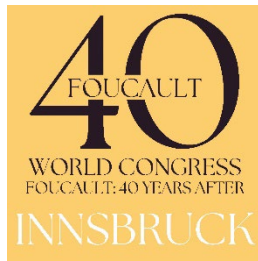
⁷ Durkheim, Emile. 1984. *The Division of Labor in Society*. New York: Free Press, 294.

⁸ *Foucault World Congress: 40 Years After -- Rethinking Foucault's Historical Ontology of Ourselves: Subjects,*

Subjectivation, Self-Practices. University of Innsbruck, FZ Social Theory, June 21-22, 2024.

⁹ *Adorno's Sociology*. University of Innsbruck, FZ Social Theory, July 4-6, 2024.

'Research Center for Social Theory' at the University of Innsbruck to encourage the development of contemporary sociological theory and new cohorts of researchers?



(A) The two conferences on Adorno and Foucault were an exciting learning experience: both were highly specialized, one on Adorno's sociology, the other on a specific question to Foucault. Both nevertheless attracted over a hundred academics each, whereas a more general European ESA Social Theory conference in another attractive city a year ago only attracted thirty people. How can that be? Here, we need to consider how we plan theory meetings. Our experience is that participants greatly appreciate it when others share research questions, research problems, and in-depth reading knowledge. Via 'Adorno' and 'Foucault,' as a side effect, we gained five more scholars from our university for our Center whom we did not know about before. What are we offering them? We organize feedback, workshops, lectures, interdisciplinary lecture series, and conferences. However, the Center should not teach its members; instead, it should serve and support bottom-up ideas.

(Q4) *In social theory, what are the hot topics currently being developed in Innsbruck? Do you identify any new trends in the ongoing research?*

(A) Fortunately, the change in the popularity of specific theories is not as media-driven as that of other products and attitudes. Nevertheless, two different forces influence the choice of theories, firstly by established researchers and secondly by students. In the case of established researchers, we find that once a theoretical framework has been painstakingly acquired in the 1970s, 1990s,

or 2010s, it cannot be modified or abandoned so quickly. In the case of students' MA and PhD theses, the choice of theory is much more dependent on which social issues are perceived as significant. We notice that most students in the Bachelor's program prefer Bourdieu's sociology (management students who also attend sociology lectures prefer descriptive sociology such as Ulrich Beck's individualization or risk society analysis). In contrast, during the Master's program, Bourdieu is overtaken by Michel Foucault's concepts, which, from the perspective of about one hundred recent MA thesis authors, are even better suited to capturing the changing form of capitalism.

A Theory Hub that hosts Guest Scholars

(Q5) *Beyond the new trends, what are, in general terms, the theoretical currents encompassed in the research at the 'Research Center Social Theory'?*

(A) Due to the university's organizational structure, concerning our sixty-five members, we are not a center that can provide the interdisciplinary members with the same theoretical framework. So, we cannot say, e.g., that from now on, we will all do something new and apply the actor-network theory. It works the other way around. The academics from fifteen disciplines come to us because they want feedback and reflection on their daily work to improve it. Dissertations are likelier to break new ground because they are still under pressure to find their niche.¹⁰

(Q6) *Regarding the topics currently consolidated in the international theoretical debate, where do you believe the Center is best positioned within this intricate web, even concerning regional specificities?*

(A) We are not competing with other centers, e.g., the well-known Center for Cultural Sociology at Yale, that stand for and promote a specific sociology. We see our Center more as a kind of theory hub open in several directions that, first of all, tries to strengthen theoretical thought.

¹⁰ A more recent dissertation of this kind, which is also available online but unfortunately not open access, is by Christoph Kircher, who has ventured into newer territory in sociology: Christoph Kircher. 2022. [Die Fluchtlinien der Gesellschaft. Gilles Deleuze und die Genese des Neuen](#) (The Lines of Flight of Society. Gilles Deleuze and the Genesis of the New). Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft. David Furtschegger's dissertation,

which examines the introduction of the individualization of learning in school with Foucault and Habermas, is available for OPEN ACCESS: David Furtschegger. 2023. [Individualisiert – idealisiert – instrumentalisiert. Lebenswelt Schule in Erosion](#) (Individualised - idealised - instrumentalised. Lifeworld School in Erosion). Weinheim: Beltz Juventa.

Comparing the current situation to the eighties or nineties, strengthening theory seems to have become an essential task within today's neoliberal university. However, on the list of [guest scholars](#) who recently visited the Center, you find Ana Paula Hey (São Paulo),¹¹ Stefan Gandler (Querétaro),¹² Christos Memos (Abertay),¹³ Frédéric Vandenberghe (Rio de Janeiro),¹⁴ and Martin Durdovic (Prague),¹⁵ who are known for either Critical Theory or Critical Realism or both. Theoretical thinking seems to be closest to critical thinking.

Universal or historical knowledge?

(Q7) *As we mentioned in the introduction, we live in a time marked by deepening divisions and conflicts while at the same time experiencing the displacement of some centers of power (to some extent, albeit discreetly, towards the peripheries and the global south) or their fragmentation (reaching, albeit to a limited extent, into the hands of subaltern groups). The rise of new forms of discourse, identities, epistemologies, and institutions, coupled with the increasing acceleration of social changes, not only presents challenges for formulating syntheses with broader or more universal pretensions but also questions the validity of such pretensions. Do you still consider it possible to think of social theories as universal interpretations of social reality – or, as Frédéric Vandenberghe¹⁶ postulated, a general theory of society?*

(A) The answer is either with Kant or with Hegel. I opt for the latter. Following Kant and Kuhn, we see theory as indispensable glasses to see reality. With Hegel and Foucault, we use theory as a toolbox and spade to dig into the reality that is considered historically changing. Although birth, hunger, and joy might be universally shared common human experiences, the latter view does not insist that we can approach all times and places with the same theoretical apparatus.

(Q8) *Still considering the trend of increasing fragmentation, it is also notable that within sociology itself, there is a growing specialization that favors the deepening of specific objects at the expense of broader explanations of social phenomena. It is even possible to question whether such a tendency reflects the anti-intellectualism that has been gaining ground in common sense, producing a more general spirit of disdain for the production of 'foundational' knowledge, which appears to have no immediate connection to concrete issues. Is the perception correct that this process has decreased the space for theory as an object of study? How do you view the current status of research work in theory?*

(A) Instead of seeing cultural forces such as anti-intellectualism and rationality fighting the match, I would emphasize more secular forces such as the differentiation of the university, the growing pool of researchers,¹⁷ and, above all, the installation of the neoliberal pressure to publish or perish to make your career. Individual goals of the academic self replaced the common goals of welfare institutions. Consequently, scholars must find their niches and tirelessly promote themselves on X. A negative side-effect is that people lack time to write and even read books, not to mention develop (theoretical) reflections on the constitution of the social phenomena they measure with the finest precision. It reminds me of C. Wright Mills, who, by the way, completed his *The Sociological Imagination* in Innsbruck.¹⁸

The social forces at work in the neoliberal university are fighting against the freedom of theoretical thought. However, what we do with the remaining space is also up to us.¹⁹

Theory & Social Research

(Q9) *Bourdieu stated in 1992²⁰ that 'Research without theory is blind, and theory without research is empty,' lamenting that 'sociology today is still predicated on a clear-*

¹¹ Catani, Afrânio M.; Nogueira, Maria A.; Hey, Ana Paula; Medeiros, Cristina C. C. 2017. *Vocabulário Bourdieu*. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica.

¹² Gandler, Stefan. 2015. *Critical Marxism in Mexico. Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez and Bolívar Echeverría*. Leiden: Brill.

¹³ Memos, Christos. 2025. *Open Marxism: Critical Theory as Militant Enlightenment*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

¹⁴ Vandenberghe, Frédéric. 2022. Critical realist hermeneutics. *Journal of Critical Realism* 21(5): 552-570.

¹⁵ Durdovic, Martin (2018): Generative hermeneutics: proposal for an alliance with critical realism. *Journal of Critical Realism* 17(3): 244-261.

¹⁶ Caillé, Alain; Vandenberghe, Frédéric. 2020. *For a New Classic Sociology: A Proposition, followed by a Debate*. London/New York: Routledge.

¹⁷ Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1997. Differentiation and reconstruction in the social sciences. A paper presented at ISA Research Council, Montreal, Aug. 6.

¹⁸ Mills, C. Wright. 2000. *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁹ Welz, Frank. 2016. The European Sociology We Want. *Czech Sociological Review* 52(3): 435-440.

²⁰ Bourdieu, Pierre; Wacquant, Loic. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 162.

cut distinction, and a practical divorce, between research (...) and the 'theory without object' of pure theoreticians.' What is your opinion on this divorce? Has this separation become more distant or closer since Bourdieu's observation? Does the current state of social theory more or less acutely endorse his diagnosis?

(A) Current social theory does not endorse this diagnosis. In 1959, C. W. Mills criticized Parsons' 'Grand Theory.'²¹ Okay. The 1981 *Theory of Communicative Action* by Jürgen Habermas,²² who always belonged to the philosophy department at the university, could also be criticized for not engaging enough with people's actual experiences. However, when I attend the theory sessions of our *International Sociological Association* or the *European Sociological Association* today, I see the supposedly theoretical no longer discussed in the ample space of theory, including its historical changes and anchoring in historical societies, but as often anchored in applied research.

(Q10) *It is well known that research, in theory, faces accusations of hovering over reality without effectively grounding itself in it, remaining closer to metaphysics than empirical science. What means do you believe social theory currently has to achieve this grounding?*

(A) We have the absurd categorization of good and bad in the political and media world. In the neoliberal university, scholars are urged to fight for the biggest slice of the cake. Instead of continuously balancing theory and experience, as demanded by Adorno's sociology, we see the development of sociology that comes closer to and identifies with empirical research, that is, the precise measurement of facts, passively reflecting social reality instead of actively analyzing the historical processes of its constitution.

(Q11) *Looking at the other side of the divide, we also observe that empirical research increasingly moves away from grand narratives to become more descriptive. Many researchers seem to forget that no knowledge is produced entirely autogenous, free from any interpretive line, or devoid of various metatheoretical foundations. They believe they can extract themselves from the mire of theoretical traditions like Baron Munchausen. To what extent is vigilance regarding the categories, conceptual schemes, and*

theoretical – and even metatheoretical – assumptions upon which thought is organized indispensable?

(A) You are right. For theorists, for the philosophy of social science, and all philosophers, it is a well-known fact since Immanuel Kant. I once believed it would be a fact for social scientists since Thomas Kuhn and the sixties.²³ However, I must confess that this knowledge got lost in the teaching and publishing practice of the social sciences, particularly economics and psychology as well as some branches of sociology.

Power & Knowledge

(Q12) *Trends observed in recent decades, such as the rise of subaltern voices and the shifting of centers of power, contribute to forming a prism of paradigms that do not always coexist harmoniously. In this context, epistemologies emerge that challenge authorities long established as legitimate agents of knowledge production and, at the same time, as agents of domination. On the one hand, this process represents an opening to legitimate participatory demands from previously marginalized groups. On the other hand, it may also risk creating space in the humanities, as well as in the sciences more broadly, for anti-systemic epistemologies that align with denialist and obscurantist trends of an anti-scientific nature.²⁴ In this sense, and considering the investigation of the foundations (logical, ontological, and epistemological) of discourses, do you believe that social theory can provide solid tools for current debates, such as those on post-truth or scientific denialism, without falling into the traditional exclusion of newly integrated voices?*

(A) Just like empirical research, a permanent openness to newly articulated voices that must try to make themselves heard is necessary for sociology. That is beyond question. In contrast to pure cultural science, for sociological thought, the different positions do not have to remain unmediated so that they can only be evaluated normatively. Instead, sociology offers the key. On the one hand, it recognizes and respects the heterogeneous and conflict-laden empirical reality. On the other hand, it can always pose the same question that brings thinking (and hopefully people) together: What historical conditions and processes enabled the historical constitution of

²¹ Mills, C. Wright. 2000. *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²² Habermas, Jürgen. 1986. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Polity Press.

²³ Welz, Frank. 2023. Theory Change. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Theory in Science, Technology, Engineering, and*

Mathematics, Vol. 2. Edited by James Mattingly. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 897-904.

²⁴ Mede, Niels G.; Schäfer, Mike S. 2020. Science-Related Populism: Conceptualizing Populist Demands Toward Science. *Public Understanding of Science* 29(5): 473-491.

the specific and heterogeneous social phenomena?

(Q13) *Like all theoretical production, sociological theory does not escape the historical and social conditions in which it is formulated. For decades, there has been discussion on how intellectual production from the center of the capitalist system inevitably carries the marks of its privileged position: what is said is inextricably mediated by where it is said from. Post-colonial theory and, more recently, decolonialism have approached this issue in various ways, attempting to give voice to a theory of society that starts from premises considering the systematic and ongoing exploitation of the so-called 'periphery' of the system. This discussion has a long history in national sociological thought in Brazil, predating these currents. Roberto Schwarz²⁵ for example, sought to understand how ideas from a different social, economic, and political reality helped (or hindered) the understanding of Brazil's complex social context and underdevelopment. If capitalism connects the globe in an interlinked and mutually dependent system, the differences generated by this process are profound and seemingly solidify over time. The prolific intellectual production from various continents and countries, with new generations of sociologists and young researchers, invigorate these issues in the academic environment. Could you share your opinion on these discussions in contemporary social theory?*

(A) I think that, especially in sociology, we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater. The world is complex. And so is sociology. Power and knowledge are strongly connected. However, we have known that for a long time, and it is what makes sociology so fascinating. In my view, sociology offers the unique opportunity to find a shared perspective and (metatheoretical) understanding in the processual way phenomena are explained while necessarily remaining entirely open to the historically varying content and even lenses of the analysis.²⁶

Theory Change

(Q14) *Let's now turn to more specific issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In recent years, a vast body of literature has emerged not only on how the health tragedy deepened existing social problems but also on how it presents new challenges to social theory by highlighting how catastrophic events affect different social groups in various*

ways. In many cases, topics such as race, gender, and the labor market have been reworked in light of recent events. In a way, the pandemic has once again highlighted how major events influence the theoretical work itself. In your opinion, what transformations and challenges has the pandemic and its terrible consequences imposed on sociological thought?

(A) Indeed, the intersectionality approach seems helpful for practitioners and students who are reminded to consider not-yet-considered groups and factors. For social theorists, the social reality is complex in any case. In my view, the main impact of the pandemic on theoretical thought is the ongoing discussion about the possible new understanding of the role of the state: Did the virus²⁷ – or the currently emerging new world order – stop neoliberal globalization and change the form of neoliberal capitalism including its societal consequences?

Critical Theory

(Q15) *Last year, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the 'Institute for Social Research' in Frankfurt was celebrated. Another significant milestone related to critical theory was the 50th anniversary of Habermas's publication of 'Legitimation Crisis.' Throughout its history, this interdisciplinary intellectual tradition has solidified as a plural current with various approaches, more or less aligned with Marxism and with distinct theoretical and thematic emphases. In your opinion, what is the relevance of critical theory of society for contemporary social theory, and what are its most promising contemporary developments?*

(A) In teaching, in our public lectures at our Center, and at our Austrian Sociology Conferences, the sessions on critical theory continuously attract the highest number of people and submissions. Young people, in particular, are very interested in critical thought. There are two reasons for this success: Data only gain significance in critical theory analysis. Conversely, theory does not remain a normative concert of wishes but serves to understand experienced reality. From my perspective, however, the more recent critical theory from Frankfurt with and after Habermas has turned too far back into philosophy.

²⁵ Schwarz, Roberto. 1992. *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture*. London, New York: Verso Books.

²⁶ Wallerstein, Immanuel et al. (eds.) 1996. *Open the Social Sciences: Report of the Gulbenkian Commission*

on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

²⁷ Welz, Frank. 2021. Virus meets Society. *Soziologie* 50(4): 507-510.

(Q16) *In 2024, it will be the 40th anniversary of Michel Foucault's death. The critical fortune of the author continues to flourish, revealing how seminal figures are read and re-read through new perspectives and challenges. Taking Foucault as a starting point but considering it as a more general example, how do you view recent generations of sociologists engaging with the tradition of social theory? Are dogmatisms to be challenged, revisionisms to be avoided, or is their reappropriation occurring through new lenses?*

(A) I see the most significant danger today in the fact that sociology in teaching and research practice is less and less understood as a long-grown intellectual space in which you have to be very well-versed and read a lot of books to be able to speak about society in a relevant way. It is increasingly becoming a technical science of qualitative or quantitative measurement of social events. In contrast, our Foucault conference in June 2024 was highly positive and revealed the following: Young people – big surprise: twenty-five of the hundred speakers were from China – are less interested in any pedantic corrections or defenses of old thinkers, but quite simply in their sociological questions about contemporary society, to which they want to refer Foucault and his concepts such as governmentality or subjectivation and critically discuss their use with others and learn from others. The anchor here is always the empirical analysis – sociology as it should be.

Sisyphus – a Theorist

(Q17) *With the outbreak of new wars, theory again turns to the themes of conflict and social disintegration. Terms like 'neo-imperialism' and 'the new Cold War' emerge as symptoms of an urgent need for theoretical reworking. Both the resurgence of anti-Semitism and the extermination of thousands of Palestinians have compelled theory to examine new aspects of the ongoing regressive disintegration. Additionally, the climate catastrophe and neo-authoritarianism²⁸ seem to make the future increasingly uncertain and disorienting. With clear processes of de-civilization underway, the view of history as a linear progression seems increasingly unrealistic. As a result, some utopian energies that once guided and invigorated sociological theory appear to have shifted towards a fear of the future. How does this new prognosis affect contemporary social theory and the possibility of*

thinking about the future in theoretical and, why not, practical terms?

(A) This sketch, shared by many, sounds highly pessimistic. One could give up. On the other hand, the idea of linear progress was left behind sixty years ago with the criticism of modernization theory. We have good reason to be pessimistic about the state of world society but not about our actions. The priority is always to educate young people. That is the most crucial issue. Secondly, one could hope that, as was the case at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt a hundred years ago, the perilous state of social reality will force the intellectual forces to make an even greater effort and produce better and more weighty analyses that focus more and more on the situation of the people and not on their individual careers.

Active Analysis and the Social Imagination

(Q18) *When we referenced a passage from Adorno at the beginning of this interview, initially concerning philosophy, we aimed to provoke a necessary questioning about both the need for specifying the field of practice, the object of study, and the tasks of sociological theory, as well as the opacity of disciplinary boundaries between sociology and other social sciences, such as philosophy, economy, and anthropology, to name just a few. How has contemporary social theory, especially sociology and its representatives, addressed this issue—foundational to our field but (fortunately) never fully resolved?*

(A) I also see the development of sociology in such a way that the connection between active analysis of the experienced world and the social imagination of how we want to live has been lost. Adorno never forgot it. Even the early Marx taught us that the object of knowledge is not simply on the other side of the cognitive relationship but that the subject and the object of knowledge are mediated in human practice. Conversely, the various theories are not fantasies of any imagination but are always components of social reality enacted in the latter. Nevertheless, it is true that in today's hustle and bustle of sociology, which is often understood as applied social research, it is challenging to keep an eye on this context.

²⁸ The centrality of the theme was explored last year during the XX ISA World Congress of Sociology in

Melbourne, *Resurgent Authoritarianism: The Sociology of New Entanglements of Religions, Politics, and Economies*.

Artificial Intelligence - the End of Theory?

(Q19) Earlier, we discussed the challenges posed by the increasing fragmentation of social reality and its profusion of voices, epistemologies, and divisions in various directions. Synthesizing the multiple determinants of social reality has always been challenging, but it seems increasingly distant as a possibility. In your assessment, could the emergence of increasingly sophisticated artificial language tools help create a parallel trend? How do these tools influence the profoundly human task of developing interpretations of social reality?

(A) Artificial intelligence is currently transforming pretty much everything. It is a great help and a great danger. The digital humanities are spreading

in the humanities. In the social sciences, AI will be used to write even more articles and analyze even more data. In law firms, in programming activities, human labor will be replaced in many areas. In the cultural and social sciences, however, it is impossible for the abovementioned reason: we must not understand the object of research separately from the subject of research. AI can teach us when and where wars take place and under what circumstances people become criminals - but not whether we want to have them or abolish them and, above all, not how we should, can, and want to think about them, should we not want to become machines ourselves or already be machines.



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A Sidetrack from Mainstream

Nilgün Çelebi¹

I learned the terms of sociology from books translated from English into Turkish. This led me to question the meaning of these terms. I would like to share with you some of my questions and the answers I found:

1-In Parsonian sociology, an actor is someone who plays a role. Roles can be 'ascribed' or 'achieved'. In today's sociology, we call the one who plays an 'ascribed' role an agent (bearer) and the one who plays an 'achieved' role an actor. However, the fact that some authors ignore the Parsonian roots of the terms agent and actor causes problems in my understanding of them.

2-'Social' and 'societal' are adjectives belonging to different nouns. Social belongs to socius and societal belongs to society. Sociology is neither the science of social nor the science of societal. There is no science of adjectives. The subject of sociology is socius, i.e., all forms of human association (B. Latour does not pay attention to the adjective-noun distinction). According to Parsonian sociology, human associations can appear as aggregates, categories, and groups of any level of complexity. The analytical concepts we use to name the level of complexity are micro meso and macro. Sociology is not limited to society and intra-society nor to the practices of everyday life. Sociology is not an 'intra-social' science but an 'intra-and-inter socius' science. Let's explain this a bit: Sociology studies both a) everyday life practices, interpersonal relations, interactions, and processes, b) intra-societal institutions and organizations and the relations, interactions, and processes between them, c) inter-societal institutions and organizations and the relations, interactions, and processes between them.

My views are not in line with 'mainstream' sociology, so I wanted to share them with you.

¹ Muğla S.K.University, Muğla, Turkey. Nilgün is a member of the ISA Research Committees on the

Communications

New journal *Theory and Social Inquiry* (formerly *Theory and Society*)

In our previous *Theory* Winter 2023 issue,¹ we informed that Springer Nature set *Theory and Society* under a new editorial management while all former senior editors resigned because they ‘have lost confidence that *Theory and Society* will continue to advance the intellectual project founded by Alvin Gouldner five decades ago.’

Since May 2024, however, former members of the editorial board launched a new journal, *Theory and Social Inquiry*.² Here is their invitation:

Dear Colleagues,

As former members of the editorial board of *Theory and Society*, we wish to announce that we are launching a new journal, *Theory and Social Inquiry*, to continue the mission of Alvin Gouldner’s *Theory and Society*.

The immediate catalyst for the constitution of this new journal is an attack on the principle of intellectual autonomy. In 2023 Springer Nature, the publisher of *Theory and Society*, unilaterally decided to change the intellectual direction of the journal. Beyond simply changing editorial personnel for operational reasons, Springer decided that the journal needed to be “less political” and “more scientific,” and found two executive editors willing to fulfill that mandate.³ Springer asked us, the members of the existing editorial board, to resign. This demand for our resignation came after we had asked to provide input into the process of selecting a new executive editor, only to have Springer refuse our request.

For us, the issue is simple. Because academic careers depend on scholarly publications, allowing for-profit publishers to determine the intellectual trajectory of a journal means allowing them to dictate the intellectual trajectory of the discipline. Springer decided the direction of the journal without any consultation with the community that produces the journal, neither the senior editors nor the corresponding editors.

In behaving in this way, Springer has set a precedent that for-profit publishers can unilaterally determine the intellectual direction of scholarly journals.

We propose a different model. Our new journal, *Theory and Social Inquiry*, will be published by the Open Library of Humanities (OLH). OLH is a non-profit organization whose mission is to assist journals in breaking free of commercial publishers if their intellectual autonomy comes under attack. Our experience at *Theory and Society* is far from unique, and other editorial teams have also been effectively “fired” when they refused to cede to publishers’ demands. Often these demands involve pressure to publish more (typically shorter) articles so that the press can make higher profits from open access fees (“article processing charges”). Publishers may also interfere in the content of a journal, as in Springer’s decision to “change the direction” of *Theory and Society* by opting for a more “scientific” and less “political” type of scholarship.

In the broader context of growing attacks on sociology and encroaching censorship, we feel it is critically important to take a strong stand by moving our journal to a not-for-profit publisher. In addition to re-constituting as a non-profit, our new journal will also be open-access. OLH’s model of open access (“Diamond Open Access”) relies on collective funding from an international network of university and public libraries and does not charge article processing fees to authors. This is particularly important for researchers situated in universities with fewer resources, including in low-income countries. Open access also allows readers without university affiliations to access scholarly work, expanding the reach of the scholarship published in our pages to the broader public.

Most importantly for us: we will own the journal. An association of sociologists will be the owners of *Theory and Social Inquiry*, which means that what happened with Springer can never happen again. We hope other journals will follow our lead in exploring models that similarly protect their intellectual autonomy.

Our Vision

Alvin Gouldner founded *Theory and Society* explicitly to advance scholarship devoted to the

¹ [Theory, RC16 newsletter](#), Winter 2023

² <https://www.theoryandsocialinquiry.org/>

³ <https://retractionwatch.com/2024/01/22/sociology-journals-entire-editorial-board-resigns-after-springer-nature-appointed-new-leadership/>

“critique and renewal” of established traditions of social theory and empirical research, with the aim of attaining a better comparative-historical understanding of the social world and coming to practical terms with its hardened structures and future possibilities. “Critique” and “renewal” also encapsulate the mission of the new journal, although we have given these concepts new meanings, alongside their original connotations. What “critique” means to us, first and foremost, is a refusal of efforts to draw a bright line between scientific practice and engagement in the world. Alvin Gouldner’s *Theory and Society* was dedicated to the view that a critical analysis of existing social structures and social processes is not opposed to, but in fact an important source of, scientific discovery. The modal article asked “big” questions, theorized boldly, and drew on rigorous empirical research to arrive at knowledge that often challenged conventional wisdom. Our new journal will follow these principles, publishing articles that engage the world from the best traditions in social scientific and humanistic research, including ethnography, comparative and historical sociology, and quantitative analyses. Whatever the method, *Theory and Social Inquiry* will publish articles that offer a high level of theoretical argumentation, drawing from an eclectic and interdisciplinary range of sources, as was also the signature of the original *Theory and Society*.

“Critique” is inseparably tied to “renewal,” and here again we draw on our own history while seeking to recast it for a new generation. Alvin Gouldner’s *Theory and Society* was reflexive from the very start. We believe that some of the most exciting conversations in the discipline today involve serious reflection about the scholar’s role in the world, under names such as public sociology, problem-solving sociology, engaged research, and the like. These conversations offer an opportunity for renewal of our practices as of the world we study. We welcome theoretical meditations on these issues as well as practical empirical applications that result from such thinking.

“Critique” and “renewal” also apply to ourselves. We are very aware that aspects of the operational procedures of the former *Theory and Society* were the source of justified criticisms, particularly concerning long turn-around times for initial reviews. Renewal on this issue means a new model that places the review process directly in the hands of the editors, who will now handle all operational aspects of shepherding manuscripts through. Our pledge to the discipline is a new

journal that is not simply a continuation of the old journal, but a better one.

The journal will be open for submissions by July. We plan to celebrate the launch of the journal at the ASA annual meeting and produce its first issue this year.

2024 would have been the 50th anniversary of Alvin Gouldner’s *Theory and Society*. We look forward to reconstituting this exciting intellectual community, now entering its sixth decade, and we invite you to join us at ASA to celebrate the official launch of *Theory and Social Inquiry*.

Nitsan Chorev, Brown University

Gil Eyal, Columbia University

Neil Gross, Colby College

Greta Krippner, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Charles Camic, Northwestern University

Mara Loveman, University of California, Berkeley

Chandra Mukerji, University of California, San Diego

Monica Prasad, Johns Hopkins University

David Swartz, Boston University

Iván Szelenyi, Yale University (emeritus)

New Publications by Members

New Books by Members

Browne, Craig. 2024. *Social Theory and the Political Imaginary: Practice, Critique, and History*. London/New York: Routledge.

Schneiderhan, Erik; Lukk, Martin. 2023. *GoFailMe: The Unfulfilled Promise of Digital Crowdfunding*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Riccioni, Ilaria (ed.). 2023. *Theater(s) and Public Sphere in a Global and Digital Society*. 2 Vols. Leiden/Boston: Brill.

Jacobs, Ronald; Townsley, Eleanor. 2021. *Living Sociologically: Concepts and Connections*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Eyerman, Ronald; Sciortino, Giuseppe (eds.). 2020. *The Cultural Trauma of Decolonization. Returnees in the National Imagination*. Basingstoke: Palgrave-MacMillan.

Smith, Philip. 2020. *Durkheim and After. The Durkheimian Tradition, 1893—2020*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Susen, Simon. 2020. *Sociology in the Twenty-First Century: Key Trends, Debates, and Challenges*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

New Articles by Members

- Broadbent, Jeffrey. 2024. [Power and Theory: Toward a Multidimensional Explanation of the Dynamic Political Field](#) (Open access). *Journal of Political Power*, 1-30.
- Lukk, Martin. 2024. Politics of Boundary Consolidation: Income Inequality, Ethnonationalism, and Radical-Right Voting. *Socius* 10. doi: 10.1177/23780231241251714.
- Susen, Simon. 2023. A New Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere? With, against, and beyond Habermas. *Society* 60(6): 842–867.
- Susen, Simon. 2023 [2023]. Vers une ontologie de la réalité contemporaine?. *Éditions Académiques de France*, traduit par Pascal Nouvel, 1–33.
- Susen, Simon. 2023. Towards an Ontology of Contemporary Reality?. *Theory, Culture & Society*, Online First, 1–23.
- Susen, Simon. 2023. Lessons from Reckwitz and Rosa: Towards a Constructive Dialogue between Critical Analytics and Critical Theory. *Social Epistemology* 37(5): 545–591.
- Susen, Simon. 2023. 'Postmodernism'. In Maria Grasso and Marco Giugni (eds.) *Elgar Encyclopedia of Political Sociology*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 470–474.

Opportunities

Call for Nominations for the Award for Junior Theorist 2025

RC16 Award for Junior Theorist

The Research Committee on Sociological Theory (RC16) of the International Sociological Association invites applications for the 2025 Award for Junior Theorist. The award is granted to the best paper in sociological theory authored by one or more junior theorist(s) and submitted to the competition. It is intended to provide motivation and recognition to a promising junior scholar in the field of sociological theory, as well as to encourage graduate student interest and participation in the ISA and RC16.

The award consists of a certificate with a citation and the travel costs (up to a maximum of USD \$750) of the winner(s) to present their work at the RC16 Mid-term Conference to be held in Innsbruck, Austria, in July 2-4, 2025.

Eligibility

Applicants must be currently enrolled in a Ph.D. program or have received their Ph.D. within five years of the deadline. Papers must have been

published or accepted for publication no more than five years prior to the deadline, and must be authored by one or more junior theorist(s); those co-authored with tenured faculty members at a degree granting institution are not eligible. The publication can be in any of the ISA's three official languages (English, French, and Spanish), to a maximum length of 15,000 words. The winner(s) must be a member (or members) of ISA and RC16 at the time of receiving the award and must be available to attend the conference.

Nominations

Papers can be nominated by the author(s), or by a nominator (for example, a book or volume editor, supervisor, or other third party). Deadline for submissions is **January 15, 2025**. Details of the nominations, including a copy of the paper in electronic form, should be sent to the Selection Committee Chair, Paul Joosse, at [pjoosse\(at\)hku.hk](mailto:pjoosse(at)hku.hk) (kindly include "RC16 Junior Theorist Award" in the subject line).

Call for Papers *Civil Sphere Theory* Working Group Meeting

It is with great pleasure that we open the call for abstracts for the 2025 Civil Sphere Theory Working Group meeting. It will be held on October 22-24, 2025, at the University of Vienna. We ask that you submit your 250-word abstract by January 15, 2025. The decisions will be sent out by February 28, 2025.

The [conference website](#) is active, and registration will open on March 1, 2025.

Presenters must register by July 15, 2025. If you have any questions, please contact us. Abstracts should be submitted to civilspherewg@gmail.com.

2025 Organizing Committee: Jeffrey Alexander, Nadya Jaworsky, Anna Durnova, Till Hilmar

Call for Papers *Revisiting the Sociology of Literature*

The *Czech Sociological Review* is organizing a thematic issue in English on ‘Revisiting the Sociology of Literature: Towards Epistemological Symmetry in Literature-and-Society Research’ that will be guest edited by Jan Váňa and Hernán Maltz, Institute of Czech Literature of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague.

This proposal builds on our long-term effort to facilitate dialogue between literary theoretical and sociologically oriented approaches in examining the complex relationship between the social and the literary. Since the inception of the social sciences, sociology and literary studies have profoundly influenced one another (Lepenies, 1988). However, due to institutional and disciplinary divides, sociology has historically placed greater emphasis on the ‘social’ aspects of literary communication. We can observe this trend even today. Contemporary sociology of literature continues to emphasize literary production, often relegating literary works to the status of passive objects shaped by social interactions and institutions—with Pierre Bourdieu’s work serving as a prominent example. Even sociologists who acknowledge the intrinsic value of literature frequently treat literary texts as resources to be translated into sociological discourse.

At the Literature & Society Laboratory, we advocate for both sociologists and literary scholars to consider extra-textual and intra-textual elements to gain a more comprehensive and enriching understanding of social-literary interaction. Successive synthetic accounts show that the sociology of literature remains a fragmented and dispersed field, offering a diverse array of approaches, with Bourdieusian field theory being just one among many (see Ferguson et al., 1988; English, 2010; Glinóer, 2019; Casas, 2020). We argue that the existing *epistemological asymmetry* in this area of study can be addressed through a dialogue with those whose professional calling is to understand literature—with literary theorists and critics. Therefore, the proposed issue aims to bring together sociologists, cultural scholars, literary theorists, historians, and critics to explore various facets of the literary-social link, providing rich and compelling analyses through their collaborative effort.

We welcome analyses that engage with texts and contexts, fictions and discourses, theories and practices, themes and motifs, traditions and novelties, spaces and trajectories, and more. We are particularly interested in submissions that critically examine the category of ‘sociology of literature’ itself and explore its connections with various fields of knowledge, especially in areas where sociology and literary studies intersect or compete. Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Case studies examining the creation and/or impact of literary works across different cultural and historical contexts.
- Research on literary production (such as authorship, publishing institutions, and editorial practices), readership (including reader interviews, statistical surveys, and discourse analyses of reception), and literary fields that combine sociological perspective with close reading of relevant literary texts.
- Methodological contributions that propose new ways of conceptualizing the relationship between literature and society or that draw on the analysis of specific literary works within their social contexts.
- Theoretical contributions that discuss models, paradigms, and schools of thought, or propose new theoretical approaches.
- Intellectual history exploring how different schools and paradigms have approached—and are approaching—the study of the literature-society relationship and how these approaches have evolved over time.

Instructions for authors

Please send a working title and an abstract of 250–500 words, outlining your central research question, theoretical framework, and general argument or expected findings to casopis@soc.cas.cz, vana@ucl.cas.cz, and maltz@ucl.cas.cz.

Authors whose abstracts are accepted will be invited to submit full papers, which will undergo a fully anonymized peer review process. Please note that an invitation to submit a full paper does not guarantee publication in the issue, as acceptance is subject to the outcome of the peer review process.

Deadline for submission of abstracts: *31 March 2025*

Decisions on abstracts communicated to accepted authors: *Late April 2025*

Submission of full papers: *31 October 2025*

For any additional information or questions regarding the issue, please contact the guest editors vana@ucl.cas.cz and maltz@ucl.cas.cz.

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Call for Proposals for ISA Book Series and Special Issues

As you see on the updated webpages of the ISA’s two main publication outlets, 1) [SAGE Studies in International Sociology](#) book series and 2) [Current Sociology monographs](#) (special issues), the ISA has significantly reduced the turnaround time for proposals for both of these publications. For *Current Sociology* monographs, the ISA team has explicitly required guest editors to incorporate epistemic diversity and inclusivity in their calls.

In particular, ISA RC16 Sociological Theory colleagues are invited to consider turning

Research Committee discussions into SAGE Studies in International Sociology (SSIS). The ISA especially welcomes innovative formats that leverage the length of a book. It encourages colleagues to consider small group co-authored volumes (2-4 authors), allowing for an in-depth dialogical investigation of a specific topic.

The new editor, Joy Zhang,¹ is happy to discuss any ideas that colleagues may have.

¹ Joy Y. Zhang (cs-monographs@isa-sociology.org), Professor of Sociology, Founding Director, [Centre for Global Science and Epistemic Justice](#), University

of Kent, UK; Editor, *Current Sociology monographs* and *SAGE Studies in International Sociology (SSIS)*.

Coming Conferences

2025, July 2-4 *Theoretical Reflections: Sociology of the Future/The Future of Sociology*
[Sociological Theory \(RC16\) Mid-term Conference](#) Innsbruck, Austria

The ISA Research Committee 16 (RC16) on Sociological Theory invites scholars from around the world to contribute to the *Sociological Theory RC16 Midterm Conference*, to be held from July 2-4, 2025, at the Research Center Social Theory, University of Innsbruck, Austria.

Call for Papers

We're no longer moving forward into the future with confidence. The future is now coming in our direction, it seems, throwing its shadow on the present. From the economy and politics to technology and ecology, the accumulation of crises projects us into the future without any solution in sight. One of the tasks of sociology is to accompany major societal transitions and open up radiant futures. To do so sociology has, however, to reinvent itself, rethink its relations to the world, to other disciplines and to its own history. Thanks to its reflexivity, being both in and about social change in the long term, but also in the interstices of society, sociological theory has always been at the forefront of innovation. We invite innovative papers on the future of social and sociological theory, the world at large and their mutual implication in the collective construction of the past, present and the future. We welcome papers from all areas of sociological and social theory. Papers that reopen the temporal horizon, investigate social imaginaries and study transformative practices will be especially welcome.

Please, send your abstracts to Paul Joosse before the 31st of December. Email: pjoosse@hku.hk



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Important Dates

Abstract submission: open

Abstract submission deadline: December 31, 2024

Further ISA Conferences

2025, July 6-11

[V Forum of Sociology](#)

Rabat, Morocco

2027, July 4-10

[XXI World Congress of Sociology](#)

Gwangju, Korea



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Job Announcement: University of Bamberg, Germany

The Faculty of Social Sciences, Economics and Business Administration invites applications for the position of a *Professor (f/ m/ x) (W3 salary level) of Sociology, especially Sociological Theory*.

The successful candidate will be appointed as a civil servant for life. The holder of the post should broadly cover General Sociology and sociological theories in teaching and is responsible for the study content in these areas. The teaching duties comprise the respective fundamental and advanced courses of the sociological Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes. Experiences in theory-driven empirical social research and a fit with the profile of Bamberg's Institute for Sociology are required.

Applicants are distinguished by outstanding research that links theory with empirical research fields. In addition to an outstanding research profile and an internationally recognized research record of visible publications, applicants have experience in raising third-party funds. They are also willing to engage in applications for joint research projects and to contribute to larger research alliances. The position is suitable for junior researchers with high scientific potential.

Participation in the faculty's degree programmes and in the development of new degree Programme concepts is part of the duties. Participation in tasks of academic self-governance, in international Cooperation and exchange programmes and in the further internationalisation of the degree programmes is expected. English-language teaching in our international study programmes is a prerequisite. Active involvement in the structured doctoral training Programme within the Bamberg Graduate School of Social Sciences (BAGSS) is desirable.

The relevant qualifications consist of a completed academic degree, pedagogical aptitude and a particular talent for academic work generally substantiated by the excellent qualification of the candidate's doctoral degree and, in addition to this, further academic achievements. Additional academic credentials must be certified by a Habilitation or equivalent academic qualification, which may also have been obtained through activities outside of higher education or within the scope of an assistant professorship.



Concerning tenured positions as a civil servant (*Beamtenverhältnis*), the candidate must be under the age of 52 years at the time of appointment (for exceptional cases see Art. 60 Abs. 3 Satz 2 BayHIG).

Where candidates are otherwise equally qualified, preference will be given to candidates with disabilities.

The University of Bamberg has been certified by the Hertie Foundation as a family-friendly university. It is particularly committed to helping reconcile work and family life. The university promotes gender equality in the workplace and endeavours to increase the Proportion of women in research and teaching. In the case of equal aptitude, qualifications and expertise, preference is given to women. The faculty aims to increase the proportion of women in research and teaching and therefore welcomes applications from female scientists.

The University of Bamberg is a member of the regional Dual Career Network (DCNN) and provides support for the spouses or Partners of newly appointed staff. More Information can be found at <http://www.dualcareer-nordbayern.de>.

Applications from abroad are particularly welcome. Both the ability and willingness to teach in English are required. As a rule, proficiency in German is a prerequisite for employment; in individual cases, courses may be offered exclusively in English during the first two years.

Applications including relevant documents (curriculum vitae, list of publications and courses, copies of certificates and diplomas) in German or English are generally to be submitted in electronic form to the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Economics and Business Administration (dekanat.sowi@uni-bamberg.de) of the Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg, 96045 Bamberg no later than 15.01.2025. Please direct any questions about the professorship to olaf.struck@uni-bamberg.de.

Call for Contributions

Theory needs your contribution! Please send your ideas for a short essay, a reply, an interview, a reference to your new (published) book or recent dissertation, or any other information of interest to RC16 members to the newsletter editors

Nick Osbaldiston (Cairns), nick.osbaldiston (at) jcu.edu.au, and

Frank Welz (Innsbruck), frank.welz (at) uibk.ac.at

until **May 15th** to be considered for the summer issue, **December 31st** for the winter issue.

Currently, we are particularly interested in receiving short (one page or a short essay) contributions to our planned series on

- Theorising in Troubled Times
- Theory & War
- Trajectories into Theory
- What is Critical Sociology?
- Teaching Theory: How to (successfully) teach Sociological Theory?

RC16 Board 2023-2027

ISA RC16 Board 2023-2027

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Objectives

Following the RC16 statutes, the goal of the Research Committee in Sociological Theory is

- to organize open interrelationships among its various schools of thought,
- helping resolve its recurring crises and define its future prospects and
- to create an international community among scholars

¹ Past Co-Chairs are ex-officio members of the board.