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# Theory

The Newsletter of the Research Committee on Sociological Theory  
International Sociological Association  
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CONGRESS OF SOCIOLOGY*, Gothenburg,  
Sweden, from July 11 to 17, 2010

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## Message from the Chairs

Dear Colleagues,

It is already time for us to make intellectual and travel plans for the next World Congress of Sociology, which will be held in Gothenburg, Sweden, from 11 to 17 July 2010. We believe that this is an ideal setting for the Congress, not least because of Swedish sociologists' many past and current contributions to our discipline and the dynamic character of sociology in that country. Moreover, Sweden has long been an important site for international and comparative sociological research, largely due to what analysts have dubbed the Swedish model and its part in "Scandinavian exceptionalism": the advanced character of the welfare state and social programs, a corporatist tradition in industrial relations, high rates of unionization and prominence of unions in public life, low imprisonment rates, and relatively flat income and inequality gradients. However, sociologists have also pointed out the challenges faced by this model because of rapidly changing domestic and international conditions. Economic globalization has severely tested the social democratic foundations of the Swedish state, whereas changing migration patterns have underscored the socio-cultural limits of who is part of the national community, and thus of the existence of exclusion, prejudice and inequality in the country. Far from us to weigh in on this ongoing debate; much better, then, for you to join us in a year's time and make up your own minds about this fascinating place.

Gothenburg (Göteborg in Swedish) will be a wonderful location from which to make this kinds of assessments. Home to about a million people in its metropolitan region, it is located along the Southwestern coast of the country and is noted for its vibrant intellectual and cultural life – including fine architecture, museums, parks and gardens, seafood restaurants and urban canals. On a less "refined" or genteel note, or for those seeking to relive their misspent youths, the city is the home of the "melodic death metal" musical genre known as the "Gothenburg

sound". For more information about Gothenburg and the World Congress itself, we invite you to visit the latter's website:

<http://www.isa-sociology.org/congress2010>

As one of the largest sections in the International Sociological Association, RC16 has been able to propose a large and comprehensive program of sessions for the Congress. Thanks to our Board meeting at the Mid-Term Conference in Pusan last June, we have devised a program that strives to strike a balance between classical or longstanding themes in our collective dialogue, on the one hand, and new directions or emerging areas of theoretical interest and debate, on the other. All of this, of course, in the hope of capturing the incredible range and the lively spirit of contemporary sociological theory around the world, and perhaps even to contribute to shaping its agenda over the next few years.

In this edition of *Theory*, we present our call for papers for the World Congress, with the next few pages containing descriptions of all the sessions and contact details for their organizers. Please send an abstract of your paper to the organizer of the session of your choice by 31 October 2009. You may want to indicate to this organizer whether your paper fits with another session in our program, as the abstract can then be forwarded to such a session in the event that your first choice cannot be accommodated.

Finally, please note the call for nominations for RC16's Distinguished Contribution to Sociological Theory Award and its Best Student Paper in Sociological Theory Award. If you wish to put forward any names, please contact the relevant subcommittees administering these awards.

We look forward to seeing you in great numbers in Gothenburg.

*Philip Smith*  
*Fuyuki Kurasawa*  
RC16 Co-Chairs

### **Session 1: Power and Performance**

*Organizer: Jeffrey Alexander, Yale University (USA)* (E-mail: jeffrey.alexander@yale.edu)

The theme “performance and power” addresses two very different kinds of theoretical vulnerabilities, a double challenge that illuminates the potential for theoretical advance. Culture suggests voluntary compliance, even heartfelt commitment, and supra-individual, collective constraints of an invisible symbolic kind. Power seems to suggest the very opposite. It points to more coercive constraint, more material kinds of force, more instrumental and manipulative motivation. Theorists of culture and power have tried to escape these blinders, via such devices as interpellation (Althusser), power/knowledge (Foucault), hegemony (Gramsci), and legitimacy (Weber). The stimulation for this session is doubt that such efforts have been successful. If – as I would argue – such efforts have undermined the relative autonomy of culture, then the challenge of theorizing culture and power remains. Can the relative autonomy of power be recognized without neglecting its embeddedness in meaning structures? Recent theorizing about social performance offers one possible way. If all every action has a performative dimension, then so must the struggle for and the exercise of power. Purely coercive power, while historically and normatively significant, is nonetheless a limiting case, for it is extraordinarily inefficient and energy consuming. Most exercises of power, and also the struggles to possess, are performative: they aim to convince audiences that actors have the capacity to be powerful, the competence to use it effectively, and the authority to wield it in a morally virtuous way. Power is successful to the degree that audiences are convinced by its performance, and this means bringing the various and differentiated 'elements of performance' firmly into play. To create effective and fused performance, however, is a difficult task, and failed performances, or only partially effective ones, are much more likely. Performative failure does not mean that coercion is impossible, but it drastically reduces the possibility

for exercising power in a sustained and continuous way. This session welcomes both more theoretical and more empirical investigations of these dilemmas in political and cultural sociology.

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### **Session 2: Provincializing Social Theory**

*Organizer: Gianpaolo Baiocchi, Brown University (USA)* (E-mail: Giapaolo\_Baiocchi@brown.edu)

This panel is an invitation to reflect on the project of “provincializing” social theory, that is, calling into question its purported universalism (Chakrabarty 2000; Burawoy 2005). Scholars have in recent times extended the logic of criticism of universalizing projects like Liberalism to the social sciences themselves, a critical project that gained momentum with the *Open the Social Sciences* Report (Wallerstein 1996), but which has earlier roots in similar interrogations in the humanities (Mignolo 2003). In the *Open* Report, prominent sociologists charged that social sciences have hidden their Eurocentric origins “behind universalist claims”.

In this panel, we turn to social theory itself. It has long been argued that the “founding fathers” of social theory were steeped in Eurocentric assumptions about the supposed nature of non-Western societies (see, for example, the portion of Said’s *Orientalism* dedicated to Marx), but the insight has not often been extended to the project of social theory built on these texts. It is not the intent of the panel to evoke charges of “Eurocentrism” for its own sake, or to engage in the “reverse Orientalist” exercise that in the end, simply states that “things are different” in other places. Rather, we invite papers that widen the frame of reference of social theory to one that is more global in scope, as well as papers that analytically expose the colonial roots of social theory, or the “historical particularities that make up the putatively universal”. We also invite papers that critically consider the intellectual division of labor between the global North and the global South, one that currently juxtaposes

supposedly universal and parochial knowledges. Finally, “provincializing” social theory might also mean re-telling the history of social theory from particular locations, national traditions, or excluded voices. Together, it is hoped that these critical tasks might lead to theoretical stretching, interesting engagement with colleagues elsewhere, and perhaps even unexpected insights into cultural processes in the changing global North itself.

Burawoy, Michael. (2005), “Provincializing the Social Sciences”. In: George Steinmetz (ed.), *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences: Positivism and its Epistemological Others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 508-525.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. (2000), *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Mignolo, Walter. (2003), “Globalization and the Geopolitics of Knowledge: The Role of the Humanities in the Corporate University”. *Nepantla: Views from South*, vol. 4, n<sup>o</sup> 1, pp. 97-119.

Wallerstein, Immanuel (ed.). (1996), *Open the Social Sciences: Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

view of totalitarian regimes from Mussolini’s Italy to Stalin’s Russia – all of which aimed for a continually mobilized population.

In the post-war period, political parties took over political communication in European venues. In the United States, public relations as an adjunct of market society flowered. The study and process of political communication became professionalized as public opinion. Political science took over the study of political communication and the method of study was almost exclusively quantitative and based upon attitude studies and preference formation.

In the last fifteen years, there has been a general recognition that political communication is a broader phenomenon than the mere aggregation of attitudes. Jürgen Habermas’ *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) was a first step in this direction, particularly after it began to obtain wide scale translation into multiple languages (into English in 1989, for instance). The diffusion of Habermas’ conception of the public coincided with a growing interest in wedding political and cultural sociology. In addition, a methodological interest in history and ethnography fuelled a broader conception of what the political might be and how it might be studied.

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### Session 3: Political Communication

Organizer: Mabel Berezin, Cornell University (USA) (E-mail: mmb39@cornell.edu)

Political communication originated in antiquity, when Plato realized that artists were dangerous for the republic. Modern conceptions of political communication date to the period of World War I. In the United States, journalists and publicists such as Walter Lippmann and Edward Bernays developed a conception of public opinion and propaganda that was closely allied with American market society. Bernays, who worked for the government during World War I and II, was also a founding father of Madison Avenue advertising. In Europe during the post-World War I era, political communication was the pur-

This session aims to capture these trends. How do political entities from the state to parties, to media organizations communicate political knowledge? What is political knowledge? What is the public sphere? Does it vary across time periods and cultures? What are the media that disseminate political knowledge? Has political communication truly changed in the age of the internet and the rise of the blogosphere? This session seeks to include papers that address this subject from a range of perspectives, methodologies, and geographical areas. It incorporates a range of vehicles of political communication, from public political rituals to internet organizing, to websites and everything in between. It takes up the issue of propaganda versus ordinary knowledge,

the role of the public sphere, and the marketization of politics. It would also welcome papers on the development of political communication and public relations as a profession.

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#### **Session 4: Political Philosophy and Social Theory**

*Organizer: Craig Browne, University of Sydney (Australia)* (E-mail: craig.browne@arts.usyd.edu.au)

The discipline of sociology partly originated from a perception of the limitations of political philosophy. The transition to modernity demanded new ways of addressing the questions that political philosophy had typically posed, such as the nature of authority, the conditions of the good life, the definition of justice, the degrees of freedom, and the prerequisites of inclusion in a community. Classical sociological theory reflected the modern appreciation of the independence of the *social* relative to the *political* and the need to understand the internal dynamics of the social in their own terms. Sociological theory suggested that the political is shaped by the social, and this implication could be drawn from otherwise quite conflicting conceptions, like those of the material base and the political superstructure, the overarching social solidarity of the *conscience collective*, and the cultural background to variations in legitimate domination. This juxtaposition of sociological theory and political philosophy may not do justice to the complexities of conceptual adaptation, yet the balance did seem to tip towards sociological theory in modernity, with the transformation of political philosophies into political ideologies and the disciplinary specialisation of political science leading to a marginalizing of political theory.

This longstanding conception of the relationship between political philosophy and social theory has, however, been arguably overturned in recent times. Political philosophy has undergone a major renewal and it has become a point of reference for debates in

social theory. John Rawls's theory of justice and restatement of political liberalism is the most prominent representative of this revitalisation. It led to parallel developments and the communitarian critiques that are associated with important political philosophers like Charles Taylor, Martha Nussbaum, Michael Walzer, Chantal Mouffe, Alisdair MacIntyre, and Seyla Benhabib. Jürgen Habermas's shift, after *The Theory of Communicative Action*, to the more exclusively political theory of the discourse ethic of morality, democracy and law possibly exemplifies a reconfiguring of the relationship between sociological theory and political philosophy. Similarly, there has been a renewal of interests in theorists concerned with the institution of the political, like Hannah Arendt, Carl Schmitt and Claude Lefort.

This session seeks to reconsider social theory's relationship to political philosophy and it aims to address questions that emerge from these recent developments; for instance, does political philosophy's contemporary consolidation tell us anything about the state of sociological theory? What are the implications of the prominence of concepts associated with classical political philosophy, like civil society, cosmopolitanism and sovereignty, in contemporary social theory? How should the social theories of political philosophers, like Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser, be evaluated? Did the narrative of sociological theory's replacing political philosophy collapse with the calling into question of social science methodologies and techniques of governance? Has sociological theory's alleged interests in regularity and determination led to its being overshadowed by those political philosophies that accentuate creativity, diversity and indeterminacy? Papers that explore these questions and related issues are invited. Papers that pursue general comparisons or examine the interconnections between particular theories and specific conceptualisations are also welcome.

### **Session 5: Objects and Aesthetic Agency**

*Organizers: Eduardo de la Fuente, Monash University (Australia) and Ian Woodward, Griffith University (Australia) (E-mail: Eduardo.de la Fuente@arts.monash.edu.au and I. Woodward@griffith.edu.au)*

This session aims to bring together scholars interested in theoretical debates about the status of the “object” and its “agency” in social life. There is a discernible shift in fields as diverse as consumption studies and the sociology of art away from contextual factors and towards the “thing itself”. The move towards affinities with objects is clear in Becker *et alii*'s *Art from Start to Finish*, which suggests that the “artwork is one of the actors involved in the drama of its own making”; and in Harvey Molotch's *Where Stuff Comes From*, which explores ways that “the specific feeling an object gives off helps to constitute what indeed it is in social terms” through the design of consumer goods. However, unlike older forms of essentialism, the new sociology of objects tends to emphasize the constructed and relational character of objects. Objects move around, cause things to happen and form all kinds of alliances with persons and other objects. We also know that things possess their own “aura”, magic and enchantment. This session poses the question: to what extent is the social life of things governed by “aesthetics” in the broadest sense of the term? To what extent is the experience associated with different kinds of objects a question of aesthetic factors, such as “touch”, “look”, “feel” and the senses more generally (what the Greeks termed “aisthesis”)? And who are we to turn to theorize the complex factors at work in the aesthetic agency of objects: Simmel's aesthetic sociology of everyday things? Durkheim's reflections on “totems”? Freud or Winnicott on the psychology of objects? The anthropological writings of people like Mauss, Douglas or Miller? The sociology of the art-object of Gell or Becker *et al.*? The work of researchers into the significance of domestic things, such as Csikszentmihalyi and Halton or Halle? While submissions are welcome from

anybody working on the question of how to theorize the aesthetic agency associated with objects – both art and non-art – the organizers especially welcome papers from scholars sympathetic to the approach of a cultural sociology rather than a sociology of culture, as well as those familiar with discussions regarding the “iconic turn” in the social sciences.

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### **Session 6: Theorizing Global Media, and Other Global Cultural Flows**

*Organizer: Ronald N. Jacobs, State University of New York at Albany (USA) (E-mail: rjacobs@albany.edu)*

With debates continuing about globalization, transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and global civil society, there is a need to think about how these different types of supra-national processes of cultural exchange are organized in and through media. For a long time, the question of American television was examined primarily through the lens of cultural imperialism. Since the 1990s, scholars have come to recognize a number of serious weaknesses with the cultural imperialism thesis: (a) empirically overstating the extent of cultural imperialism, (b) conflating economic and cultural domination; (c) failing to connect an individual's media consumption to her larger cultural and civic practices; (d) assuming the centrality of national identity; and (e) conflating cultural imperialism and Americanization, imagining that American culture is the only large-scale culture that threatens smaller-scale cultural groups.

In the place of the cultural imperialism model, today's understandings of global media are more likely to emphasize the multi-directional nature of cultural exchange. Yet, important questions remain unanswered. How does the current organization of media systems constrain or enable the development of these global processes? What is the role of the nation and of national media within these supra-national spaces? With the decline of the public service broad-

casting model, and the continuing rise of multinational media conglomerates, how are we to understand the relationships between corporate and cosmopolitan interests? How are new and old media impacted by the increasingly transnational circulation of cultural formations? Are there multiple paths toward global/transnational media outside of the North Atlantic region (e.g., Asian media formations, South American media, etc.)? And how are we to understand the relationship between news and entertainment media, as each one comes increasingly to circulate in a post-national way?

The theoretical sources that inform these questions are many: Keane, Habermas, and Alexander on global civil society; Beck on cosmopolitanism and globalization; Appadurai on transnationalism and cultural flows; Eisenstadt and Taylor on multiple modernities; Lewis, Miller, and Bennett on critical cultural policy studies. And yet, while each of these theories can help us to understand global media and cultural exchange, it is not often that they are put into dialogue.

The hope of this session is that we can begin such a theoretical dialogue. We encourage papers that consider any aspect of the questions posed above, in addition to other questions that can help to illuminate the relationship between institutional media and global publics. Both conceptual and empirically concretized papers are welcome.

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### **Session 7: Urban Space and Global Cities**

*Organizer: Agnes Ku, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (Hong Kong) (E-mail: soagnes@ust.hk)*

In the new era of global capitalism, cities play an increasingly strategic role in urban entrepreneurialism. Starting in the UK and the US, the 1980s marked the beginning of intensified global restructuring worldwide, with the government embarking on a policy of urban entrepreneurialism and competitiveness in the post-industrial service economy. Increasingly, cultural activities have

become significant in the economic development strategies in many cities (Scott), with some scholars putting forward a new agenda of cultural globalization in light of the new developments.

Cities can be seen as nodes within a global economy (Sassen). The question of how the global and the local intersect in local economic development has received increasing attention in recent years from academics and policy thinkers alike. Where is the boundary between the “global” and the “local”? Globalization does not take place in an abstract space but is embedded in our social, economic and political relations at multiple levels, locally, nationally and transnationally. The global and the local, therefore, are not distinct entities in a dichotomy. Recent years have witnessed an expanding literature conceptualizing their interaction, with such popular ideas of the “global-local nexus” (Teo and Li), “glocalization” (Thorns), “grobalization” (Ritzer) and “indigenization” (Appadurai). Scholars begin to distinguish between globalization from above and globalization from below, recognizing in the former a process of cultural homogenization in specific local sites under the sway of global capital (for example, Disneyland) or state-led competition, and in the latter one, of harnessing local cultures to produce unique cultural capital for a heterogeneous global space.

The panel welcomes submissions that address issues related to changing urban forms in the context of globalization, including but not confined to the following:

- how the cities seek to position, project or refashion their cultures in the global space through a project of urban entrepreneurialism;
- how the socio-economic, political and cultural processes take place whereby the “global city” project is shaped and contested in particular local contexts;
- how civil society creates spaces for cultural participation from below in the process of

cultural globalization and urban development.

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**Session 8: Non-Western Challenges to Western Social Theory Today: Are More Cosmopolitan Dialogues Possible?**

*Organizer: Sang-Jin Han, Department of Sociology, Seoul National University (South Korea) (E-mail: hansjin@snu.ac.kr)*

In recent years, an interesting area of critical social theory has emerged. This is situated in the middle of several intersecting fields and amounts to a major challenge to conventional or “Western sociological theory”. Firstly, investigations of East Asian development have pointed to unique features of East Asian capitalism and modernity. The argument has been made, for example, that a Confucian tradition has played a major role here and that the focus on competitive individualism in authors such as Weber cannot be generalized. Another discourse investigates the viability of conventional concepts such as human rights and democracy, asking whether a universal definition is possible. Might these axioms not require some kind of local specificity or flexibility? Yet further normative critique is found in the field of civil society and intercultural dialogue. Do current “Western” templates and scholars dominate intellectual fields to the point where meaningful exchange and mutual recognition is impossible?

In response to these issues, a new kind of literature has emerged, one looking for a self-conscious and reflexive examination of the relationship between Western and non-Western experiences and cultures. This aims at constructing an alternative kind of social theory, one which confronts the limits of dominant Western social theories. It explores themes such as relativizing neo-liberal preoccupations; rethinking the balance between individual and community; understanding diverse participatory traditions and their importance for the quality of democracy; detecting non-Western traces and forms of civil society and the public sphere; challeng-

ing the Western world-view with its tendency towards binarism and looking instead towards themes such as dynamic balance and harmony.

Participants are invited to reflect upon these and other similar concerns. The impetus for much of this recent work has come from East Asian sociologists (China, South Korea, Japan), yet the session should also appeal to ISA members from other parts of the globe attentive to the need to de-center and relocate social theory. Over recent years, for example, similar arguments have been made for Latin American specificity; for the alternative rationality of Islam; or for the need for African and South Asian voices and experiences to be heard. The session is open to a dialogue between these various claims towards what is sometimes seen as a ‘non-Western’ social theory.

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**Session 9: Beyond Advocacy: Theorizing Sexuality as a Key Dimension of Social Life**

*Organizers: Martina Cvajner, University of Trento (Italy) and Giuseppe Sciortino, University of Trento (Italy) (E-mail: Giuseppe.Sciortino@unitn.it)*

Within all of the social sciences, sexuality is an increasingly central and visible topic. There is an expanding body of empirical research as well as a skyrocketing production of textbooks, handbooks and journals devoted to the analysis of the social dimension of sexuality. Since the early 1990s, a wave of large-scale social surveys has greatly increased our knowledge of sexual behavior in many countries. Social histories of sexuality have provided a more adequate understanding of historical changes and long-term trends. Ethnographies and qualitative researches have explored the social and cultural significance of sexual practices, discourses and systems of interaction in an extraordinary variety of settings. The sociology of sexuality is a quickly maturing field, often potentially producing strategic research

materials for a variety of classical sociological problems.

Theoretical developments, however, are lagging far behind. The debate between naturalist and constructivist approaches to human sexuality is currently a dialogue among the deaf, where each side fights against a self-made straw-man. The original promises of French theory, both in its psychoanalytic and foucaultian versions, have failed to deliver a vibrant theoretical debate, quickly being converted into an extreme form of obscuring jargon. Attempts to produce rational-choice accounts of sexual behavior have quickly run into difficulties. Moreover, a large part of current research in the sociology of sexuality is nearly always justified by political or ideological assumptions rather than arguments rooted in analytic problems. Most of the arguments are shaped by advocacy concerns for sexual minorities, rather than by attempts to understand in a more generalized way a key dimension of social life.

It is possible to develop a social theory of sexuality able to understand adequately sexual behaviors and sexual meanings? Although there are many promising developments – from the theory of sexual scripts to the analysis of sexual fields, from evolutionary to cultural approaches to sexuality – the lack of an adequate sustained theoretical debate is a main stumbling block for the development of the field.

The session will present papers willing to explore generalized arguments on human sexuality, through the original analysis of key authors, concepts, theoretical traditions or bodies of empirical evidence. Preference will be given to papers trying to locate the study of sexuality within a broader concern for traditional issues of social research, such as the structural features of modern and contemporary sexuality; comparative analysis of the cultural meaning of sexuality across cultures and traditions; the existence, dynamics and strains of a modern erotic sphere; sexual socialization; sexual stratification; processes of sexualization and de-

sexualization of the various dimensions of social life; variations in the cultural templates and scripts used to make sense of sexual experiences and tensions; sexuality and the cult of the individual; the interaction between conditional and normative dimensions of sexual action; or, the long term structural impact of the sexual revolution.

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### **Session 10: Sociological Theory and the Environment**

*Organizer: Philip Smith, Yale University (USA)*  
(E-mail: philip.smith@yale.edu)

At the time of the World Congress of Sociology in 1994, there was quite a stir about the sociology of the environment. Those of us who attended the gathering in Bielefeld, Germany remember the packed sessions on “reflexive modernization” hosted by Beck, Lash and Giddens. These came in the wake of Beck’s pioneering work on Risk Society. Whether loved or subject to critique, that book had set the agenda for a rethinking of the relationship of society to the natural world. Of course, prior effort had already put the relationship of society and nature on the theoretical map. One thinks of the writings of Durkheim and Mauss on Primitive Classification, of Lévi-Strauss on myth systems and totemism, and of Mary Douglas on risk. These worked with the now somewhat forgotten concept of “cosmology” in conceptualizing the tie.

In the period since the mid-1990s, a number of “real world” issues and processes have kept environmental sociology on the front burner. Environmental social movements have continued to have high visibility, in many cases as part of a more general anti-capitalism, anti-globalization coalition such as we see protesting whenever there is a G7 or G8 meeting. The once science fiction-like scenario of global warming has become generally accepted as a scientific fact. This has had profound implications for the emergence of global civic awareness. Environmentalism has also become completely mainstreamed, with every leading political

party or transnational corporation claiming to have green credentials. One thinks, for example, of the concept of “triple bottom line” accounting. In effect, environmental issues are inescapable.

Theoretically inspired sociological research has struggled to keep pace with such rapid changes, although Luhmann’s *Environmental Communication* stands out as a major effort at a systematic thinking-through of the issues. Still, we do have detailed ethnographies of environmental social movements, studies of popular understandings of environmental scientific issues and yet others on the discourses and images through which nature is imagined in the public sphere. These are all important middle range and empirically validated contributions. On the margins of the field, one can find parallel literatures that speak to the wider theme of the relationship between human society and nature, even if they don’t badge themselves as “environmental sociology”. The burgeoning and rather interesting literatures on animals, on adventure tourism and on food scares can all be thought of in this light.

The session calls for papers addressing such themes and issues. They might consider issues such as: How adequately have sociological theory and research come to terms with the astounding growth of environmentalism? To what extent – if at all – can the resources of classical sociological theory be of any use? What can empirical studies tell us about the validity of existing and widely endorsed theoretical perspectives? Has a perceived or real environmental crisis accelerated globalisation, and if so, in which ways? Put another way, please submit papers making use of the concepts of risk, nature, environmentalism, global warming, pollution, nature and culture in some combination.

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### **Session 11: Intersubjectivity and Trust**

*Organizer: Edmond Wright, Cambridge University (United Kingdom)* (E-mail: elw33@hermes.cam.ac.uk)

The problem hopefully to be addressed in this session arises out of the assumption on the part of both speaker and hearer in a communication that there is a common referent about which information is to pass from one to the other. Such an assumption obviously includes a measure of trust, not merely because there is always the possibility of being deceived, but because the partners in dialogue cannot be sure that their concepts of “the referent” match sufficiently to satisfy their individual expectations.

Of course, if one is a direct realist, one who believes in the furniture of the world being a given set of events, things and persons, then the theoretical problem of trust cannot arise: for truth will be a matter of correspondence of statements to that given set, resting on a concept of intersubjectivity that relies on a common countability of entities, and normativity in language will be reducible to the degree of sincerity in an utterance. There is, in fact, a popular notion in philosophy at the moment that appeal may be made to the “transparency” of entities, namely that, whatever the understanding of subjects may be, whatever object they perceive is nevertheless transparent-as-an-entity, in that a tree is still a tree no matter who may be looking at it – we look *straight through* to the entity itself; to argue otherwise, it is believed, throws objectivity away, opening the door to a relativism which would remove all hope of contact for knowledge with the real world. Our senses, it is maintained, must provide us with reliable information about the real; to deny that obvious proposition propels one into solipsism. Embracing this view allows one to see trust as testable against that truth, and invests language itself with a normative ground independent of individual speakers. Jürgen Habermas is one for whom language remains something by which normativity may be reckoned; his “ideal speech situation” contains the element which can act as a touchstone of the reliability of what is communicated.

It can be conceded that subjects have to behave *as if* there is an array of entities

identical for all observers, that is, as if there is an ideal speech situation; however, it is by no means a guarantee of objectivity, for what appears objective to one agent may not be for another at the same time as both being able to protest fairly that they are being “sincere”. If that is so, then the character of trust, indeed, of *faith* in the other becomes a critical feature of human communication, one that cannot be decided by a simple appeal to facts. The aim of the session, it is hoped, will be to explore the social implications of this dilemma, which is both practical and theoretical.

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### **Session 12: Cosmopolitanism and Recognition**

*Organizer: Gilles Verpraet, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (France) (E-mail: verp@ehess.fr)*

The purpose of the session is to examine contemporary theories of cosmopolitanism in their different dimensions (ethical, cultural, and political). Here can be considered the contributions of Stephen Toulmin, Axel Honneth, Ulrich Beck, Robert Fine, and so on. The session intends to question the social foundations of these theories, in order to specify their relations with the institutional matrix and to frame the interiorized kernel of cosmopolitan attitudes (Alexander, Descola). The enactment of critical cosmopolitanism is also a methodology to be developed.

The development of theories of cosmopolitanism has been linked with interpretations of globalization, such as new cultural worlds, an expansion of new cultural exchanges, and expectations for global justice. Beck's strategic interpretation, which focuses on post-national interdependence, is one way to consider the problem. We may also evaluate the consistency of solidarities sustained by a different cosmopolitanism (Kurasawa). What style of solidarity implies cosmopolitanism? Hospitality, the rights of others, the new relations between redistribution and recognition (Fraser), constitute different possibilities.

In this extensive framework can be specified the contributions of theories of recognition (Honneth) with cosmopolitan theories. For Honneth, the recognition process contributes to interpersonal socialization. The figure of recognition sustains an activation process which challenges the figure of reification. Intersubjectivity is developed inside the comprehension process and questions numerous sociological categories (Honneth).

This connection frames the question of cultural recognition as a support for cultural exchange, as an activation culture for cosmopolitanism. So different figures of recognition can be specified inside the globalization process (Benhabib). This analytical question displays the recognition of the “other” inside interpersonal relations, as sociability and reciprocal recognition (Honneth), through the urban interactions (Hannerz), by the recognition of a national culture (Calhoun), or under the hypothesis of a strategic culture between nations (Beck). Cosmopolitan recognition can be questioned, as it varies between “isomorphic” recognition, asymmetric recognition, and progressive recognition.

This contemporary development of multiple forms of cosmopolitanism combines increased cultural exchanges with the requirements of interiorization that sustain the learning processes. Here again the dialectic between misrepresentation and recognition takes place. The main purpose of the session is to clarify the contributions of theories of cosmopolitanism to social theories in their cultural dimensions, and so to specify their purposively hybrid combination with theories of recognition.

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### **Session 13: Mediating Public and Private**

*Organizer: Paul Jones, University of Sydney (Australia) (E-mail: p.jones@unsw.edu.au)*

This session concerns the increasing porosity of boundaries between intimacy, privacy and publicness, and could also include the role of mediation in this process.

In the Habermasian public sphere schema, 'publicly oriented privateness' was a key factor of cultural transition in the establishment of the bourgeois public sphere. Mediation and emergent cultural forms such as the novel played their part in the circulation of the new, bourgeois, form of subjectivity formed within a sphere of intimacy. Even for Habermas, then, his intimate/private/public schema had somewhat porous borders. Critics of the public sphere thesis, such as Alexander, have pointed to the resulting tendency to set aside these cultural dimensions and privilege rational discussion, especially normatively, over all else. Feminist critiques such as Fraser's prompted Habermas to acknowledge the constitutive role of gender inequity. However, his subsequent reworkings of the public sphere thesis have tended to recast the private/public dynamic in terms of social movement theory rather than the more nuanced literary public sphere model within the earlier work – in which there has been considerable feminist interest (Lara, Johnson).

Meanwhile it is commonly noted today that that emergent bourgeois private/public dynamic has been intensified in late modernity, if not reversed by a process of "intimization" of the public sphere (van Zoonen). Such concerns are often couched with examples of mediated facilitation of these tendencies – e.g., celebrity culture – which would appear for some to confirm Habermas's initial Adornian estimation of a public sphere colonized by the logic of the culture industries (or at least the subtler accounts of privatization in Williams and Bauman). From this perspective, the critical theoretical norm of the autonomous self remains a matter of central prominence.

Less pessimistic accounts continue to emerge from those bringing sociological theory to bear more directly on mediation (John Thompson, Calhoun) and the related set of questions grouped around cultural citizenship (Dahlgren, Corner, Stevenson). The strain of newer theoretically informed empirical work on political communication

and 'public connection' has moved in a similar direction (Livingstone, Couldry, Lewis). In such accounts, citizenship – and thus the conception of the private/public relation – is reconfigured, often as an addendum to Marshall's expansive reformulation. "Ordinariness", community, the aestheticization of politics and "privatized" mediated popular culture are regarded as potentially enabling features of everyday life that facilitate public connection, whereas formal political institutions have demonstrably failed to do so. To some extent, this tradition marks a break with models of hegemony and thus leaves unclear the relation between such developments and the resurgence of the phenomenon of populism. Indeed, intellectual blindness to this issue has previously been labelled "cultural populism" (McGuigan). Social theoretically informed papers are welcomed on any of the themes raised above, or on cognate themes.

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#### **Session 14: Business Meeting**

This session is the Research Committee on Sociological Theory's administrative meeting at the World Congress of Sociology. As such, no papers are presented.

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#### **Session 15: Inequality and Difference**

*Organizer: Elisa P. Reis, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)* (E-mail: epreis@alternex.com.br)

Reassessing classical theory, evaluating recent contributions, proposing new ways to deal with equality and difference remain paramount to the agenda of sociology. While such issues have always been central to sociological analysis, in recent decades new forms of inequality and new claims for the right to difference have posed novel challenges to sociologists. Can existing theories account properly for inequality? Can theories of redistribution tackle the question of recognition? Can theories of recognition be integrated into a theory of stratification? How do gender, race, ethnicity and cultural

differences intersect with class? How to reconcile equality ideals and claims for collective rights based upon difference? These are examples of questions to be faced from a theoretical perspective.

It is trivial to recall that inequality and difference are perennial sociological subjects. Class, socio-economic status, patterns of stratification, social mobility, and related issues, were central to classical sociologists. It is not only that such topics are distinguished ones in the history of sociology. Revisiting the work that our classics did on such topics constitutes a timely challenge to be confronted by theorists. Going back to our pioneers, we have the opportunity not only to historicize them, but also to compare how society then and now conceives of ranking and its multiple implications for social life.

From status to contract (Maistre), from serfdom to commodity labor (Marx), from status groups to individuals (Tocqueville), from patrimonial to rational-legal bureaucracy (Weber), the idea that there was a before and an after way of ranking individuals permeated alternative theoretical conceptions about societal ordering. Now that sociology is entering its third century and that the question of differences of all sorts have been forced upon the agenda by social movements and social theorists, the time has come to rethink the question of stratification and ranking from a variety of perspectives. How do post-structuralism, post-modernism, cultural studies, post-colonial studies, women's studies, pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, rational choice, and so on, deal with equality and difference? Can we analyze cultural differences from a structural perspective? How do class, status and caste intersect with gender, race and ethnicity? Can one reconcile redistribution and recognition into a single framework, as Honneth claims, or does one rather have to conceive of recognition within a theory of justice, as Fraser claims? Or is it perhaps a misunderstanding in the first place to think that Honneth's theory of recognition

has anything to say about cultural and ethnic differences? And in any case, what happens to questions of recognition and redistribution when one takes the world system as the unit of analysis?

While equality remains a cherished ideal in today's world, we can no longer ignore the renewed importance of social differences in societal processes. Both the positive and negative implications of the various forms of difference salient in a context are as relevant to sociological theory as are the multiple dimensions of inequality that remain such a big challenge to the sociological imagination.

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### **Session 16: Conceptualizing the Future in Social Theory**

Joint Session of the Research Committee on Futures Research (RC07, host committee) and the Research Committee on Sociological Theory (RC16)

*Organizers: Elisa P. Reis, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and Markus S. Schulz, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (USA)*  
(E-mail: epreis@alternex.com.br and isarc07@gmail.com)

Paper proposals are invited for a session on "Conceptualizing Future in Social Theory", which is hosted by the Research Committee on Futures Research (RC07) with the participation of RC16. This session takes up the Gothenburg World Congress's motto, "Sociology on the Move", and its concern for social change. In line with the organizers' call for rethinking sociology, the session aims to provide a space for discussing how to orient sociology towards the future and how to conceptualize open futures. To make sociology more relevant, more direct engagement with the future is needed.

In many of today's national sociologies, the future appears spectacularly neglected. Why is that so? Among the complex and locally varying reasons, one view seems to be particularly widespread. It holds against

dealing with the future the fact that we cannot know anything about it. And since we ought not talk about what we cannot know, we should hence better be quiet about it.

This position runs counter to the fact that we all lead our daily lives based on innumerable assumptions about the future, short-term and long-term, small and large. Whether we deem something to be possible or impossible, likely or unlikely, desirable or undesirable has consequences. Anticipation, aspiration, expectation, hope, imagination, planning, projection, and vision are inherent aspects of future-oriented human action.

Once we accept the need for sociology to become more forward-looking, the tricky questions begin about how to do it. How can we conceptualize the future? What are the most fruitful ways, and how do we assess competing modes of engagement? Finding answers to these questions is a task to which a range of theoretical approaches can contribute.

In the past, the future was often assumed to be predestined, predetermined, or at least progressing in a certain direction and thus, with the proper approach, predictable. Religious beliefs in some future *telos* gave way to the positivist search for social laws, the knowledge of which sociologists in traditions from Comte to Durkheim thought to be useful for managing or administrating society. Marx shared similar assumptions when he pronounced the laws of history would be pointing to a necessary triumph of the oppressed proletariat over the bourgeoisie, though he did recognize in his more empirical-historical writings that there were no historical automatisms but plenty of manoeuvring room for contingent action.

The belief in an open future is the hallmark of the modern consciousness of time. As Koselleck noted, in modernity the “space of experience” and the “horizon of expectation” are increasingly disassociated. This fundamental contingency opens the horizon of the possible for social and political creation. What is could have been different. The

existing reality could have been differently shaped through non-determined human action, in more or less reflexive as well as in more or less conflictive or cooperative ways.

This consciousness of the agency of the present is increasingly thematized in contemporary social theory through the inclusion of agentic social factors and multiple historical trajectories. The new consciousness found its expression in the emphasis on “imagination” (Boulding and Boulding), the “social imaginary” (Castoriadis), “expectation, choice, and decision” (Bell), “the creativity of action” (Joas) as well as in an explicit integration of the factor “human agency” (Emirbayer and Mische; Sztompka), and in the conceptualizations of a “reflexive modernization” (Beck, Giddens, and Lash) or “multiple modernities” (Eisenstadt). The increasing insight into the contingency of social shaping has spread across the borders of most diverse types of theory. Even systems theory recognized the need to equip its “systems” with “dynamics” and an “autopoietic” capability that can autonomously conceive their respective futures (Luhmann; Müller and Schmid; Münch).

Sociology’s re-orientation toward the future can benefit from a whole range of theoretical approaches, analytical and normative (Bell 2003; Boulding and Boulding 1995; Herzog, Hoffmann, and Schulz 2003; Masini 1983; Nederveen Pieterse 2000). Recent advances in action theories can help us to overcome the positivistic restrictions and narrow instrumentalist rational choice models that seeped into futures research when its methodological toolbox was rebuilt in an attempt to increase its scientific respectability. Theories of collective action and social movements can help us to recognize alternative visions formulated from the grassroots and to gain a better understanding of political contestation. Time-diagnostic approaches can help us to discern pertinent trends of our time. Critical theories can help us to pinpoint the value decisions at stake, unmask the working of vested interests, and identify

differential consequences for different sectors of society.

Pressing problems of increasing social inequality, setbacks in human rights discourse, profound climate change and environmental degradation demand broader and more forward-looking scholarship. The current economic crisis seems to have discredited narrow economic approaches that were dominant since the 1980s. However, a broader social-science perspective does not seem to be filling the void yet. If sociology is to become more relevant, it needs to embrace a more forward-looking orientation and engage with the critical issues of our time.

Bell, Wendell. (2003), *Foundations of Future Studies: Human Science for a New Era* (2 vols.). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Boulding, Elise and Kenneth, E. Boulding. (1995), *The Future: Images and Processes*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Herzog, Roman, Hoffman, Bert and Schulz, Markus S. (2003), *Internet und Politik in Lateinamerika: Regulierung und Nutzung der neuen Informations- und Kommunikations Technologien im Kontext der politischen und wirtschaftlichen Transformationen*. Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert, vols. 1-6.

Masini, Eleonora (ed.). (1983), *Visions of Desirable Societies*. Oxford: Pergamon.

Nederveen Pieterse, Jan. (2000), *Global Futures: Shaping Globalization*. London: Zed.

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### Session 17: The Visual Turn in Sociological Theory

Organizer: Fuyuki Kurasawa, York University (Canada) (E-mail: kurasawa@yorku.ca)

In recent years, the intersection of visibility and the social has supplied one of the most fruitful areas of theorizing in the human sciences. Rather than treating images as derivative of or causally dependent on texts, or yet again analytically reducing the former to the latter, the visual turn has foregrounded the role of images in social and political life. Visual sociology adopts two principal routes to establish this point. In its more ethno-

graphic mode, it employs visual material to record, describe or illustrate a particular phenomenon or event. In its social constructivist mode, it demonstrates how images are embedded in socio-cultural settings that both produce and give them meaning.

While both of these approaches are fruitful, this session aims to push the visual turn further by inviting papers that incorporate one or more of the three following dimensions of critical socio-visual analysis. The first of these is the iconographic aspect, whereby the focus is placed on the interpretation of the symbolic organizations of images in order to make sense of the meanings that they convey – instead of reducing them to effects of structural forces. The second dimension is performative, in that it studies how images perform certain social functions (and have certain socio-political effects on audiences), generate certain meanings for audiences, and even partly constitute such audiences (e.g., their visual “agency”). Thirdly, institutional facet of visibility is crucial, since we need to research the socio-economic and political networks and institutions through which images are created and circulate in public spaces, as well as the historically and culturally specific contexts within which citizens view and debate them. In other words, the session is asking: what are the implications of taking visibility seriously for classical and contemporary sociological theory?

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### Session 18: Theorizing Internal Conversations

Organizers: Margaret Archer, University of Warwick (United Kingdom) and Frédéric Vandenberghe, IUPERJ, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) (E-mail: m.s.archer@warwick.ac.uk and frederic@iuperj.br)

While philosophers are trying to reduce the mind to a neuronal circuit, prominent social theorists (Norbert Wiley, Randall Collins, Margaret Archer) have started to theorize and to empirically analyze the internal conversations people have with themselves. In

this session, we want to bring the fascinating theme of internal speech to the attention of sociologists and stimulate theoretical reflection on the essence, the forms and the functions of internal conversations in social life. As organizers of this session, we are convinced that the theme of internal conversation has an important role to play in social theory and that it can open up whole new vistas for thinking through some of the central questions of our discipline, such as how to reconnect the theory of action to values, beliefs and emotions; how to link agency and structure through reflexivity; or how to integrate personal and social change.

In the same way as the theme of recognition (*Anerkennung*) has succeeded in capturing a whole range of issues that are related to the sentiments of humiliation and injustice that cry for redress, we think that the theme of internal conversations has the potential not only to catalyze, but also to aggregate a series of existential concerns that are related to the inner aspirations (hope) and frustrations (despair) of subjects who reflect on what they want to do not just in but *with* their life. Like the theme of recognition, the theme of internal conversations is at the intersection of sociology, social psychology, and moral and political philosophy, but whereas the theory of recognition suggests that one has to change the world to alleviate suffering, the theory of internal conversation connects more directly social change to personal change and points in the direction of a transformative hermeneutics of the self.

With its focus on reflection and meditation, the theory of internal conversations opens up the perspective of a sociology of thinking, feeling and dreaming not just at the individual, but also at the collective level. By making consciousness conscious, as it were, it introduces the transformative power of reflection with force into theory, allowing thereby for a finer analysis of the process of mediation between agency and structure (Giddens), habitus and field (Bourdieu), or lifeworld and system (Habermas).

The theory of internal conversation not only allows for potential advances within current social theory. At the intersection of pragmatism, critical realism and critical theory, hermeneutics, semiotics and phenomenology, it offers a platform for engagement and dialogue with the most important and most promising trends within social theory, such as Boltanski's sociology of critique, Lahire's sociology of plural dispositions, Beck's theory of reflexive modernization or Honneth's theory of recognition, to name but a few.

Internal conversations also have a history that is interrelated with the type of social context in which they are conducted. In 1934, Vygotsky made a plea for the development of a history of inner speech. So far, this has gone unanswered, but papers taking up this challenge would be welcome. It follows that internal conversation and the reflexive processes that it enables also have a future. Given the radical social transformations that are already beginning to emerge in this new millennium, consideration also needs to be given to the shifting modes of reflexivity now practiced. One implication is that the relevance of certain theories, ones appropriate for the twentieth century, begins to peter out towards its end (for example, those stressing routine action, socialized dispositions and "habitus" in general). Some are concerned to revitalize such theorizing by syncretic modifications, such as the notion of a "reflexive habitus". Others are more concerned to explore new modalities of inner conversation that are promoted by the shifting range of global opportunities. Papers exploring any of these themes would be appropriate.

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**Call for Nominations: Best Student Paper in Sociological Theory Award of RC16 of the ISA**

RC16 invites nominations for the Best Student Paper in Sociological Theory Award, which will be awarded at the 2010 World Congress of Sociology. The award is

granted to the best paper in sociological theory authored by one or more graduate student(s) and submitted to the competition. It is intended to provide motivation and recognition to a promising young scholar in the field of sociological theory, as well as to encourage growing graduate student interest and participation in the ISA and RC16.

The award consists of a certificate with a citation and the travel costs of the winner(s) to attend the World Congress of Sociology, up to a maximum of \$750. The winner(s) will be allowed to present his/her (or their) joint work during one of the scheduled RC16 sessions at the World Congress of Sociology.

In order to be eligible for the award, the candidate(s) must be registered for a graduate degree at a degree granting institution at the time of submission of the paper. He/she (or they) must hold an undergraduate degree (or equivalent), but cannot hold a Ph.D. at the time of submission of the paper. Papers can only be authored by one or more graduate students; those co-authored with faculty members at a degree granting institution are not eligible. In addition, the paper must have been published or accepted for publication no more than three years prior to its nomination or submission.

The paper can be in any of the three official languages of the ISA (English, French, and Spanish), to a maximum length of 10,000 words. The winner(s) must be a member (or members) of both the ISA and RC16 at the time of receiving the award, and attend the World Congress of Sociology to accept the award.

Nominations and self-nominations are both encouraged. Please send (or have arranged to be sent) a copy of the paper, in hard copy or electronically, to each of the following members of the Award Subcommittee:

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**Call for Nominations: Distinguished Contribution to Sociological Theory Award of RC 16 of the ISA**

We call for nominations for the RC16 Distinguished Contribution to Sociological Theory Award. This award is granted to a living thinker who has made a significant contribution to sociological theory over the last two decades at least. It is intended to recognize long-term achievement rather than the excellence of an individual book or single idea. The winner of this prize will be a thinker held in high standing by sociological theorists throughout the world.

Nominations are invited for any living sociologist or social scientist, whether or not he or she is a member of RC16 and/or of the ISA. Award Subcommittee members and serving RC16 board members are not eligible to receive the award. A condition of acceptance of the award is that the winner attend the World Congress of Sociology in Gothenburg, Sweden and deliver a presentation. The award does not confer any financial benefits, but if the awardee is selected from ISA countries in Groups B and C, RC16 will subsidize her or his travel to the World Congress as required.

Please send your nominations and a brief paragraph of justification, in hard copy or electronically, to the following members of the Award Subcommittee:

**Jeffrey Alexander**

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**Important Announcement**

Jeffrey C. Alexander has been awarded The Foundation Mattei Dogan Prize in Sociology by the International Sociological Association. The prize is awarded every four years in recognition of lifetime accomplishments to a scholar of very high standing in the profession and of outstanding international reputation. Previous recipients of the award were Neil Smelser (2002) and Alain Touraine (2006). The \$5000 prize will be presented at the World Congress of Sociology in Gothenberg, Sweden, in July 2010, where the laureate will present a prize lecture at the special presidential prize-giving session. Alexander is the Lillian Chavenson Saden Professor of Sociology at Yale University.