



**Sociological
Theory**

Winter 2017 Co·chairs

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We are very pleased to offer you theoretical winter holiday reading for your enjoyment. Many of you are just about to take your end-of-semester breaks. What better than to have our theory newsletter at hand while you relax? We have several interesting and stimulating submissions in this issue: First, Fabio Rojas of Indiana University talks about how he radically changed the way he teaches theory; Second, Terry Leahy of the University of Newcastle engages with mind/body dualism and the New Materialism; Third, Brad West of the University of South Australia and Steve Matthewman of the University of Auckland respond to a recent critique (in a past issue of *Theory*) by Michael and Angeline Kearns Blain. Our last substantive piece by François Dépelteau of Laurentian University, talks about relational sociology and a new book series that offers opportunities for publication. As always, we conclude with announcements by our members. This is our penultimate newsletter as editors. We look forward to a full and exciting final issue, with an abundance of information on the Toronto RC-16 program. We also are excited to host you all during your time in Toronto! It promises to be a great event.

Erik Schneiderhan and Daniel Silver

Why I Gave Up Teaching “Great Man” Sociology and Now Teaching Social Theory as If It Mattered to Human Beings

Fabio Rojas, Indiana University, Bloomington

Since 2005, I have been the primary undergraduate social theory instructor at Indiana University. For a decade, I taught an ineffective style of social theory based on reading old, classic texts. This way of teaching theory is modelled on Parsons’ approach to social theory. In his view, the classical social theorists presented key insights of sociology and modern sociologists were supposed to immerse themselves in classic texts. There are few followers of Parsons in contemporary sociology, but his approach to sociology persists. Every year, thousands of sociology majors are forced to read wordy, old texts in attempt to show them the core insights of sociology. “Species being.” “Anomie.” “Organic solidarity.” These cryptic terms, forged over a hundred years ago, haunt the world’s social theory classrooms.

Around 2007, I realized that this was a really, really, really, ridiculously bad way to teach social theory. Here are my criticisms. First, historical and “great man” approaches conflate the history of sociology with the theory of sociology. History of sociology is the subfield dedicated to understanding how the field’s ideas and institutions evolved over time. In contrast, social theory is the body of concepts that people now use to construct descriptions and explanations of the social world. Are history and theory related? Sure, but the average student who majors in sociology needs to learn theory first and intellectual history second.

Second, historical and great man approaches to theory teach the wrong lessons. Instead of helping students understand sociology’s core ideas, the theory class turns into a sort of mindless grocery list of ideas. Name Durkheim’s four categories of suicide or Merton’s five types of social conformity. By teaching “what theorist X said,” social theory instructors do not convey the most important idea about sociology - that the field is about theories of behavior that can be tested with empirical research. The social theory class, then, addresses the first issue - the creation of hypotheses or descriptions. Other courses would address data and inference. The focus on history and original texts disconnects social theory from its core function in the curriculum, teaching people how sociologists generate social explanations.

Third, there is something very anti-democratic in the way that theory is often taught. Many readers might think I am referring to a lack of diversity in most social theory classes. That is a correct observation. Most social theory classes still revolve around the tradition “dead White, male” canon. But that is not what I had in mind. Rather, the historical and great man approaches to theory turn theory into the purview of a relatively specific subdiscipline of sociologists. Instead of teaching the lesson that theory is relevant to all sociologists, the typical social theory course sends a very different message. “You can only understand this if you read one thousand pages of *Economy and Society*.”



You can only understand this if you spend years pondering the importance of the 'self-structuring structure.' The student hears: theory is a very special thing that you don't have to worry about. My view is that every single student in a social theory course should come out with a basic understanding of the explanatory "recipe book" of sociology. Not just cultural sociologists, or historical sociologists, for whom the classics continue to have a draw, but also the demographers, the status attainment scholars, and the social psychologists. They can all benefit from a course that extracts the main theoretical ideas of sociology and presents them in a clear framework.

I learned these hard lessons when I realized that most of my students were frustrated with the theory course, even the good students. My pupils seemed to have a fairly benign view of me as an instructor but they usually confessed that after cramming their minds with endless vocabulary they still didn't know how it all fit together. So, what did I do? I rewrote my theory course from scratch and a book to go along with it.

The first step was challenging. What were the basic theoretical ideas of sociology? I don't mean topics like culture or population. Rather, what were the recurrent theories that sociologists relied upon to explain things like culture or population? Sociologists have a knee jerk response to this issue. They like to say, "sociology has no core! We can't agree on anything!" This is wrong. What one learns from two decades of work in sociology is that certain ideas pop up over and over again. These ideas are fairly simply to state as well: people use their resources to seek and maintain individual or group status ("inequality and power theory"); people judge things in terms of costs and benefits and they often use their social environment in an instrumental fashion ("decision and resource theory"); people use culture and shared values to create and inhabit social structures ("values and structures theory"); and people come together to create shared knowledge and beliefs ("social construction theory"). There is more to sociology, of course, but knowledge of these four theoretical approaches would allow most students to understand a very wide range of sociology.

Second, I had to figure out a way to communicate how these broad ideas are relevant to sociology in general, not just other theory. It turns out that this was the relatively easy. I simply would read in a range of empirical areas and pick well known - and some lesser known - examples of research that illustrated these ideas. For example, to explain Bourdieu's theory of habitus, which students find challenging, all I needed to do was summarize Annette Lareau's research on how middle class and working-class parents and children interacted with schools. *Unequal Childhoods* is a great way for student to immediately grasp the idea. Another example: to explain how some rational choice theory considered how actors exploit social resources, I talked about Ron Burt's theory that people who can bridge separate social groups may have an economic advantage.

All of this work resulted in a book called, *Theory for the Working Sociologist* (2017, Columbia University Press). In simple and direct language, I guide students through these four theoretical approaches and illustrate them with many, many examples. My course improved dramatically. At first, students find it hard to think about theory and explanation, but over the course of the semester, they start to actually use the theories to generate different explanations of various behaviors, like choosing a college or asking someone to marry them.

Perhaps the most interesting change was in how I felt about the course. When I taught the great man approach, I always felt that the course was confusing. A single theorist (e.g., Simmel or Weber) would discuss multiple topics and I had to pretend they all hung together in a coherent framework. I also felt that I was teaching theory that was disconnected from my own work, and that felt hollow. By focusing on major theoretical frameworks, it was easy to pick classic texts that illustrated a major theoretical approach and I could honestly say how the old canon connects to current work, including my own.

My approach to theory teaching may strike readers as odd, or even heretical. You may have gone to a graduate program, as I did, that focused heavily on the historical approach to theory. But this is a weight that we hang on our own necks and there is nothing to prevent you from teaching theory in new ways. In fact, I urge you to discard this old way of teaching theory and embrace modern sociology in all its splendor. Think of sociology as an ocean with deep currents within it and you are the captain guiding the sailors in your class through these waters. Give them the map that will help them set their own path. And of course, I encourage you to assign my book as that map!



Mind/Body Dualism and the New Materialism

Terry Leahy, University of Newcastle



Often radical sociologists refer to the mind/body split or mind/body dualism as a problem of Western culture or patriarchy – as though we all know what the phrase means and why mind/body dualism is a mistake. In fact, there are a number of ways of looking at what this phrase might mean – not all that closely related. I will try to tease these out before getting into some of the particular issues which come up with the New Materialist use of this phrase.

'Mental' and 'biological' as frameworks of understanding

For me, if I want to think about the split between the mind and the body, I tend to look at it in terms of the following general understanding. Materialist or biological accounts of people are one kind of *framework* for understanding what is going on, using concepts like DNA, blood cells, livers, neural pathways and so on. By contrast a 'mentalist' framework talks about objects that do not figure in the materialist conceptual map – like feelings, desires, thoughts and beliefs.

In a mentalist understanding of things, our mind *includes* experiences of our body. So, it makes no sense to talk about the mind as split from the body. Instead, in a great variety of situations our mind is 'in the body'. For example, we experience pain in *our thumb*.

Some of these bodily experiences are conscious but we must also be aware that our bodily experiences are often unconscious. As in: I did not realize I was so tired. Maybe I was just hungry. It seems highly possible that Western culture has worked to 'repress' certain bodily experiences so that they are rarely entertained in consciousness. For example, as I am learning to sing I am becoming aware of how my breath, chest and tummy are producing the sound and 'paying attention' to that. I am aware that I have never really brought all this to consciousness before, even though these feelings have always been there. 'Mindfulness' is premised on the attempt to break these patterns and attend to the feelings and thoughts that are normally ignored. In that sense, ending the mind body split is about trying to undo conditioning which has prevented us paying attention to certain experiences of our bodies.

When New Agers talk about turning off the voice of rationality, the mind, the ego and so on, one of the things they mean is to pay attention to bodily feelings and bring them to consciousness.



There is a paradox of this mentalist framework. We experience – as though in our own body – things which we know are outside it. For example, with a cane walking along a road, we experience the bump of the stick on the pavement as happening *on the pavement*, not as happening in *our body* or at *our fingertips*. Our mind experiences sensations as ‘in our mind’ and *also outside* our-self as though they were experiences of our own body. So, there is a radical incompatibility between the mentalist framework of our understanding and a materialist framework, which can be revealed by asking the question – *where* does this sensation take place? In a materialist framework, the experience takes place somewhere in the body, or at a number of places in the body at once. In a mentalist framework, we experience the sensation as taking place outside the physical limits of our own material body.

In this account of the meaning of the ‘mental’ and the ‘biological’, there is a limit to how far we would want to go in breaking down mind/body dualism. The mentalist and materialist framings of human behavior are both necessary and they cannot readily be mapped onto each other, they remain *different*. On the other hand, seeing the ‘mental’ as a realm that is never *embodied* is to misunderstand the mentalist framework as we actually use it. Some things that are biological in one framing become mental in the other framing (for example our thumb becomes something that we experience directly). Likewise, things that are mental in one framing become biological in the other (our decision to have spaghetti on Tuesday becomes a set of cellular episodes).

Cartesian dualism

The French philosopher Descartes (from the seventeenth century) is famous for the idea that the mind is some kind of spiritual entity and that human bodies (and the whole persona) of animals are merely machines. This is usually called Cartesian mind/body dualism. This runs into a number of problems. One is that the mind (as noted above) is ‘in the body’ – our mental experience includes experiences of our body. The parts of the body that Descartes supposes to be purely mechanical are also mental. Treating most of the body as a mere machine, the hidden implication of Cartesian dualism is that the mind (as a spiritual object) is only *located in the brain*. This is problematic if we stick with the implications of ‘mentalist’ theory as we use it every day. It does not correspond at all to the way we experience and think about our bodies. Another problem is that it is radically implausible to think that animals do not experience mental events. Then there is the whole problem of how such a mental (spiritual) entity could possibly make contact with the physical world.

However, one of the reasons why I am uneasy with the assertion that Cartesian dualism is simply wrong is as follows. Alongside our mentalist understandings of human action (which we have had from day one of human history) is a current physicalist biological description and explanation of our behavior that has gone ahead in leaps and bounds in the last few centuries. Basically, the only thing that makes sense now, and what we all really believe, is that there is an identity or equivalence between our thoughts and feelings and the physical events taking place in our bodies. Though the brain is part of the locus of these events, they also take place all over our bodies and these parts communicate in various ways. It makes sense to conceive the mentalist and biological frameworks as different ways of understanding what is going on. Theoretically they could be reducible. This would not be

the end of the world as some seem to think. However, from a practical point of view we will always access reality through these two frameworks with points of crossover and clear identity being rare and difficult to establish with much certainty. Given this kind of reflection, we may end up thinking Descartes does not go far enough. In *one* framework for understanding, human beings are not different to the animals he talks about – we are all biological machines.

Mental and bodily desires

The idea of mind/body dualism also has another referent and this version goes back to the Ancient Greeks and Christian theologians. It is the fact that basic human drives come in two types. Some are identifiable in relation to goals that can be named by referring to observable types of physical bodily manifestations – gestation and birth/ eating/ having sex/ being in good health/ physical comfort. The rest have a wide range of possible physical effects and their targets cannot be named in relation to any particular kind of action or bodily manifestation. For example, autonomy/ social pleasure/ creativity. It has been common since Plato and the Christians to elevate the latter and denigrate the former; using this distinction to explain and justify class and gender distinctions. This conservative mindset has tended to identify the second set of drives with 'the mind' (often referred to as 'reason') and the first set with 'the body'.

The project of 'bringing back the body' in sociology is usually assumed to mean recognizing the relevance of these bodily desires and activities to social life and also acknowledging that, at least to a certain extent, they have a biological foundation. Yet in fact *all* the drives of human nature have a biological foundation – including our desires for autonomy, creativity and social pleasures. While instances of all basic desires may be socially constructed and personal in their detail, as 'drives' they are innate to the human species. They can be viewed in the mentalist framework – as uber desires of humans in general – or in a biological framework – as 'drives'. The mistake is not that sociologists are now recognizing 'bodily' drives as innate but that they are restricting this recognition to this set of desires. This is very arbitrary really and turns on the way these drives are *named* in terms of identifiable bodily targets.

Following on from this split between bodily desires and mental desires is the idea that reason should take pre-eminence over the body. This is another mistake associated with the Platonic and Christian traditions. My view is that reasoning is always processing information with a view to action. It takes place in reference to any kind of desire whatsoever and is not absent in actions taken to pursue bodily desires. There is no 'desire for reason' as such. Reason is a method, not a desire. The idea that reason should take pre-eminence over the body is often taken to mean a particular kind of reasoning. It is when the subject looks at a proposed action in terms of a variety of desires they have and realizes that the (bodily) desire cannot be pursued without sacrificing some other desire – for example for a peaceful life, for wealth, for good company and esteem – and decides to abjure the pursuit of the bodily desire. Such decisions are no different in their form to any kind of thinking about what to do in relation to a range of competing desires – have breakfast now and a bath later or have a bath now and breakfast later! There is no general rule of ethical conduct or of the good life that says it is always better to abjure the bodily desire. Such questions must be

considered case by case. This prejudice against bodily desire is one of the mistakes of the Platonic dualism discussed above – the elevation of non-bodily desires and the repression of bodily desires. This kind of ideology has never done anything good where human happiness is concerned. Nevertheless, in particular cases this kind of reasoning makes perfectly good sense and is unavoidable.

New Materialists transcend the mind/body split?

New Materialism rejects the mind body split in terms of all these problems with different versions that I have discussed above. Nevertheless, New Materialism rarely explains clearly why the mind/body split is a problem. The issues mentioned above get jumbled into a big bag along with a final interpretation of the mind/body split that is newly introduced by New Materialism and ANT. New Materialism argues that the mind, like the body and other material objects, is 'material'. This insight is the basis of the name 'New Materialism'. The argument of New Materialists begins from the observation that the mind has material effects on material bodies and is itself affected by material bodies. Consequently, the mind itself must be a material body. For example, eight days of rain and grey skies dampens people's mood. I decided to catch the train so I went and bought a ticket. To embrace this philosophy is to end the mind/body split by treating both as aspects of 'the material' world.

In my view, treating the mind as a material thing in such cases is accurate as causal analysis but confusing in seeming to eliminate the separate validity of materialist accounts and mentalist accounts. I see these materialist and mentalist accounts as different ways of talking about *the same* objects and events. Consequently, we should not be surprised that our thoughts, which *are also* cellular events in the brain, are affected by events which we find easier to frame in a materialist way (five days of rain) and vice versa. I find the elimination of the independent logic of these differing frameworks as untenable in everyday description. In practice, we will continue to use materialist and mentalist frameworks with their different logics, alternating between these accounts.

New Materialist relativism

While this conflation of the mental and material in New Materialism may be a bit confusing it is not a huge problem. Accounts of social events will actually go on as before, packaged up in jargon with translations for the reader who wonders what they are all talking about. What is more worrying is that this version of New Materialism (and of ANT) is often used to replicate the worst errors of poststructuralist relativism – which it claims of course to have 'transcended'.

The following argument is hard to understand without understanding the New Materialist attack on the concept of 'object'. For New Materialists, objects are not things in the world, which have causal properties, and which last for at least a while. For them, this normal understanding of objects is a kind of essentialism. We are treating these causal properties and the associated continuity as *essential* properties of the things we are nominating as objects. Instead, what we have called an 'object' is in fact an 'assemblage' of relationships. It cannot be understood independently of the relationships with which it is involved at any particular moment.

This is a difficult claim to assess. On the one hand, it is certainly true that objects cannot exist independently of their various relationships, they are always formed by relationships with other objects at some time in the past. They are always causally linked to other objects and these linkages explain their current state. So, on this reading of the New Materialist view, an assemblage is just an object that *we are not to forget* has relationships. But this does not make it any less of an object really. It is still causally independent of some other objects, contingently related to other objects and with various causal capacities to engage in future and different relationships down the track. In that sense, it is still something which has a certain independence as far as we think about it and an essence, if you like, that predictably allows it to engage in some kinds of relationships and not others.

But New Materialists constantly urge us against this everyday reading of what they are talking about. There are no objects, only assemblages of relationships. This is so thoroughly ungrammatical as to be inconceivable and unwrite-able. I am in a relationship with my father, the relationship of father and son. That makes sense, we know what that means. But in talking about this I have mentioned two independents, causally effective, objects in the world, myself and my father. It is impossible to conceive what our *relationship* 'paternity' might be without considering those two beings related through it. In other words, objects may well be constituted by relationships but we cannot talk about relationships without talking about objects; there cannot just be 'relationships'. These grammatical parts are interdependent and mutually necessary for any meaningful dialogue.

Barad is usually credited as the source for the argument against mind/body dualism that is drawn out of this set of ideas. She argues, referencing quantum physics, that the things we look at are inevitably affected by the process of observation so there are no *material* objects existing independently of what we might at any point in time *think* about them. No, the material object and our observation exists as an 'assemblage' of 'relationships', and no item in such an assemblage can be considered *outside of its relationship* to other items, since all items are conceived of as constituted by their relationships.

If this is truly the case, then whatever assemblage of reality we have postulated at any point in time is only valid relative to the mental construction of that reality and vanishes at the point where *those thoughts* are absent from the assemblage. Objects could never free themselves from that assemblage and go wandering off to make a new assemblage – their essence is their assemblage as an event made up of relationships.

Latour makes the relativist conclusion of this logic quite patent when he says that Boyle's law of the behavior of gases does not describe the actual behavior of gases, but instead merely summarizes the experiments which were used to develop this theory. In other words, the behavior of gases is *relative* to the scientific processes which attempt to establish the nature of this behavior. It does not have any independent reality.

While it may be possible to entertain this idea on paper, it is a farce to think you could implement it in the practice of everyday life. As a result, aficionados constantly revert to more everyday forms of speech, talking about people as real objects in the world, whose really existing thoughts are formed contingently in relationships with other real objects and contingently have various impacts. In other words, like the rest of us, they speak about assemblages *as though they were objects* which are independent of the observations we make about them.

Let me explain what this argument has to do with 'transcending' the mind/body split. It means that the body, as part of the material world as we normally think of it, is not a thing that can ever exist independently of the mind that thinks about it. The material world is always the material world *as we have conceived it at any particular point in time*. Rendering this more carefully in terms of New Materialist ways of speaking, the material world and our thoughts about it constitute various kinds of assemblages of relationships, not relationships between things of course but relationships with other assemblages of relationships and so on. And of course, as above, our thoughts are themselves 'material' in this view. So, there can be no body independent of mind. This conclusion becomes a subset of a more general claim that 'objects' as such do not exist, only relationships.

To give a longer account of this argument, the phrase 'all objects (assemblages) are constituted by their relationships' is used to show that objects can never '*precede*' their relationships – and so objects cannot have an independent existence which we may perceive either correctly or not as the case may be. Barad's argument, and that of those who follow this logic, turns on a particular reading of *which* relationships we think *constitute* an assemblage. A simple refutation is as follows. Let us look at researcher A and their object of study B. If A and B are constituted as assemblages with certain specific causal powers before they meet up and form a relationship, then A and B have *preceded* that relationship. So as Barad is using this terminology, the phrase, 'constituted by their relationships' cannot mean, constituted by what may have happened to form them in the past. No, it must mean, constituted by *this particular relationship* between the human and their object of study. Before that they have no real existence. And, I might add, after that they have no further real existence either.

This is radically implausible. Think of an orange, constituted by a DNA that relates it to its wild ancestors and its ancient cultivators, an object that is situated in relation to gravity, an object related to the market place, to its tree and so on. Yet despite and because of all that, it is an object and these relationships have constituted it with causal properties that are ongoing (at least for a certain period). In many passages, new materialists would be the first to concede this and exclaim with triumph that 'affects' come out of relationships and equip assemblages with causal powers (capacities)! However, in relationship to Barad's argument, they are not so hasty. The orange is *constituted* by its relationship to the person who is perceiving it (and vice versa). On Tuesday, the orange is in a relationship with us and is constituted by our relationship to it. On Monday, there can be no orange and no us to perceive it, to *precede* our relationship, because there is no orange independent of this relationship with us on Tuesday. So, there can be no mind (us perceiving it) and body (the material orange) split.

In ordinary everyday thinking, we well know that the fact that we are now in a relationship does not show that the items in question were not in existence before this relationship took place. We also know that it would have been perfectly possible for me and the orange to continue our merry ways without ever coming into contact and consequently, to be independent of the relationship we had on Tuesday – but might not have had.

The independence of reality and our views of it is confirmed in a vast array of ordinary understandings. Dinosaurs really had roamed the earth in the Jurassic even though people in the seventeenth century were not aware of this. The earth was round even in the periods

of history when people thought it was flat. And so on. This is just simple realism. In other words, it normally never gives us a moment's pause to think that an object *preceded* our perception of it.

Finally, the view that objects are *made by their relationships* is tenuous. They are made by some relationships and not others. As well, while a relationship may impact one party it does not necessarily impact both. I am digging up a Roman *vicus*. My excavation is not having a great deal of impact on the *vicus* two thousand years before. I look at a doorknob. My observation is not changing the doorknob, it goes on being the same doorknob that it was before I looked at it. In other words, our observation of things does not necessarily affect reality, though it may in some cases. More generally, relationships may take place which do not have a particularly strong effect on an object – meaning that its independent existence, the one that preceded the relationship, goes on. I pick up the orange and look at it before replacing it in the bowl. Or in other cases they may radically change the object – for example if we eat the orange rather than merely observing it.

This then is the argument against mind/body dualism which New Materialism introduces to this discussion. As you can see, it is quite a metaphysical sort of reasoning, and attacks the mind/body split in terms of the way the split offends against the concept of objects as assemblages of relationships. I find it a dubious argument, partly because of my problems with the attempt to re-cast objects as assemblages. But it is also dubious in the way it argues from the concept of assemblages to the conclusion that assemblages are always momentarily constituted by the presence of an observer and unthinkable outside that particular context. This is in fact a very old argument for relativism, going back to Berkeley, that has been dressed in new clothes with talk of quantum physics and assemblages.

I am aware that devotees of 'New Materialism' will just wring their hands at this terrible 'misunderstanding' of what they are saying. The problem is that a more plausible understanding of what they are saying just gets us back to the status quo ante of stock standard humanist realist sociology – no special jargon required.

Conclusions

As the reader may now be aware, the simple phrase 'mind/body dualism' can mean a vast variety of different things at once. Shifting between these is a strategy that makes the New Materialist attack on mind/body dualism plausible. No one wants to be associated with Descartes' view of cats or Plato's view of gender. So, look over here and buy into this relativist ontology which also denies the 'mind/body' dualism. The outcome is that novices in this field of scholarship struggle to use the terminology appropriately, without falling into the trap of stating things in a way that makes it all very silly. Aficionados gate-keep this complex verbiage as editors, supervisors, examiners and so on, performing a kind of distinction. The massive work involved in this project does not give people a lot of time to consider some of the problems we face. How come the feminist revolution of the second wave only achieved limited success and we are still struggling with the outcomes? How is capitalism destroying the planet and is there anything that might work better? Why is racism taking the breath out of attempts at social justice and reform? Like other sociological philosophies before it, New Materialism acts as a millstone around the neck.

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Why sociologists do not study war and the military: A Reply to Michael Blain and Angeline Kearns Blain

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In our recent contribution to this newsletter 'Sociological Theory as a Demilitarized Zone' (2016 Winter RC16) we proposed a theory as to why sociologists do not more fully engage with the analysis of war and the military. Our theory revolved around the perceived relationship between war, the military and civil society. Here we reply to the critique made by Blain and Blain of that article in the last edition of the newsletter, pointing to a number of misunderstandings of our argument in their commentary. While we acknowledge that they raise issues that are important considerations for a sociology of war and the military, we argue that they fail to comprehend the main points that we were advancing.

The first misunderstanding put forward by Blain and Blain is that they see the aim of our article as to propose a strong program of cultural sociology in the area. While their critique rightly notes that we provide some references to work by scholars in this cultural sociological perspective, as elaborated in our coedited special issue of the *Journal of Sociology* on war, the military and civil society, we are not focused on cultural forces or meaning-making per se. Rather, we argue that the idea of strong and weak theories, as developed through the Edinburgh School on the sociology of scientific knowledge, is apt for comprehending both the general neglect of war and the military within sociology, and the specific theoretical perspectives on war and the military that presently dominate. These tend to comprehend organized violence and armed conflict in relation to the study of other social phenomena. When sociologists have paid attention to war and the military they have often done so in ways that comprehend its relationship to civil society differently from how they see civil society dynamics operating in relation to other domains of social life. It is this conception of war and the military as being different, as not necessarily the purview of sociologists, that we seek ways to redress.

As such, we reject the accusation that Blain and Blain put forward that we are 'retracting to the non-violent everyday world of "peace" and civil society'. In fact, we are proposing the opposite. In advancing a strong program perspective, we are arguing that war and the military need to be studied more directly and in their own right. Part of our argument is that the military needs to be studied as a distinctive organization that has both an influence on as well as being influenced by civil society, something Blain and Blain see as us advocating for "insider accounts".



We similarly argue that war needs to be comprehended in direct terms not as an isolated historical event but as something that has ongoing social, political and environmental consequences. That is to say, we argue that war plays an ongoing role in the shaping of societies. In outlining the history of sociological studies into war and the military we do point to the way that personal experience of the military and war by sociologists throughout the twentieth century did not translate into any significant increase in studies of war and the military. However, this point is made to illustrate the historical neglect of the field.

In this regard, we do not see that a critical sociology is antithetical to our argument about civil society, nor to the ideas of a strong program. We would however argue that there are several 'weak' characteristics in how Blain and Blain explain the neglect of sociological research of war and the military in their commentary on our article. To the extent to which Blain and Blain explain this lack of scholarly attention in epistemological terms they do so by emphasizing the power and influence of modernization thought within sociology and its positive functionalist view of violence, not simply as a characteristic of the discipline in the 19th century but as something that has 'continued functioning right up to the present'. Ironically, the empirical case put forward by Blain and Blain to illustrate this argument is of universities and their relationship to the military. We feel that this relates to one of our own arguments: that militarism needs to be analyzed in relation to everyday social processes and institutions. That said, we strongly disagree with the view that modernization theories and their functionalist views on organized violence remain paradigmatic within mainstream sociology today. Further, we are not convinced that the career trajectories of C. Wright Mills and Noam Chomsky have warned others away from studying the military.

The 'most obvious reason' Blain and Blain put forward for sociologists neglecting to study war and the military relate to the 'deliberate decision' making of sociologists, principally a lack of financial support for sociological research by the Departments of Defense and the political 'blowback' that can come from undertaking research in this area. War and the military are undoubtedly politically controversial topics, but we do not see equal neglect in other politically fraught areas of social life such as corporate interests or Indigenous rights. This explanation also cannot explain why the social science research on war and the military that is undertaken by sociologists in the academy is overwhelmingly from a critical perspective – including the authors' own works that are extensively cited in the article. We should also not forget that an equally significant number of sociologists are employed to undertake research within defense.

In essence, we suggest that the view Blain and Blain has about their sociology colleagues is consistent with a broader instrumentalist view of social action that we pointed to as having some 'weak' characteristics. We welcome the engagement with our scholarship that Blain and Blain provide and we recognize their own important research in the area. However, the tone of their commentary, particularly accusations about our work 'ignoring' the reality of mass violence and consequences of military power, has made us reflect on whether in attempting to maintain one of the dominant theoretical paradigms in the study of war such critiques have the unintended consequence of contributing to the continuing neglect of this area by sociologists.

The authors note, on several occasions, that they do not have time to elaborate on their points because of the word limit. We found ourselves in the same position. Should they so wish they are welcome to look at our work that considers the causes of war (Smith and West, 2008), reasons for the institutional neglect of the military (Matthewman, 2012), and related issues in the special edition that we co-edited (West and Matthewman, 2016), including significant studies by established and emerging sociological theorists such as Barry Smart, Cynthia Enloe, Joseph Pugliese and Thomas Crosbie.

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Crises, intellectual movement and collective effervescence in relational sociology: invitation to a new book series

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It has been called an 'intellectual movement' or, more specifically, the 'relational movement' in sociology (Dépelteau 2018b, Vandenberghe 2018). The basic ideas discussed within this sociological movement are not necessarily new. They can be found in other disciplines such as (processual) philosophy, (relational) psychology and (relational) psychoanalysis, as well as in the works of established social thinkers like G. Simmel, G.H. Mead, N. Elias, H. Blumer, H. Becker and B. Latour, or even in specific statements of M. Weber, K. Marx and E. Durkheim. The ideas might not be original, but many of us are inspired and enthused by the aspirations of this 'movement.'

This growing interest has something to do with the multiple crises affecting contemporary society and sociology. Of course, it could be argued that sociology has been related to internal and external crises since its beginning. However, it might also be justified and wise to claim that we are going through significant and multiple crises these days, and that we should act accordingly when we relate to others and when we study these relations. In other words, we should re-examine in rigorous and critical ways our 'habitus' — composed by predominant worldviews, principles, ideas, concepts, methods, reactions, tastes, emotions, etc. — in our social life and sociology. Fundamentally speaking, this is what relational sociology is all about: a collective or an intellectual movement dedicated to the critical evaluation and reformulation of our social and sociological habitus in an era of crises.

More precisely, we are talking about proposing an anti-substantialist sociology highlighting the limits of variable analysis; focusing on relations between interactants rather than independent entities, essences or metaphysical forces; and proposing a processual worldview made by dynamic 'networks', 'configurations', 'social worlds' or 'social fields'. There is no doctrine to promote. Relational sociologists are under the influences of different thinkers or theories (Bourdieu, Elias, White, Tilly, Deleuze, Tarde, Latour, Dewey, critical realism, etc.). Like any vibrant collective, there are shared orientations and important differences of opinion. This is a multi-faced and open sociology of interdependency fueled by conceptual and empirical research, the use and search for relational methods, and necessary disagreements.

¹ I would like to thank the authors Jamie Cleland, Mark Doidge, Greta-lula Ivana, Peter Millward, Sergio Tonkonoff and Paul Widdop who read my first draft to make sure I did not misrepresent their books. I am still responsible for any mistake.

Relational sociology is oriented towards the construction of an alternative mode of perception of our social universe; a different mode of perception which potentially leads to different relations. This work implies a resistance to the social universe as it is and, of course, resistances from the defenders of the 'established' practices in this universe. Indeed, in our society, this relational work is done in the middle of a predominant and incompatible culture of egocentrism characterized by the affirmations of identities looking for 'autonomy' or 'protection', and the cult of individualism. Contemporary sociology has been deeply affected by this doxa and its related interests, ideas and practices. This egocentric logic is particularly clear at the extremes of our social universe: the so-called extreme 'right' and the so-called radical 'left.' In brief again, relational sociology is an approach putting the emphasis on interdependency (rather than independency) and 'relational goods.' Besides the promises of relational sociology in terms of social explanations, this is mostly why it is interesting and, maybe, why it is growing.

In effect, this is a moment of collective effervescence in the short history of this intellectual movement. After the previous works of G. Bajoit in France, P. Donati in Italia and M. Emirbayer in the USA, and the 'relational' or 'processual' 'turns' taken by influential sociologists like P. Bourdieu, C. Tilly and H. White, we have witnessed a recent proliferation of books and articles discussing the ideational foundations of this relational and processual approach (for example, see Abbott 2016; Crossley 2015, 2011; Dépelteau 2018a, 2015, 2008; Dépelteau and Powell 2013; Donati 2015, 2010; Donati and Archer 2015; Erikson 2013; Fuhse 2015; Powell and Dépelteau 2013; Pyyhtinen 2017, 2016). In parallel, we have seen publications on methods with the adjectives 'relational' and 'processual' in their titles (Desmond 2014, Fujii 2017, Josselson 2013, McNamee and Hosking 2012). And of course, all of this is accompanied by the realization of researches on topics as diversified as music (Crossley 2018), video games and multimedia (Walkerdine 2009), education and leadership (Eacott 2018), processes of radicalization (Alimi, Demetriou and Bosi 2015), racism (Emirbayer and Desmond 2015), family farms' resilience (Darnhoefer and al. 2016), childhood (Gabriel 2014), sociology of personal life (Roseneil and Ketokivi 2016), the sociology of 'ambivalence' (Hillcoat-Nallétamby and Phillips 2011), agency (Burkitt 2016), social movements (Diani and McAdam 2003), and more.

New sessions on relational sociology have appeared in congresses of established associations like the *International Sociological Association* and the *Canadian Sociological Association*. Soon, Palgrave Macmillan will publish the *Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology* where the goal is to present an overview of the main contemporary influences and approaches one can find within this 'intellectual movement'. As 'intellectual' as this 'movement' can be, for many of us this is not about detached, abstract or academic discussions. Once again, this is more about thinking and seeing our social life in a different way, in order to develop new praxis in the multiple social fields, networks, assemblages, social processes or configurations through which we make our way through the world. Maybe this intellectual work will help us to reinforce this capacity to live together in what we call 'society'. In some ways, we are going back to Durkheim and his concerns about the possible collapse of modernity caused by egocentric power relations, the reduction of the society to the logic of the market, a lack of common values and norms (anomie), and(or) the 'cult of individualism.'

By referring to Durkheim in this way, we understand we are not promoting once more the 'conservative' substantialist postulate of society seen as an external and constraining 'social thing.' We are closer to a relational, processual and pragmatic reading of Durkheim who also identified the existence and the possibility of 'constitutive practices' from which can emerge new forms of solidarities (Dépelteau 2017; Rawls 2017, 2012).

All of this leads us to the presentation of a new book series: the *Palgrave Studies in Relational Sociology*. We recently published two books and two more will come soon (see below). This book series is open to any relevant theoretical discussion and empirical analysis inspired by — or related to — relational thinking in sociology. No specific approach or method is favored. The series is designed and managed to be another open space of ideational and methodological experimentations based on relational thinking.

From Tarde to Deleuze and Foucault: The Infinitesimal Revolution (2017)

The first publication came from Argentina. Sergio Tonkonoff works with basic ideas of Tarde, Deleuze and Foucault with one specific purpose in mind: showing there was and still is another possible sociology, different from 'macrophysical totalism' which 'tends to offer a static vision of the social world in which events are taken as superfluous, and history is understood both as the development of grand structures and the inexplicable passage of one grand structure to another.' Tonkonoff shows in detail that an alternative form of describing social life can be found in the articulation of Tarde's micro-sociology, Deleuze's micro-politics, and Foucault's micro-physics. We are clearly at the 'micro' level here; and the 'macro' level does not have any causal powers on individuals and groups. First, because in each case the real social agents, actions and relations are at a level which is imperceptible to macro-sociologies: capillary power relations with Foucault, trans-individual beliefs and desires with Tarde and Deleuze. Second, because in each case new concepts were built to grasp a social reality where dynamics prevail over statics, relations over terms, and the infinite over the finite. Among others, those concepts are 'multiplicity', 'difference', 'flow', 'device' or 'assemblage', 'diagram' and 'event'. Thanks to those notions, the 'paradigm of the infinitesimal difference' seeks to provide a new epistemology and (relational) sociology. From Tarde, for example, we can learn to think in the terms and logic deriving from infinitesimal calculus; with Deleuze and Foucault, we can be inspired by the principles of quantum physics. By doing so, we end up with a very different mode of perception of the social universe founded on the 'problem of the infinitely small with all its constitutive and transformative potential.'

This is obviously a 'theoretical' book, and it is also an original and a well-conceived contribution. It will bring a lot for one type of sociology where history happens in specific local, regional or global micro-processes of diffusion, and where impersonal social structures become 'assemblages' made of the creativity and interactions of people we can see and name. That is why the corresponding relational method of this approach is a "cartographic" one.

Sociology Through Relations: Theoretical Assessments Through the French Tradition (2017)

Relational sociology is an open space for discussions and experimentations related to basic ideas and practices in the discipline. Once more, the book series should contribute to this openness and diversity. The comparison of the first two publications reflect this approach. As we saw, Sergio Tonkonoff's approach relies on microscopic processes and he asks us to start from there. Christian Papilloud offers a different perspective. He brings us to the other end of the spectrum of relational sociology. With him, we see the social world from the 'macro' point of view. This is a 'top-down approach' rather than a 'bottom-up perspective'. He speaks of relation 'as a macro-phenomenon in order to say that relation cannot be reduced to personal interaction(s) between individual actors, even if these interactions obviously contribute to the concrete existence of a relation.' Critical realists, Bourdieusians and structuralists will probably support this kind of relational approach. Concretely speaking, 'relation is a configuration involving reciprocity between non-personal actors or institutions and personal or individual actors. By configuration, we do not mean a context of observable interactions between actors, but an embeddedness of these actors in a reciprocity from which they directly or indirectly benefit.' Society is possible if there is 'reciprocity' according to Christian Papilloud. We are talking about 'a special relationship that legitimates institutions and personal actors, and whose concrete manifestation is strongly conditioned by the expansion strategies of institutions on the one hand, and to a lower degree by the personal actors on the other.' Obviously inspired by the theories of Berger and Luckmann, Bourdieu and critical realism, this 'sociology through relation' is founded on dialectical interactions between the institutions and the individuals. In the words of the author, 'our concept of relation would enable us to understand how institutions have an impact on the life and social careers of personal actors, and how these personal actors can affect the expansion strategies of institutions by contributing to the meaning of the reciprocity to the institution and therefore, to the legitimating operations which these institutions produce.' As the subtitle is announcing, his ideas are developed through discussions with French sociologists such as E. Durkheim, G. Richard, M. Mauss, P. Bourdieu and B. Latour.

Collective Action and Football Fandom: A relational Sociological Approach (2018)

In the preface, Nick Crossley opens *Collective Action and Football Fandom* with a short but very clear statement: in order to be relevant and not just another temporary 'turn' in the discipline, relational sociology has to reshape the way we conduct empirical research. This is what Jamie Cleland, Mark Doidge, Peter Millward and Paul Widdop offer: an empirical research on football clubs in the UK. This research is clearly influenced by N. Crossley's approach and social network analysis, but the authors build a framework — made by 'the five core concepts of social relations, interactions, networks, social actors and power' — through the free integration of ideas coming also from other sociologists such as M. Castells and A. Melucci. In brief, the clubs of football fans are seen as social movements. They are 'actors in their networks both shape and are shaped by (...) structures.' And through this dialectical process, 'social change comes about through aggregations of social actors bringing about social action through expressions of power and counter-power.'

As 'counter-powers', those movements of British football supporters have reacted to contextualized 'structural' transformations which started in the 1980s: the deindustrialization of the UK economy, as well as more specific changes 'to English and European football in the post-Hillsborough period. Initially this was based on the upgrading or building of new

stadia, but it also led to the Football Association to effectively embrace neo-liberalism through the introduction of a Premier League in 1992 and subsequently a more commercially driven strategy, most notably through higher ticket prices and the league's relationship with satellite broadcaster, BSkyB.' However, the authors do not stay at this 'structural' level and bring us to contextualized stories of various resistances and solidarities based on 'friendships, ties, networks and relationships' and the use of internet.

They employ multiple methods to 'capture the connections between social actors': qualitative fieldwork, interviews, observations, ethnographic work and social network analysis.

Social Ties in Online Networking (2018)

Thanks to empirical research on users of social media, consisting mostly of interviews about 'what they do, what they like and watch, but first and foremost how they intend their own actions and read into each other's within the realm of social media', Greti-Iulia Ivana 'discusses social networking activity and its significance in the context of (...) reciprocal bonds.' The main arguments are inspired by the phenomenological works of M. Merleau-Ponthy and A. Schutz, G. Simmel and symbolic interactionists — particularly E. Goffman and A. Hochschild. Aimed at providing a relational alternative to the self and identity oriented approaches to social networking, the book focuses on both online interactions and the more consolidated social bonds on which these interactions are built. Generally speaking, the author is interested by the co-constitutive character of different dimensions of the relations between users; more precisely, she explores: i) 'the ways in which the exchanges of information unfolding on Facebook impact the universe of the users' social bonds', ii) 'how the underlying fabric of social relations influences the dynamic of Facebook contents.' The emphasis on online networking also allows the author to question the most basic assumptions about what constitutes a social interaction and how to conceptualize the variety of modes of 'keeping in touch' specific to contemporary technological affordances. Greti-Iulia Ivana presents 'a rich set of data, consisting of the subjects' own attitudes, doubts, enchantment with Facebook, as well as great examples of information exchanges online and how these exchanges were lived and understood' relationally. By reading the book, we also learn that the 'respondents often talked about life trajectories and old contacts, about how Facebook users seek to increase their social status in each other's eyes, about physical and relational distance and about the process through which they decided to post or to give feedback to another (a process which was unexpectedly laborious for many users).' Emotions, such as 'pride and embarrassment', are central dimensions within these relations; at the same time the patterns according to which bonds unfold and their symbolic significance are also taken up. Overall, the analysis reveals 'the sociological significance of how (inter) acting in this given setting is experienced and how that experience becomes meaningful in a larger relational picture.'

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Announcements

What is Soziopolis?

Soziopolis – Observing Society is an internet platform which meets three intellectual needs in particular: first of all, the wish for (daily) news about sociology and its related disciplines. By providing a variety of information including notes on events, calls for papers or submissions, conference reports, job offers and new appointments, but also book reviews and press roundups as well as contributions on relevant anniversaries or historic dates and informative portraits of influential social scientists, Soziopolis aims to assume the role of a daily newspaper for sociologists.

But *Soziopolis* also intends to function, secondly, as a weekly or quarterly journal, in that it offers a wide range of background information on social science topics, for instance in texts that comment on research trends, literature reviews aimed at shedding light on larger sociological discussions, or dossiers and introductory texts. The platform will also provide space for essays on contemporary phenomena, interviews with researchers, videos of talks or discussions, and contributions to ongoing debates. We will also publish opinion pieces and editorial articles, commentaries and columns addressing social, cultural, political, or academic debates in other countries.

Thirdly, we intend to occasionally take a sociological look at the arts, as well as photography and advertising, and also to include the presentation and discussion of interesting material from sociological archives on the website. Moreover, we will cooperate with print and online media, so that selected content from their repertoire will also be made available to *Soziopolis* users.

How does Soziopolis work?

The editors of *Soziopolis* are based at the Hamburg Institute for Social Research and cooperate with [H-Soz-Kult](#), the most important German platform for historians, and its sponsoring organization, Clio-Online e.V. A network of social scientists and institutions both in Germany and in other countries supports the project.

Whereas the main editors at Hamburg Institute for Social Research are in charge of coordinating and administrating the project, sociological expertise is provided by a group of approximately forty academic editors who are responsible for suggesting topics and suitable authors within their field of research. An editorial board comprising internationally renowned researchers offers strategic advice.

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* * *

Apropos the 100th anniversary of Georg Simmel's (1858-1918) death – a notice

Hans-Peter Müller (Humboldt-University Berlin, Germany)

What a remarkable difference between Simmel's 100th birthday and his 100th day of death. In 1958, Kurt Gassen and Michael Landmann published their „Buch des Dankes an Georg Simmel. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot“ („The book of appreciation for Georg Simmel“) in which they put together letters, memories and a comprehensive bibliography. In their introduction, they gave a report of the enormous difficulties they met in setting up a Simmel-archive in order to collect texts about the person and her oeuvre. It seemed as if Georg Simmel was completely forgotten after the second World War in philosophy and the social sciences Kurt Wolff's famous edited collection („Georg Simmel 1858-1918. Columbus: The University of Ohio State University Press 1959) notwithstanding. Simmel led an almost clandestine existence as a secret hint to the helpless scholar: if you are at a dead-end try and read Simmel – Simmel as the last resort and resource.

In 2018, the world looks completely different. The first comprehensive edition of his oeuvre is complete and available in 24 volumes at the best home for the classics, the Suhrkamp publishing house in Berlin. Otthein Rammstedt and a host of collaborators have spent more than a quarter century (1989-2016) editing Simmel's corpus of over 25 books and over 200 articles. At the same time, first the „Simmel-Newsletter“ (1991-1999) and then the journal „Simmel-Studies“ (since 2000) has become an international platform for the „Simmel-people“ to present their research and reflections upon the German classic. Simmel has been raised to the status of a „classic“, albeit with a considerable delay that was also characteristic of the recognition he received during his life and academic career. But a classic of *what?* Surely, a founding father of sociology but also a *spiritus rector* of the „philosophy of culture“ conjointly with Ernst Cassirer.

What a felicitous fate and what an amazing posthumous career. Georg Simmel has arrived successfully in the 21st century. This arrival poses three questions: 1. What is Simmel for us today? This is the quest for his *relevance*. 2. Where and in which way do we work with his ideas and concepts? This is the quest for his *connectivity* („Anschlussfähigkeit“ (Luhmann) or in the words of E.M. Forster, „only connect“!). 3. How do we assess his oeuvre and its impact? This is the quest for his *actuality*.

Hans-Peter Müller (Humboldt University Berlin) and Tilman Reitz (University of Jena) have edited a handbook on Georg Simmel as an accompanying volume for the entire edition which will be put into a box and be sold at a good price by Suhrkamp in 2018. This handbook consists of three parts: In part I, more than hundred concepts will be explained showing Simmel's wide-ranging ideas and interests. Part II presents his major books and its reception. In part III, an essay section explores Simmel's impact on current philosophy and sociology. Georg Simmel is the philosopher and sociologist of modernity and individuality. More than hundred years after the publication of his work, his ideas and insights speak to us livelier than ever. It is as if we in the 21st century have finally arrived at Simmel's time.

Hans-Peter Müller/Tilman Reitz (eds.): *Simmel-Handbuch*. Berlin: Suhrkamp

* * *

The Relational Turn in Sociology: Implications for the Study of Society, Culture, and Persons

Special issue of the academic journal *Stan Rzeczy* (State of Affairs)

The relational approach, which has a long tradition and widely differing variants, has reemerged and grown stronger, forming a new, vital movement in the social sciences. After postmodern diffusion and beyond the stagnation of interpretative against normative conceptualizations of social life, relational sociology offers new insights and could play a leading role in reconstructing the discipline to face the challenges of the global age. Social relations are among the key sociological concepts and have been studied as constitutive for social bonding. Contemporary relational thinking assumes radical changes in the ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological status of social relations.

The aim of this issue is to reflect upon and discuss the innovative potential of contemporary relational theorizing about society, culture, and persons. Various theories of contemporary socio-cultural changes evoke relationality, but relational thinking is different from "relationistic" positions. Relational questions are investigated by the founder of the new paradigm, Pierpaolo Donati, and other authors interested in the relational turn.

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