

TIMELINES



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History of Sociology Section

Message from the Chair

George Ritzer, University of Maryland

At this point in my tenure as Chair of the Section on the History of Sociology, I suppose I should issue forth with some ringing statement about our strong current position and our brilliant prospects for the future. However, neither of those seems to be the case, or maybe even need to be case. The section has been stable and is likely to remain stable. I don't think there is much of a chance of significant growth, but there is a risk on the downside as ASA section membership gets more expensive and "hot" new sections (e.g. global and transnational sociology) attract more members. There is a danger here, especially since we are about 100 members below the minimum number set by the ASA for a section (300 members). However, that

has been true for some time and the ASA seems disinclined to cancel sections. In fact, there are a few sections with even fewer members and there seems to be no effort to eliminate them as sections.

When I was a candidate to Chair the section, I raised the issue of broadening the domain of the section to something like "The History, Current Status, and Future Prospects of Sociology". I received no reaction to that suggestion, or alternate proposals for an expansion of the section's domain. I would be interested in hearing from members about such an expansion, whether it is a good idea, and what such an expansion might look like.

Another possibility would be more of a focus on the relevance of the study of the history of sociology to the major social issues we are facing and will face

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[Eds: We have started a new tradition and decided to include interviews with scholars doing sociological and historical work. What follows are two of the first interviews for this section's newsletter. Hope you enjoy!]

Interviews

Richard Swedberg – On Bringing Theory to Life:

Theorizing and the History of Sociology

The word “theorizing” is becoming increasingly used within sociology to explain the process of making theory. A recent contribution by Richard Swedberg, “Theorizing in Sociology and Social Science: Turning to the Context of Discovery”, describes the craft of theorizing and helps concretize what is meant by the word theorizing. He emphasizes that theorizing is not a focus on theory construction but rather, a focus on discovery. His main idea is that we need to bring life to theory by working with data in “unsystematic, impressionistic, irrational ways” so we can come up with great ideas. My interview focuses on the role of theorizing and what Swedberg means by the concept, how it can be useful for the members of the history of sociology section, and how the history of sociology section can be useful for theorizing.

– Katelin Albert

Let's start with the concept of theorizing. Can you talk a bit about it and where it came from? Why would someone theorize?

My sense is that after WWII methods have

advanced very quickly while theory has not really advanced very quickly. So today, in graduate sociology and in undergraduate programs, you have very competent courses in methods, there are a lot of advanced methods and people use computers to a great affect but it seems like theory has not really developed very much. So, there is a kind of imbalance between methods and theory. Graduate students and faculty spend an enormous amount of time on methods. I mean, if you took a time analysis you would find that, I don't know, 80-90% of the effort is really geared towards using methods in the correct way. So it seems like there is something wrong there. So that is one reason why one would try something new in bringing theory to life.

The other thing is that I have taught theory for I don't know, 20 - 30 years and I'm very fond of theory but, I have come to the conclusion that there is something wrong with the way theory is being taught, and with the way I teach it. This is sort of illustrated by the fact that I am often approached by students who have done most of their research and then, there research isn't really

Swedberg Continued

that interesting and they come to be because I'm the theory man, and I'm supposed to spice things up. Graduate students take all their requirements and they start their dissertations and then they take theory requirement close to the end. So, there is something about the reputation of theory and the way theory is being taught that results in pretty bad work which in a sense, confirms that methods are much more reliable and advanced than what theory is. So, for me, to try to bring some life to theory is the focus on theorizing.

So, theorizing is the process that precedes theory. Theory is the end product of theorizing and they naturally complement each other. In the best possible world, theory and theorizing would be equally important. But today, given the situation that I have outlined that the theory element is very underdeveloped and all it seems to be taught in the wrong way, we may want to focus on the theorizing element to teach people theorizing rather than theory.

That's the basic project and when I'm talking about theorizing one could think, for example, that it is the same as theory construction, which is part of theory, particularly in the 1960's, but the theory construction in my mind is not really what I'm after. And the reason for that has a lot to do with what I see as the context of discovery rather than the context of justification.

When I read your work and actually tried theorizing myself, those concepts were so fundamental. If I were unsure about how to theorize, I would go back to those ideas. Could

you talk about them and what they mean for someone who is theorizing?

I think these two concepts can be used as rhetorical points of departure. By talking about these two concepts we can figure out the area where we want to start. So, the context of discovery is centered around the discovery itself, and the context of justification is centered around the way that you present your research results and work out your research results to the community of scholars. So if you have a brilliant idea you cannot just write it down, you are supposed to, according to the rules, work it out, test it, and present it to the profession in a way that is acceptable. So, you know, the idea should be falsifiable, and, we will use whatever method in a way that hopefully others can reproduce. So, what I'm saying, the heart of the theoretical enterprise is to come up with new ideas, and the way to revive theory, through theorizing, is to focus on the element of discovery. So, the part that comes before theory and theorizing, in my mind, should be focused on discovery.

What we want to do really in theory is come up with great ideas. And since we are dealing with sociology, theorizing has to involve facts. So, I am arguing that in order to be good in theorizing, we should try to work with data in an unsystematic, impressionistic, irrational way. Whatever way we can come up with good ideas. So, elements in theorizing, like you want to figure out what phenomenon you are studying, you want to give it a name, you want to develop concepts, you want to built the theory out

Swedberg Continued

through typologies of analogies, you want to have an explanation. This happens in the context of discovery with the purpose of discovering something new. When you are looking at facts, when you are observing facts, in the context of discovery, you are not interested in being systematic and approach the fact in the way that you would do in order to prove your point in the context of justification. You are really looking at facts in order to come up with good ideas. So, in the context of discovery, everything is really allowed as long as it helps you in discovering things. It means that if you're studying a phenomena, if you are person who is sensitive to art, go and look at art. If you are sensitive to poetry, go and read poetry. If you are sensitive to history, do archival research. Do whatever. You should do art, history, poetry, all of these kinds of things even if you are not very sensitive in them. Just come up with new angles on the topic.

So we can pretty much use anything as data? We can use music, poetry, advertisements, anything?

That's right. So, in a sense it is sort of liberating you and an important part of theorizing project, which I haven't really worked out but that I think is very important is the relationship between social science and art [which] historically, have been very separated. Art has been very beautiful and we don't know where it comes from while science has been the rational and the practical. I do think that they can come closer and I think they have very positive influence, art on the sciences. I think it would be great if you had a

course in art. It is always good to expose yourself to art. It loosens you up, sharpens your sensibility. That's where we want to go. One of [my students said] that he found it easier to theorize with Emile Dickinson's help than with social science articles. I mean, you can do it in a million ways and it is great fun. So in general, I think that this theorizing topic would entail things like, we know very little about intuition. We know very little about the role of emotions in doing good social science, we know very little about the role of imagination, we hardly know what imagination is. And we know very little about memory. I mean, one of these poems by Emile Dickinson is about memory, on how we recall earlier experiences. When you start saying, ok, what it memory really about? ... Let's shake the foundations and see if the building comes down.

So how much should someone know about a topic before they start theorizing?

Well, you know, in the article I am sort of saying that there are certain rules for theorizing and what you do. And it's my understanding, not that of the world, but, it's very good to learn these rules and follow them and then forget about them, and the whole thing melds in your mind. You're supposed to use any means to get to know a topic, and the topic is really supposed to change because things are never what they really seem to be. So, things are really starting to look odder once you really dig down into it and try out the limits of it through free association,

Swedberg Continued

dreaming, or as we said, using art, archives, poetry, whatever it is. And once we have quite a bit of information about it, that's when we should start theorizing. You can't really do theorizing without facts. So, I call this the prestudy, the early phase, and at that point, if you sort of learn a lot about a topic and theorize about a topic, you may come to a conclusion that this is really a dead end. And you should give it up, you know?

As someone who has tried to do theorizing as you describe it, one of the strengths of it is that it can look different depends on who is doing it. It is relevant and useful to all of types of social science or all types of discovery because it is so creative and it is whatever works for the person who wants to do it.

That's right and I call it is personalist approach. I use the word personalist, which is a little odd, to make the point that you are really working with yourself to be creative and to be unique and it means that everyone sort of has to go into themselves and also the fact that you have to conquer your fear for being an idiot and fail, and you have to just sort of learn to fail. It's very reassuring to fail, I mean, you sort of laugh at it after a while how stupid you are. And so that's why it's important that it is being taught in a kind of supportive atmosphere. Once you sort of write for a journal, then you are in the context of justification. But at this stage, you really have to write exclusively for yourself.

So given our understanding of the process of theorizing, what can people who are involved in this section, the history of sociology, or people who do historical sociology get from the process of theorizing?

Well, first, let me say that the people who do theorizing, what they can get from the history of sociology because, it is the historians who know where the archives are, and they know where the diaries are, and they track a lot of the things that have been pushed to the side in modern sociology. So, it seems natural for me that if you are interested in theorizing, you are really interested in knowing how Tocqueville theorized, how Jane Adams theorized. And the people who are writing these kinds of books these days are the historians of sociology. So, I think that people who do theorizing should have one foot in a lot of different camps. One in art and so on and so forth. But also, they have much to learn from what the people in the history of sociology have put together.

Now, the people who do the history of sociology, I mean, they do a lot of different kinds of work. But one kind of work where they can be sort of inspired by the theorizing approach is that they can actually help to cast light on the process of theorizing because of their interest in the history of sociology in the sense that if you are interested in, let's say Max Weber, you know, theorizing can open up to you a new approach to Max Weber. Namely, how did Max Weber go about theorizing? I've written two books on Max Weber and I would sort of argue pretty strongly

Swedberg Continued

that no one has looked Max Weber from this perspective and no one has looked at Durkheim, or Weber, or Jane Adams and a lot of others from this perspective. So, part of what people have been looking at, is the making of, for example Rosdolsky has written a book called the making of Marx's capital, and people have written books on the making of the economy by Max Weber, but even though that overlaps with the theorizing project, the theorizing project is really very much more about how do you go about coming up with the ideas. It is my experience from my friends that most people actually destroy the early versions of their work. So, a lot of this material is missing for many people but it probably exists there for other people. There is a history of theorizing we want to know and presumably people theorized a little but different when they had access to electronic media, or newspapers, as the case with Tocqueville where newspapers in the United States and France were very primitive, so people have theorized in different ways and you know, we surely can learn from early ways of theorizing. We are always like fishes living in water, we never see what's around us. So, the advantage with history is that the world was different in the past, that means that it might be easier to discover things when you go to the past than when you look at it in the present. Things we take for granted are not so easily overlooked when you take an historical approach like is done in the history of sociology.

Also, the history of sociology does more

than just write the history. It has become a guardian of a part of what is the most valuable in the sociological enterprise also. The history of sociology includes today the history of sociological method, and here is Jennifer Platt who is a very brilliant British sociologist who has done the pioneering work here. And when you read her work, you just say, wow this is so interesting, the history of participant observation or the survey of whatever... And I think that one can produce the very hands of the work when one starts looking at the history of theorizing. This is not, and should not be, the main topic or subject of history of sociology, but it seems like exciting to explore at this stage. It looks promising to explore. And once one starts going in that direction then we will obviously see if the yield is rich or the yield is not rich. But, it surely would be great fun to know how Durkheim, Zimmel, and Weber theorized instead of just focusing on the end result. And there are clues in their printed end product as well as in various letters and early manuscript forms that we have... but you really have to scan a lot of material to get those little nuggets.

So, if you see that as part of theorizing in a broader sense, I mean, what are the kind of influences you expose yourself to? What is the kind of material that you want to influence you? Then, it becomes sort of fun. We obviously want an educational system in sociology and elsewhere that brings out people's creativity. And, you know, when everybody has 20 years of schooling and no

one is starving, and people go to school, you now really have a situation where you can really start spinning out new ideas and I think that if handled correctly, social science can once more become an interesting and avant garde enterprise. And it's not today.

Richard Swedberg is a Professor at Cornell University whose main research areas are in economic sociology and

sociological theory. Richard's interest in the classics has led him to write on the works of Tocqueville, Saint-Simon, Durkheim, and Weber. His contributions include biographies of Schumpeter and Weber, where he addresses the relationship and boundaries of economic theory to economic sociology. His current works focus on the role of hope and technology with economy and capitalism, as well as on questions around ethics and personal courage.

Interviews

Shamus Khan – On *Privilege* and *Exception*

The ever-growing agenda to promote diversity and social openness to facilitate equality is thought to increase access, education, opportunity, and entitlement for many people. Shamus Khan's ethnographic book, *Privilege: The making of an adolescent elite at St. Paul's school*, examines a world that recently promotes social openness to discover how elites are made, and how they relate to larger world. Currently, he is in the process of writing another book, *Exceptional: The Elites of New York and the Story of American Inequality*, which will uncover the character of American inequality. It aims to show how as "New York institutions became less exclusive, opening to those previously excluded, inequality increased". My

interview with Kahn focuses on his development of these two historical projects, and further, it discusses what his findings, that openness does not actually mean there will be a reduction in inequality, mean ethically, socially, and politically. – Katelin Albert

I noticed on your website that your work returns you to your Alma Mater. Can you tell me a how your own experiences motivated this book and informed your research?

When I entered St. Paul's as a student, I was placed within a minority student dorm. There was one for girls and one for boys. The other eighteen houses on campus were overwhelmingly filled with those whom you

Khan Continued

would expect to be at a school that educates families like the Rockefellers and Vanderbilts. This sequestering was not an intentionally racist practice of the school. In fact the school was very self-conscious about it and a few years prior tried to distribute students of color across all houses on campus. But the non-white students complained. Though their neighborhoods of Harlem and the Upper East Side might border each other, a fairly large chasm separated the non-elite and elite students. They had difficulty living with one another. Within a year the minority student dorm returned. Non-white students were sequestered in their own space, just like most of them were in their ethnic neighborhoods back home.

This segregation led me to think a lot about race and inequality. And so when I graduated high school, I was not sad to be moving on. I had purposefully not applied to the Ivy League schools that my classmates would be attending. St. Paul's was a world I had learned to fit into but one that I was not particularly happy in.

The source of my discontent was my increasing awareness of inequality. I kept returning to my first days: both my surprise at my minority student dorm and my discomfort among my elite classmates. The experience remained an aggravating curiosity. Why was elite schooling like a birthright for some Americans and a herculean achievement for others? Why did students from certain backgrounds seem to have such an easy time

feeling comfortable and doing well at the school while others seemed to relentlessly struggle? And, most important, while students were repeatedly told that we were among the best of the best, why was it that so many of the best came from among the rich? These were all questions about inequality, and they drove me away from the world of St. Paul's. But learning more about inequality during graduate school also brought me back. It's what led me to go spend a year as a participant observer at St. Paul's, and to eventually write the book, *Privilege*.

*Can you talk a little about where you developed your methodological perspective? Most studies of inequality do not look at the 'top'. What encouraged your historical study of privilege and now, *New York Elites*?*

What encouraged me to study privilege was fairly simple: that a lot of inequality today is explained not by what's going on with poor people, but instead by what's going on with rich people. The poor are basically stuck in place -- so are the middle classes, and even the upper middle classes. It is the wealthy (indeed, the very wealthiest of the wealthy) who are changing their position. They are getting richer, and thereby explaining the rise in inequality. In order to explain an outcome, you have to look at what varies, not what is constant. And with inequality what's varying is the wealth of the wealthy (they're getting richer). So to explain inequality, we need to

Khan Continued

know more about them. While this insight emerged from looking at economy the last 40 years, it also led me to think more seriously about the past. And so I set myself the project of telling the story of American inequality not from the perspective of the poor and/or rising classes, but instead from what has happened to the elite. That's what I'm trying to do in *Exceptional*.

In your new project on New York elites, you say your aim to understand the construction and maintenance of social boundaries... "better understand the character of different kinds of social boundaries, and what these different characters mean for social equality"... could you elaborate on this and what this goal looks like methodologically in an historical analysis?

I don't provide any kind of universal argument from era to era. So for example, I don't argue that elites, across the 230 year period I'm look at, always give primacy to economic boundaries. For certain, economic boundaries and their maintenance are important. But so too are families, marriages, culture, access to social networks, capacity to define the relevant knowledge of the era, etc. Methodologically this means look at a single object to ground the analysis -- boundary-making -- but recognizing that across moments of analysis, the content of that object is likely to change considerably. So, my interest is to explore what kinds of boundaries and under what

conditions elites have been more or less successful in protecting their interests, and most important, how boundaries have been used to both challenge and preserve inequality. We associate rigid boundaries with inequality, and porous ones with more equitable relations; I believe this view is naïve. Boundaries are not so simple that we can understand them along a single dimension (open or closed). Nor can boundaries be eliminated all together. They are what Durkheim called a "social fact." All societies everywhere have boundaries; even when some disappear, others inevitably emerge. The question is not whether we can make boundaries disappear, nor is it the case that "opening" boundaries always alleviates social problems. Instead the question is to better understand the character of different kinds of social boundaries, and what these different characters mean for social equality. My hope is that this richer understanding of boundaries will allow us to escape from the simplistic view that "open" means "equal" and instead understand how different kinds of openness enable us to realize greater social equality.

I see your new project on New York Elites as treading on very political grounds. We live in a time where diversity and social openness is stressed as a means to facilitate equality. However, since your work finds that openness does not actually reduce inequality, some people might crudely suggest that you are advocating for closed social institutions or the

Khan Continued

exclusion of certain groups as a means to reduce inequality. Could you talk to this paradox? How does your work fit politically, morally, and ethically in a contemporary world? How can we retain our openness while reducing inequality? In your opinion, what changes need to occur, or, what is required if we are to maintain our openness while achieving equality?

This is a great question, and one I've been struggling with as this project progresses. I'm not sure I have a great answer for it, but I have been thinking about this in a variety of ways. First, it's important to note that the elimination of social boundaries is impossible. Though our students often suggest that, "I don't see X category, I just see individuals," we know that social categories provide us with the frames of reference by which we navigate the world. Second, boundaries overlap. Imagine, for a moment, that we could magically eliminate racial biases tomorrow. We would still have racial inequality, because today, racial categories and economic positions are intertwined. Third, as I argued in my earlier work, many of the mechanisms by which we attempt to transcend the inequalities that result from social boundaries fail. But in their failing, they often create the conditions whereby blame is placed upon those who are already disadvantaged. Take meritocracy. At its core it's a form of social engineering, where opportunities are distributed according to performance on a standardized or "fair" metric.

When meritocratic instruments created systematic inequalities, it is often those who "don't perform" are told that they don't have what it takes -- not that they are the subject of bias. Taken together -- the fact that social categories and boundaries will always exist, that they overlap, and that the mechanisms to transcend them often end up blaming the victim -- I increasingly think that the elimination of social boundaries is not the ideal political project. Instead, it is the mitigation of their outcomes. I also think this isn't an either or process. Yes, we need social institutions that are available to all people. This includes both institutions we'd want to be a part of -- say a great school, which many presently don't have access to, like the poor. But it also includes institutions we'd rather avoid -- say jail, which others don't have much access to, like the rich (who can often buy their way out either through creating incentives for selective policing or through the legal system). My argument is simply that openness is not enough. And by making it a kind of holy grail for equality, we've missed some of the ways in which by opening up institutions, we have, at times, created greater inequalities. While this may make some of us shudder, the easiest analogy to see here is that of markets. "Open" or "free" markets don't always create equality. Indeed their effects require mitigation by other means. Having models that aren't as simplistic at "open/closed" is part of what I'm hoping to achieve in this next book.

Khan Continued

*There is a methodological debate between sociologists and historians as to the boundaries and relationship between the two disciplines. I see your previous book, *Privilege*, and your new book, *Exceptional*, as being relevant and useful to both historians and sociologists, as well as a larger audience. Can you talk about your intended audience and the applicability of these books?*

I am, at my core, a sociologist. I like the questions we ask, and the diversity of approaches we deploy to answer them. So my last book was an ethnography, my next is a history. I have learned a lot from historians over the last year. But I'm not much for disciplinary boundaries (I recognize the irony of this, given my previous answer!). And I try not to write for a discipline. So the last book was written, basically, for an interested reader. My hope was that students at St. Paul's could read it. So could alumni. And so could the professional sociologists. Basically, anyone who might take an interest in a book by an academic -- from the high school student to the academics themselves. The resulting writing style means that at times I've been criticized for being "light," because, for example, I don't have a long detailed account of Bourdieu's theory and my own distinct lines of difference. This is the risk with trying to write for a large audience. I'm rather sure that in reading the next book some historians won't be thrilled at how I've written up my history, and some sociologists will critique me for not being

sociological enough. But I think of my scholarship as existing in dialogue with a community of scholars. There will be people like me who try to write for a broad audience. There will be people who write far more technically, for a tiny audience. But both are valuable. I might be able make a simpler version of the technical arguments more accessible, and insodoing also extend them into contexts they weren't intended for yet might provide insights to; the more technical writers can then work within these new fields, and together, we can develop ideas. A diversity of work is important. Sometimes that means being very specialized, and sometimes it means being very general. I tend to be in the general camp much of the time, but it's important to recognize that I basically live off the work that emerges from the more specialized scholarship (across a host of disciplines). And I'd like to think that my resulting work isn't just of interest to the general readers, but also that the specialists can glean something from it as well. Whether those are historians or sociologists (or anyone else), I don't really care.

Shamus Khan is an Assistant Professor of sociology at Columbia University whose primary interests are in culture and inequality. His work focuses on four main themes: elites, how people negotiate status hierarchies, how people make political decisions, and better understanding culture.

From these interests, he published his first book, *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*, which aims to better understand how social advantages are produced. Currently, Shamus is in the process of writing his next monograph, tentatively titled, *Elite New York: A Sociological History*, and is also involved in projects to better understand fame, projects on deliberation and political decision-making and health outcomes in diverse social groups, projects on the role of

ethnography in understanding culture, and independently, is working on a project on embodiment and classical music.

Katelin Albert is a first year doctoral student at the University of Toronto whose main interests are in sociological theory, the sociology of knowledge, and the sociology of science.

News

Section Activities at ASA

The History of Sociology Section is scheduled to have its *Section Activities* at ASA on Day 2, Saturday, August 18th. Please check with the ASA programming for updates on time and place.

Recent Publications

Articles, chapters and books on the history of sociology.

Please send citations to Erik Schneiderhan for future newsletters:

(e.schneiderhan@utoronto.ca).

Gerhardt, Uta. 2011. "The Social Thought of Talcott Parsons – Methodology and American Ethos." Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.

Goldberg, Chad Alan. 2011. "The Jews, the Revolution, and the Old Regime in French Anti-Semitism and Durkheim's Sociology." *Sociological Theory* 29(4): 248-71.

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Kalberg, Stephen. 2011. "Max Weber." Pp. 305-72 in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorists (Vol. 1: Major Classical Theorists)*, edited by George Ritzer and Jeffrey Stepnisky. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.

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Turner, Stephen. 2011. "Collingwood and Weber vs. Mink: History after the Cognitive Turn." *Journal of the Philosophy of History*. 5: 230-260.

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Turner, Stephen P, and Gerard Delanty. (2011). "Social, Political, and Cultural Theory since the Sixties: the Demise of Classical Marxism, the new Reality of the Welfare State, and the Loss of Epistemic Innocence." pp. 1-30 in Delanty, Gerard, and Stephen P. Turner, eds. *Routledge International Handbook of Social and Political Theory*. London: Routledge.

Turner, Stephen 2011. "Schmitt, Telos, the Collapse of the Weimar Constitution, and the Bad Conscience of the Left, in Timothy W. Luke and Ben Agger, eds. *A Journal of No Illusions: Telos, Paul Piccone, and the*

Americanization of Critical Theory. New York: Telos Press. pp. 115-140.

Turner, Stephen. 2010. "Ellwood's Europe." Cherry Shrecker, ed., *Exchange and Influence: Transatlantic Travel and the Development of Sociological Ideas*. Aldershot: Ashgate.163-176.

Book Spotlight

Published by LIT Verlag in December of 2010 as part of the series, *Studies in the Theory of Action*, and co-published by Transaction Publishers, the volume by Talcott Parsons includes an introduction by Victor Lidz and Helmut Staubmann.

Actor, Situation and Normative Pattern is a monograph that Talcott Parsons wrote around 1939 and used in his teaching for the next 10 or 11 years, but chose not to publish. A familiar work to many of Parsons' early students, it has been largely unknown to students and colleagues who worked with him after 1950 as well as to sociologists more generally.

The monograph represents Parsons' most sustained theoretical work between *The Structure of Social Action* of 1937 and *Toward A General Theory of Action and The Social System*, both of 1951. It provides the most complete account of intermediate formulations that will enable students of sociological theory to understand how his thinking evolved from the simple schema of 1937 to the much more

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elaborate formulations of 1951. It is thus an important work for the history of sociology. However, it also explains the intermediate formulations with a directness and clarity that are not often found in Parsons' later works, and thus should be helpful to all scholars with an interest in the theory of action.

Announcements

Chad Goldberg was recently offered a one-year membership at the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study, a fellowship at the Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan, and a resident fellowship at the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin-Madison to support work on a new book about modernity and the Jews in classical sociological theory. Goldberg has accepted the membership at the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study for 2011-12 and has declined the other offers. The book is now under contract with the University of Chicago Press.

Calls and Conferences

North Central Sociological Association's Conference 2011-12 will be held in Pittsburgh in April. Larry Nichols is now serving as the President for this association.

The 5th Annual NSSR Interdisciplinary Memory Conference

April 26 – 27, 2012

The New School for Social Research, NYC

THE ARTS OF MEMORY

Playing on the title of the influential text of Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory*, (1966), where she traces the use of mnemonic techniques from the classical age to the age of the Enlightenment, the 5th Annual NSSR Interdisciplinary Memory Conference (2012) will focus on discussions around contemporary arts of memory.

With this conference we seek to look at the arts and artifices of memory practices, both as they come to rest in forms, such as museums and memorials, as well as in the enactment of memory practices themselves, such as truth and reconciliation processes. Interdisciplinary in scope, this conference specifically reaches for new ways to conceptualize the arts of memory through *the visual, tactile, textual, and synesthetic* expressions of the past. In addition, portions of the conference will be dedicated to a reflexive examination of the arts of memory scholarship—the scholarship of arts of memory examined as an art in itself. Some of the questions this conference will address include:

- ◆ How are different memory practices oriented around different senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell?
- ◆ How are events associated with one set of senses or practices remembered through another set of senses or practices?

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- ◆ How are different methods of memory disrupted, altered, or remapped over time?
- ◆ What is the relationship between destruction and creation in memory practices?
- ◆ What happens when events that seem insignificant as they unfold in the present become imbued with new significance in memory form?
- ◆ What methods do we use as scholars to conduct research on memory practice? How do we study memory on an individual and a socio-historical scale?
- ◆ What theoretical perspectives can shed light on methodologies of memory?
- ◆ touch, taste, smell
- ◆ Memory and space/place
- ◆ Virtual museums, digital archives, and online memory projects
- ◆ Mapping memory
- ◆ Evidentiary practices
- ◆ Memory and visual culture/cultural production
- ◆ Loss and aging of memories on a social scale
- ◆ Memory and transformation, confusion, destruction, fragmentation
- ◆ Synesthetic memory
- ◆ Theoretical approaches to the analysis of methods of memory
- ◆ Research methods in memory studies

Themes the conference will examine include:

- ◆ Methods of social remembering
- ◆ Memory and the body
- ◆ Memory and the senses: sight, sound,

For more information:

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Section's Mission Statement

The purpose of the Section on the History of Sociology is to provide a forum for sociologists and other scholars interested in the study of the historically specific processes shaping the development of sociology as a profession, an academic discipline, an organization, a community, and an intellectual endeavor. The Section serves its members as a structure 1) to disseminate information of professional interest,

2) to assist in the exchange of ideas and the search for research collaborators, 3) to obtain information about the location of archival materials, 4) to support efforts to expand such research resources and to preserve documents important to the history of sociology, and 5) to ensure that the scholarship of this group can be shared with the profession through programming at both regional and national meetings.

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...Message from the Chair

in the 21st century. Examples include the utility of past thinking and work for such contemporary issues as growing social inequality, majority-minority relations, the environmental crisis, or the decline of the family. What can we learn from our past about not only better-analyzing such problems, but also in finding better ways of dealing with those problems. The history of sociology is clearly what those involved choose it to be. While it is already done to some degree, we might think about a more explicit expansion of the topics we study. Among other things, we could go farther back in time, go farther afield in various disciplines to analyze their historical relationship to sociology, or explore the history of sociology in many more societies.

Barring some sort of broadening of our focus, the section is likely to remain a small,

more marginal ASA section. That is probably fine with most members and to be expected since most ASA members are more interested in narrower, more future-oriented areas. That is as it should be, but it is a good thing that at least a small segment of the discipline is interested in examining our history as a topic of interest in itself and one that can inform what sociologists do now and will do the future.

I have had no sense from the HOS membership that there is any strong need to do much of anything that is different from what we've been doing. I feel much the same way, but I felt as if it is my obligation to at least raise-again- the idea that we may be interested in at least beginning a dialogue on the future of HOS as it is as well as what it could be in the future in some altered form. – George Ritzer