universität innsbruck

Research Center
Social Theory

International Sociological Association

RC16 Sociological Theory

Sociology of the Future / The Future of Sociology
ISA RC16 Midterm Conference

Program & Abstract Book

Innsbruck Theory Summit

July 2-4, 2025
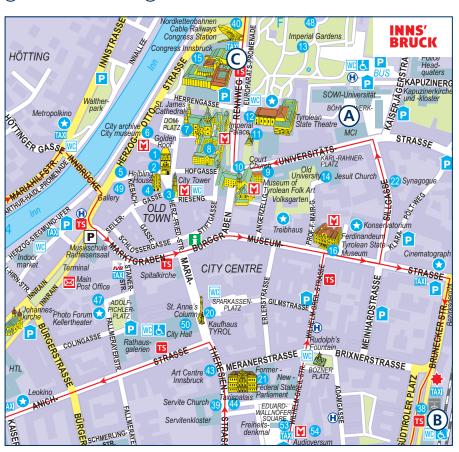**University of Innsbruck, Austria**

www.uibk.ac.at/socialtheory

Conference Venue

The conference is hosted by the Research Center Social Theory of the University of Innsbruck and will take place in the SOWI building of the University of Innsbruck, Universitätsstrasse 15, Innsbruck. It is just a 2-minute walk from the old town center and 10 minutes from the railway station.

Note: The main university building (other disciplines) is in a different city location!

Old Town

(A) Conference venue: SOWI, University of Innsbruck,
     Universitätsstraße 15 (top of the map)

(B) Main railway station   (C) Funicular stop Hungerburgbahn (to Seegrube)

Content

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Schedule

	Wednesday, July 2	Thursday, July 3	Friday, July 4
8:30		**Session 8:30** (Third Floor - East)	
9:00			**Session 9:00**
10:30		Coffee break	Coffee break
11:00		**Session 11:00**	**Session 11:00**
13:00		Lunch break	Lunch break
14:00		**Session 14:15**	**Session 14:00**
15:30			Coffee break
16:00		Coffee break	**Closing Plenary 16:00** (Ground Floor)
16:30		**Plenary Discussion 16:30** (Ground Floor)	
17:30			**17:30 THEORY SUMMIT** Restaurant Seegrube, 1920m
18:00	**18:00 Opening Plenary Keynote**		
18:30			
19:00		**19:00 Conference Dinner** Restaurant Brahms	
20:00	Welcome reception		

Sociology of the Future/The Future of Sociology

Innsbruck RC16 Midterm conference

Let us go in together,
And still your fingers on your lips, I pray.
The time is out of joint—O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!
Nay, come, let's go together.
Hamlet

The time is out of joint, said the bard. Some think that the world will come to its end. Others think it has already happened. The future is now coming in our direction, it seems, throwing its threatening shadow on the present. From the economy and politics to technology and ecology, the accumulation of crises projects us into the future without any real solution in sight. Simple solutions are at hand (Build the wall! Defund the wokes!), but they only compound the difficulties.

We think that the new times, however challenging, are interesting and exhilarating. One of the tasks of sociology is to open up radiant futures. To do so sociology has, however, to reinvent itself, rethink its relations to the world, to other disciplines and to its own history. Thanks to its reflexivity, being both in and about society, sociological theory has always been at the forefront of innovation.

We called for innovative papers on the future of sociological theory, the world at large and their mutual implication. We've been served well. We received 62 submissions and set up 17 panels that give a good overview of wide-range of topics sociological theorists are working on: The Great Transformations; The Global Civil Sphere; The Triumph of the Extreme Right; The Sociology of the Future; the Rise and Fall of Social Theory, Capitalism, Critique and Emancipation; Ideologies, Imaginaries and Utopias; The Decolonisation of Sociology; Cultural Sociology of Robots; Object-Oriented Sociology; The Dedifferentiation of Society; Axiological Engagement in Micro-Sociology and Existence Theory. With the whole gamut of themes and problématiques represented and delegates from all continents, mainly from the "minority world" (Europe, US, Australia), but also some from Latin-America, India and Africa, it promises to be a most interesting and memorable mid-term conference – if you don't get lured into hiking in the mountains, because the Alpine scenery and the setting is simply irresistible and sublime. The majesty of the Alps reminds us of the fact that there's something out there that precedes us and transcends sociology.

We would like to thank Frank Welz, his Research Center for Social Theory, and his local team for organising the mid-term conference in Tyrol. Thanks to his center, social theory remains a vibrant and viable path for students in Austria seeking to bridge scholarship and engagement. Thanks to his personal dedication, they are free to critically explore the most pressing issues of our time. Thanks to his generosity, our mid-term conference has truly become a gathering worthy of the name Theory Summit. Danke, Frank.

Frédéric Vandenberghe, Co-Chair RC16
Eleanor Townsley, Co-Chair RC16
Paul Joosse, Secretary/Treasurer RC16

International Sociological Association, Research Committee (RC16) Sociological Theory Board 2023-2027

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Objectives

Following the RC16 statutes, the goal of the Research Committee in Sociological Theory is
• to organize open interrelationships among its various schools of thought,
• helping resolve its recurring crises and define its future prospects and
• to create an international community among scholars

Welcome to Innsbruck!

Dear participant,
The higher you climb, the more you see.

And that is precisely what we need: to discuss both the *sociology of the future* and the *future of sociology*. The two are inseparable. A society without visions of the future does not need sociology, or only for research that safeguards and administers the status quo. As in the 1960s and 1970s, sociological theory becomes relevant when people seek to understand their social conditions – and to change them.
Today, in a society of increasingly individualized lives, the power to interpret the world is shifting toward technological rationalities: neoclassical economics, the molecular logic of genetics, or the promises of positive psychology. But without collective visions, social self-reflection, and sociology, we risk losing our shared understanding of who we are and where to go.

It is therefore all the more urgent to rethink our discipline. Where do we stand? How do we want to think ahead?

At the University of Innsbruck, quantum physics may lead, but sociology is also finding its voice. Our independent degree program in sociology was established only in 2007. However, our Master's program – with its distinctive focus on sociological theory – is unique in Austria and attracts many Master's and doctoral theses. More than forty scholars from diverse disciplines collaborate at our Social Theory Research Center.

We are pleased to welcome the ISA RC16 Theory Summit – which will take sociological theory to new heights: Welcome to the Alps!

Frank Welz
Head, Research Center Social Theory, University of Innsbruck

The conference is supported by

universität innsbruck

Vice-Rectorate for Research
Research Area EPoS Economy, Politics & Society
Faculty of Social and Political Sciences

ISA International Sociological Association

International Sociological Association

Program

WEDNESDAY (July 2) 18:00-20:00 (Ground Floor, Lecture Hall 2)

18:00	**Opening Plenary**
	Polycrisis and the Future of Sociology
	(chairs: Eleanor Townsley & Frederic Vandenberghe)
	Welcome – Sociological Theory: Before or After the Summit?
	Frank Welz, Head, Research Center Social Theory
	Untenability: Late Modernity and the Trauma of Critical Social Theory *Ingolfur Blühdorn*
20:00	**Welcome reception**

THURSDAY (July 3) 8:30-10:30 (3rd Floor, East)

(Room 1) Beyond Value-Neutrality (chair: Frederic Vandenberghe)

Making Things Visible: Reflections on the Cosmopolitics of Interpretation *Angelika Poferl*
Between Ambiguity and Positioning: Reclaiming the
  Transformative Potential of Sociology *Katharina Miko-Schefzig & Boris Traue*
Making Lifeworld Together: A Sociology of Understanding the Majority
  in the Age of „We" and „They" *Mitsuhiro Tada*
The Empirical Theory of Science *Hubert Knoblauch*

(Room 2) Future Studies I Theory (chair: Ariane Hanemaayer)

Sociology: Quo Vadis? *George Pavlich*
Intermittent Futures in Transnormative Societies *Gregor Fitzi*
Regenerative Sociology: Reframing Theory for an Age of Crisis *Mary Janet Arnardo*
Sociological Theory and Energy Social Research *Martin Durdovic*

(Room 3) The Triumph of the Right (chair: Jason Mast)

Psychosocial Theory and the Postliberal Far-Right *Nicholas Regan*
What Means Democratic Crisis? Theoretical Outline
  for a Sociological Approach *João Mauro Gomes Vieira de Carvalho*
Charisma, Suffering, and Saturnalia *Paul Joosse*
The Emergence of Personalized „-Isms" in World Politics *Julia Pfau*

Coffee break

THURSDAY (July 3) 11:00-13:00

(Room 1) Civil Theory for the Public Sphere (chair: Eleanor Townsley)

Civil Sphere Theory as a Research Programme: Knowledge Accumulation, Conceptual Development, and New Heuristics in the Study of Solidarity	*Celso M. Villegas*
Sociology of Taboos	*Patrick Baert & Sebastian Raza*
Democratic Futures: Toward a Theory of Societalized Politics	*Jason L. Mast*
Civil Sphere Ethnography	*Anna Lund*

(Room 2) Learning from postcolonialism (chair: Victor Roudometof)

The Future of Social Theory Will Be Non-Eurocentric - Or Will Not Be. Theoretical Reflections on a Critical Theory From the Americas	*Stefan Gandler*
Epistemic Justice as a Future of Sociology: The Need to Decolonize Sociology	*Stéphane Dufoix*
Rethinking Colonialism in Durkheim's Sociology	*Romulo Lelis*
The Role of Race and Gender in the Constitution of the World Capitalist System from a Decolonial Perspective	*Carla Campardo*

(Room 3) De/Institutionalization (chair: Andrea M. Maccarini)

Comparing Two Integral Conceptions: Bourdieu's Concept of Field and Parsons' Concept of Social System	*Victor Lidz*
On the Role of Emotions in the De-Institutionalization Processes	*Helena Flam*
The Possibilities of Investigating Forms of Differentiation, Hierarchies and Modes of Coordination in National Power Structures	*Ana Paula Hey*
The Messy Meso: Social Theory's Group Problem	*Mervyn Horgan*

Lunch Break - Due to time constraints, a complimentary lunch will be served in the hallway outside the seminar rooms on the third floor.

THURSDAY (July 3) 14:15-16:00

(Room 1) Reflexive Existence (chair: Anne Taylor)

Sport, Wellness Culture, and the Contemporary Self	*Ronald Jacobs*
Socialization Theory at the Crossroads: Reflexivity, Resonance and Identity ‚After' Modernity	*Andrea M. Maccarini*
Existence Theory and Inequalities	*Patrick Baert & Hao Li*

(Room 2) Reconstructing Subjectivities (chair: Paul Joosse)

The Production of Data-Driven Student Subjectivities through Learning Analytics: An Algorithmic Governmentality Perspective	*Hannes Hautz*
Economic Structure, Alienation, and the Moral Dimension of Work: A Cross-Cultural Re-Examination of Classical Theories	*Dawn Norris & Nicole Horáková*
Rethinking Words and Worlds. The Emic/Etic Distinction as a Tool for Theory-Work	*Giovanni Zampieri*

(Room 3) Intersections of Domination and Emancipation (chair: Frank Welz)

‚For the First Time We Live in a World in Which We Can No Longer Imagine a Better One' (Adorno): Critique of Subjective Reason, Social Tendencies, and the Utopia of the Qualitative	*Christos Memos*
Towards a Fuller Sociological Analysis of Inequality: Anti-Blackness, Afro Pessimism, and the Decline of Class	*John Mirsky*
Resonance and Revolution	*Arthur Bueno*

Coffee break

THURSDAY (July 3) 16:30-18:30 (Ground Floor, Lecture Hall 2)

Plenary discussion: Rise and Fall of Social Theory (chair: Ana Paula Hey)

Social Theory, From the Darkest Hour to Daybreak	*Andrea Mubi Brighenti & Lorenzo Sabetta*
Decline and Fall of Sociological Theory? A Discussion of Diagnosis and Prospects	*Jayme Gomes*
The Future of Social Theory. Is There Any?	*Giuseppe Sciortino*
A Manifesto for Social Theory	*Frédéric Vandenberghe*

Conference Dinner, 19:00 Restaurant Brahms

FRIDAY (July 4) 9:00-10:30 (3rd Floor, East)

(Room 1) Future Studies II Prospects (chair: Craig Browne)

Investing as a Practice of Futuring: On Imagined Futures Among
  Micro-Investors in the Czech and Slovak Post-Socialist Context   *Karel Němeček*
Climate Boundaries: How Affective Notions of „Us" and „Them"
  in the Climate Crisis Are Linked to Broader Narratives About the Future   *Till Hilmar*
Making the Study of Impossibility Possible:
  A Programme for Sociological Analysis   *Ariane Hanemaayer*

(Room 3) Global Transformations (chair: Mary Janet Arnardo)

De-Centering Globalization: Processes, Conditions & Worldviews   *Victor Roudometof*
Theorising Extraordinary Events: Genealogy and Reflective Judgment   *Csaba Szalo*
Governing Uncertainty: Global Health as a Site of
  Contested Transformation   *Bettina Bloesl*

Coffee break

FRIDAY (July 4) 11:00-13:00

(Room 1) Ideologies and Utopias (chair: Csaba Szalo)

Political Imaginaries and Ideological Metamorphoses   *Craig Browne*
The Future of Societies from the Organization of the Borders: Identity, Culture, and
  Imagination in Contemporary Societies   *Ilaria Riccioni*
Utopia as a Method for Sociological Inquiry and Territorial Design   *Natalia Coppolino*
Social Imaginaries between Constellations and Configurations   *Gilles Verpraet*

(Room 3) Cultural Sociology in Digital Society (chair: Ron Jacobs)

Exploring Existing Social Interaction Through Virtual Reality:
  Testing the Uncanny Valley Effect   *Martina Cvajner*
Performing Algorithms   *Eleanor Townsley*
Theorizing Artificial Intelligence: The Cultural Construction
  of Intentionality and Agency   *Werner Binder*

*Lunch Break - Due to time constraints, a complimentary buffet lunch will be served in the
hallway outside the seminar rooms on the third floor.*

FRIDAY (July 4) 14:00-15:30

(Room 1) Object Oriented Sociology (chair: Ilaria Riccioni)

Trees All the Way Down: Rethinking Technical Objects Through
  Phylogenetic Social Theories   *Ningxiang Sun (Sunny)*
Techno-feudalism or Routinization? A Weberian Perspective on the
  Demise of Charismatic Capitalism   *Dominik Zelinsky*

(Room 3) Text, Context, and Theory (chair: Gregor Fitzi)

Social Theorizing Through Literature: Towards a New Epistemological Framework   *Jan Váňa*
The Sociology of Meaning and the Meaning of Sociology: Or What Spatial Experience
  Can Teach Us About Meaning in General   *Dominik Bartmanski & Eduardo de la Fuente*
Checking Accounts: Foucault, Morality and the Politics of Discourse
  in the Twenty-First Century   *Ronjon Paul Datta*

Coffee break

FRIDAY (July 4) 16:00-17:30 (Ground Floor, Lecture Hall 2)

**Closing Plenary: Jeffrey Alexander – Classical Theory
for the Future of Sociology**
(chair: Celso M. Villegas)

The Political Party between Democracy and Dictatorship
     Jeffrey Alexander
From „Alexander" to „Jeff": On the Translation
  of the Theorist as a Fact-Sign   *Nelson Arteaga Botello*
Towards a Sociology of Joy   *Anne Taylor*
Discussant   *Werner Binder*

*17:30 Joint Ascent to the Theory Summit
     (Departure from Lecture Hall 2)*

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PLENARY SPEAKERS
OPENING PLENARY – Polycrisis and the Future of Sociology

Eleanor Townsley and Frédéric Vandenberghe are Co-Chairs, Frank Welz is a Board Member of ISA RC16; he also heads the Research Center Social Theory, University of Innsbruck.

Ingolfur Blühdorn is Head of the Institute for Social Change and Sustainability (IGN) at the University for Economics and Business in Vienna since 2015. He works at the interface of sociological theory, environmental sociology, and political sociology. The English edition of his current book (*Unhaltbarkeit. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*, Suhrkamp) will be published in 2026: *Beyond the Green Transformation: On the Way to a Postliberal Modernity* (Polity Press).

PLENARY DISCUSSION – Rise and Fall of Social Theory

Frédéric Vandenberghe is Co-Chair, ISA RC16.

Ana Paula Hey is Professor of Sociology at the University of São Paulo, Brazil. She works at the interface between the sociology of elites, power, and culture.

Andrea Mubi Brighenti is Professor of Social Theory and Space & Culture at the Department of Sociology, University of Trento, Italy. His research topics focus on space, power, and society.

© Micaela Ricciuti

Lorenzo Sabetta is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Sapienza-University of Rome, Italy. He works on social theory, cultural-cognitive sociology, and everyday life.

© Stefano Nobile

Jayme Gomes is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the John F. Kennedy Institute, Free University of Berlin, Germany. He received his Doctoral degree in Sociology from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Porto Alegre, Brazil.

Giuseppe Sciortino teaches sociology at the University of Trento, Italy. His main research interests are social theory, international migration, and the social dimension of sexual and erotic life.

CLOSING PLENARY
Jeffrey Alexander – Classical Theory for the Future of Sociology

From theoretical presuppositions to cultural trauma, from Watergate to George Floyd, from neofunctionalism to cultural sociology, for over forty years Jeffrey C. Alexander has helped to define the agenda for sociological theory. Recently retired, Alexander's work is due both a celebration and a reappraisal for its possibilities for future theorizing. This panel reconsiders his work as classical theory, as a way to enlighten our understanding of theory's fundamental issues and enliven theoretical innovations for the future.

A pre-eminent social theorist, **Jeffrey Alexander**, is the Lillian Chavenson Saden Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Yale University, founder and Director Emeritus of Yale's Center for Cultural Sociology, and co-editor of The American Journal of Cultural Sociology. His early work challenged the anti-cultural reductionism of classical and modern sociology to conceptualize theories of cultural trauma, social performance, and material iconicity.

Anne Taylor is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Mount Holyoke College. Her research explores interpretive agency in social performance, secular religion in media and politics, and the ways people overcome obstacles to find joy and belonging in life.

© Fanmei Xia

Nelson Arteaga Botello is Research Professor at the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences, Mexico. His research interests are violence in Latin America and social theory.

Celso M. Villegas is NEH Distinguished Teaching Associate Professor of Sociology at Kenyon College, whose research analyzes democratic change through the lens of cultural sociology.

© Terry Thurston

Werner Binder is Assistant Professor in Sociology at Masaryk University, Brno.

© Varvara Kobyshcha

Theory Summit Event at "Seegrube"

The conference optionally includes the „Theory Summit - Conference Event Seegrube" on Friday, July 4 (17:30-21:30).

This option includes funicular/cable car rides to the Seegrube Nordkette mountain on 1920 meters (Karwendel Nature Park, at 6,250 ft):
Riding the beautiful Hungerburg funicular (designed by star architect Zaha Hadid), three minutes from the conference venue, and then taking the Seegrube cable car (built in 2006), we will reach Seegrube.

(Webcam Seegrube https://nordkette.com/cams/#iframe-2).

We start at the conference venue (Lecture Hall 2, Ground Floor). As the trip to the Seegrube is on the last Nordkette funicular of the day, we must leave on time and, unfortunately, cannot wait for latecomers.
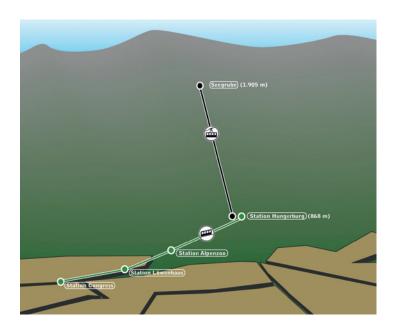
Tickets
Each participant receives a separate ticket. Please keep it safe; you will need it again for the return trip to the city. The tickets are included in the conference fee. However, the expenses for the à la carte dinner and drinks are covered individually.

Return
On the descent, which we can do in small groups or individually, there is a small challenge: to reduce noise for residents, in the night hours, the funicular no longer runs from the Hungerburg station down to the city of Innsbruck from 7 pm. We, therefore, have to take the Innsbruck public transport bus back from Hungerburg station (on the top: Seegrube; in the middle: Hungerburg; below City of Innsbruck). The bus stop is only a few meters from the cable car station heading west. The bus stop is called „Theresienkirche". There is a ticket machine where you can pay by credit card. However, you will receive a bus ticket from us. The bus leaves there every 30 minutes (on the route Nordkette ... Market Place ... Landesmuseum [not far from the railway station] ... to Gluirgschegg):
Bus J   20:14 - 20:44 - 21:14 - 21:44 - 22:14
Bus N7   22:42 - 23:12 - 23:42 - 00:12 - 00:42

Taxi Innsbruck: +43 512 5311

© Sandra Köll

Essentials:
presenting / Wifi / dietary information

Presenting papers

- **Time:** The timeslot per presentation is 30 minutes (15 min presentation + 15 min discussion).
- **Session chairs:** The chair's role is to animate the session and involve everybody in the discussion. Debating and participating are crucial.
- **Up to the particular session chair and the speakers:** If you prefer, your session could offer four presentations in a series and then integrate the presenters and participants into a discussion under a few umbrella questions.
- **Approach:** Choose the approach that you feel most comfortable with. Speaking without reading seems to work well because your talk engages more directly with the audience. On the other hand, some non-native speakers will prefer to stay tied to a script and read their paper. Everything goes! Language is no barrier. Arguments matter.
- **No full papers:** We do not expect participants to submit full papers. You submitted an abstract, which will now be developed into an oral presentation.
- **Slides:** All rooms offer the technical requirements for showing PowerPoint slides. Please prepare a PPT file (and a PDF document as a precaution). Do not overload your presentation.

Wifi
WIFI is available inside the building (conference venue) - please ask the organization team for further information.
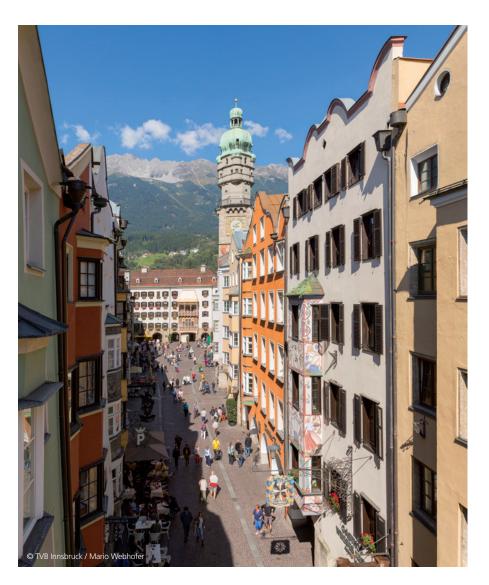
Dietary information
On Friday evening, we are guests at the Seegrube restaurant at the top of the Nordkette mountain (self-payment). The menu offers many different food options.
For time reasons, on Thursday and Friday, a vegetarian and non-vegetarian lunch/buffet lunch will be offered for free in the conference venue.
For dinner, we have reserved seats in the restaurant „Das Brahms" (7:00 pm, self-payment), which is only two minutes away. There are eight smaller and regular dishes to choose from, including vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free options.

Tap Water in Austria is Safe for Drinking:
We are pleased to inform you that the tap water in Austria is of excellent quality and safe to drink. Austria is renowned for its pristine water sources, and the tap water is regularly tested to ensure it meets high cleanliness and safety standards. Enjoy fresh and clean drinking water straight from the tap!

© TVB Innsbruck / Mario Webhofer

Abstracts – Sociology of the Future / The Future of Sociology

Jeffrey Alexander (Yale University, US)
The Political Party Between Democracy and Dictatorship

* Political Party, Civil Sphere, Regulatory Institution, Dictatorship *

As a regulative institution of the civil sphere, the political party crystallizes political ideology and organizes voters. Yet, even as it transforms public sentiment into democratic state power -- via electoral competition -- the political party is vulnerable to authoritarian transformation. Drawing on social psychology and group theory, this essay proposes a tendential explanation for this danger. Four ideal types of political party organization are presented, from loosely structured organizations whose horizontality facilitates democracy to tightly organized structures whose verticality facilitates authoritarian power. These conceptual categories are illustrated empirically, drawing from historical and contemporary times, with a special focus on the United States.

Mary Janet Arnado (De La Salle University, PH)
Regenerative Sociology: Reframing Theory for an Age of Crisis

* Regenerative Sociology, Futures Thinking, Post-Crisis Transformation, Sociological Theory *

The 21st century confronts us with overlapping and escalating crises—pandemic, climate change, technological disruption, war, and demographic shift—that have pushed sociological theory to a critical threshold. Existing frameworks, shaped by modernist ambitions of order and progress or postmodern critiques of power and meaning, struggle to address the scale, speed, and interdependence of today's challenges. In this moment of rupture, *regenerative sociology* offers a micro-to-meso-level paradigm that not only theorizes social reproduction but foregrounds society's regenerative capacity—the ability to repair, adapt, and renew systems under strain. Regenerative sociology builds on foundational insights into social order, conflict, and change—from Durkheim's concern with cohesion, to feminist and decolonial emphases on healing as justice, to ecological critiques of unsustainable systems—while drawing inspiration from regenerative practices in agriculture, medicine, and design that prioritize renewal, repair, and resilience over extraction and preservation. It offers a unifying, future-oriented lens that centers repair and renewal within both theory and praxis. This approach identifies five interlinked processes—recognition, reparation, restoration, reconciliation, and renewal—as diagnostic and anticipatory tools for reshaping institutional structures and imagining post-crisis futures. Distinct from sustainability, which often aims to preserve existing systems, regeneration emphasizes transformation: rebuilding damaged relations, reconfiguring institutions, and enabling structural adaptation. As both critique and praxis, regenerative sociology engages with futures thinking by integrating interdisciplinary insights from posthumanism, circular economy, and decolonial thought, and aligning with anticipatory practices that seek to prefigure more just and flourishing futures. Grounded in structuration theory and critical realism, this paradigm bridges structure and agency to inform institutional foresight and long-term resilience. Regenerative sociology thus advances a sociological imagination capable of navigating uncertainty and shaping institutions toward collective flourishing.

Nelson Arteaga Botello (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, MX)
From ‚Alexander' to ‚Jeff':
On the Translation of the Theorist as a Fact-Sign

* Sociological Theory, Neofunctionalism, Cultural Sociology, Civil Sphere Theory,
Latin American Sociological Theory *

I first came to know Alexander the sociologist and, later, Jeff the person. In this text, I propose mobilizing my self-reflective experience with both individuals as fact-signs from cultural sociology. A fact-sign is composed of an invisible theoretical signifier and a visible empirical signified (Alexander, 2011). To produce a fact-sign, it is necessary to bring together the theoretical concepts of cultural sociology with events related to "Alexander" and "Jeff" in time and space. The former represents the neofunctionalist and cultural sociologist, who, in these phases, helped me classify the sociological debates in my environment and supported the feeling that it was necessary to challenge the thinking of Latin American sociology. The latter represents the person who, in work meetings, demands a high level of creativity to expand both the strong program of cultural sociology (SPCS) and civil sphere theory (CST) and who, in informal and leisure meetings, listens, gives invaluable advice and has an enormous capacity to generate ties of inclusion and solidarity among those around him. Translating a theorist like Alexander as a fact-sign involved, on the one hand, an effort to reconstruct his proposal with the few theoretical pieces that could be found at first in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s. On the other hand, It involved creatively using his theoretical proposal to deprovincialize cultural sociology and the theory of the civil sphere. However, I also translated his texts into Spanish to generate a community to discuss in my academic field. The impact of meeting "Jeff" was evident. The conversations with him positively affected the technical aspects with which I translated some of Alexander's works.

Patrick Baert & Hao Li (University of Cambridge, UK)

Existence Theory and Inequalities

* Existence Theory, Reproductive Sociology, Inequalities, China *

Existence theory aims to present a new theoretical framework for explaining social behaviour. The basic premise is that individuals organise their futures around a set of existential milestones; without the successful accomplishment of these milestones, the individuals concerned would consider their lives as incomplete (e.g. Baert, Morgan and Ushiyama 2022, 2024). In this presentation we explore how existence theory can help to conceptualise social inequalities. There are at least two distinct ways in which agency and inequality come into play in relation to the pursuit of existential milestones. First, there is the issue to what extent the individuals are able to define or articulate their own milestones (and/or reject socially prescribed milestones) without facing legal or cultural sanctions. Second, there is the issue to what extent the people involved have the resources to pursue those milestones.To illustrate this, we use empirical material around the expectations surrounding parenthood in China.Drawing on qualitative fieldwork with urban women in China, we examine how parenthood emerges as a contested existential milestone. Through semi-structured interviews, participants articulate complex negotiations between internalised social expectations and personal visions of a „"complete life"". In addition, a visual method based on collage has been used to explore how individuals symbolically construct and contest these milestones, offering a deeper understanding of the inequalities embedded in existential meaning-making.

Patrick Baert & Sebastian Raza (University of Cambridge, UK)

Sociology of Taboos

* Liberalism, Taboos, Populism, Political Sociology *

Social anthropologists and psychologists have written extensively on the role of taboos in social life. In contrast, sociologists have given the topic scant attention. In this presentation, we develop an outline of a sociology of taboos with a particular focus on political taboos. First, we define taboos and present a typology of different types of taboos. Secondly, we provide a brief historical outline of the relationship between political liberalism and taboos. Thirdly, we provide a potential explanation for the fact that, within sociology, taboos are relatively unexplored. Fourthly, we develop a tentative framework for explaining under what circumstances taboos come into existence, why they may persist and what their effects might be. The analysis of political taboos, we conclude, can offer sociologists a new perspective on social change, particularly on how taboos limit future actions and thoughts and taboo-breaking messages upend those very same limits.

Dominik Bartmanski (Humboldt University Berlin, DE) & Eduardo de la Fuente (University of South Australia, AU)

The Sociology of Meaning and the Meaning of Sociology: Or What Emplaced Experience Can Teach Us About Meaning in General

* Sociology, Meaning, Phenomenology, Landscape and Emplacement: World-Opening Experiences *

In a talk at the New School in 1992, later published in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Kurt Wolff proposed the "distinction… between the meaning of sociology and sociology of meaning, must be conceived anew". His reasoning was that separating the two was one of the "elements" of our civilizational "turmoil"; and limited what sociology could contribute to considerations of existential meaning. Wolff's solution was the notion of "surrender-and-catch". He explained his approach as based on a type of "total experience" or "cognitive love" capable of grasping "what happens when we see a street for the first time, when we meet a new person, see a new part of the city, enter a house not entered before." One of the attractive features of Wolff's approach is there is no single model of meaningful "surrender experiences" (i.e., aesthetic, religious, embodied, rebellious, ethnographic, and even writing experiences, are all considered by the author). However, despite this multiplicity, many of his examples highlight emplaced experience and the "innumerable… characteristics" humans share "with animals, organisms, or inanimate objects" – something also present in the writings of Simmel, Plessner, Schutz, and Merleau-Ponty. We revisit these classic yet somewhat under-represented contributions and pose the question: why has sociology either struggled with or ignored topics such as landscape or space or the environment of social experience? And how might engaging with emplaced experience help reconnect the sociology of meaning with the meaning of sociology? Our argument is landscape and emplacement are sites for what Husserl's disciple Ingarden conceptualized as "aesthetic encounters"; and propose a cultural sociology based on the idea of „"world-opening"" experiences (Schutz and Wolff) and which understands ‚theory' as a set of „"existential practices/exercises"" (Domanski and Hadot, respectively).

Werner Binder (Masaryk University, Brno, CZ)

Theorizing Artificial Intelligence: The Cultural Construction of Intentionality and Agency

* Artificial Intelligence, Phenomenology, Cultural Sociology *

Cultural sociologists have long argued that technology is never neutral but loaded with affect and meaning. Discourses about technology are shaped by processes of re-enchantment which endow technological artifacts with new meanings. This is particularly salient in the field of artificial intelligence, where we find apocalyptic doomsday scenarios as well as messianic prophecies about the coming of the "singularity". Since Alan Turing and his critics, the question "Can machines think?" and related questions – such as can machines 'truly' be intelligent,

conscious, sentient etc. – have been hotly debated. Due to the success of machine learning and LLMs, these questions have not only become increasingly relevant, but have also left the confines of expert circles and science fiction to become part of a broader public discourse – and an object of sociological analysis. Recently, authors like Massimo Airoldi (2021) and Elena Esposito (2022) have offered (cultural) sociological accounts of AI as socialized machine that is able to participate in communication, yet they largely bypass the problem of the cultural construction of intentionality and agency, which I focus on in this talk. I do not aim to answer questions such as: Can machines can be truly intelligent? Do they possess intentionality or agency? Instead, drawing on social phenomenology and cultural sociology, I propose to transform these questions into an empirical research program that investigates the cultural construction of agency and intentionality. Starting from Turing's original "imitation game" (1950), I discuss Thomas Luckmann's seminal essay "On the Boundaries of the Social World" (1970) and his "de-socialization of the universe" thesis. I argue that the recent integration of AI technologies into out life-worlds can be described as a "re-socialization of the universe". Cultural sociology, I conclude, enables us to analyze how people are transforming machines into intelligent agents thus re-drawing the boundaries of the social world.

Bettina Bloesl (University of Innsbruck, AT)

Governing Uncertainty: Global Health as a Site of Contested Transformation

* Future, Global Governance, Global Health *

The future has become a site of political struggle—nowhere more visibly than in the domain of global health. As overlapping crises intensify and calls for equity and solidarity gain momentum—especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the negotiation of a Pandemic Treaty—questions emerge about the nature and direction of the changes taking place. Do these developments mark a genuine transformation in global governance, or do they reinscribe existing structures under the language of reform?
Approaching global health as a key arena of sociopolitical transformation, this contribution draws on Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality and theorizes neoliberalism as a rationality of governance that continues to shape institutional responses to crisis. Health policy and infrastructure offer a particularly revealing lens into how imaginaries of the future are mobilized, how uncertainty is governed, and how longstanding inequalities are reproduced or challenged. Rather than claiming a decisive rupture, the analysis frames global health as a space of contested transition—defined by institutional ambivalence, shifting norms, and competing visions. It contributes to broader theoretical debates on transformation by asking: How are futures made governable? What modes of change become legible, actionable, or desirable—and what remains excluded? In raising these questions, the paper affirms the role of sociological theory in keeping open the space between critique and possibility.

Ingolfur Blühdorn (University for Economics and Business, Vienna, AT)

Untenability: Late Modernity and the Trauma of Critical Social Theory

* Dialectic, Eco-Sociology, Late Modernity, Ungovernability *

Ecologically, late-modern societies are heading for disaster; democracy and democratization end up in ungovernability; the ideal of the *autonomous subject* has become anachronistic. The progressive, eco-emancipatory project (EEP) lies in tatters. While some still sound the alarm bells, others celebrate the end of the *green hegemony*. Adopting an eco-sociological perspective, the talk contributes to theorizing late modernity and the new post-liberal era. Drawing on Ulrich Beck's theory of reflexive modernization and his distinction between a first, industrial, and a second, reflexive, modernity, it suggests that the logic of the EEP itself is an important driver of the transformation toward a third, postliberal modernity: In the wake of a triple dialectic – of sustainability, emancipation, and democracy – it has rendered the EEP outdated and helped to pave the way for a new modernity beyond the values that once underpinned this project and Western liberal modernity at large.

Andrea Mubi Brighenti (University of Trento, IT) & Lorenzo Sabetta (Università di Roma La Sapienza, IT)

Social Theory, From the Darkest Hour to Daybreak

* Politics of Knowledge, Theory as Practice, Inspiration Space, Vitalism *

Today, thinking back to the classics in sociology engenders a kind of nostalgia, along with a sense of powerlessness and crisis. Unlike the giants of social theorizing, who developed arguments not only intellectually relevant but also socially compelling, we feel that the increased sophistication of contemporary theories has paradoxically translated into an increase in their weakness vis-à-vis the Zeitgeist. Anti-intellectualism and anti-science are on the rise: everywhere we see vehement attacks, not simply against sociology, but against the very idea of argument-based reasoning. In short, the war mindset dominates the scene. And yet, drawing precisely from Sun Tzu's Art of War, "it is on the occasions in which everything is to be feared that it is necessary to fear nothing; it is when one is surrounded by all the dangers that it is not necessary to dread any; it is when one is without resources that it is necessary to count on all of them." We believe it is both possible and desirable to continue social theory, not only as an intellectual and scientific endeavor, but as a daily practice of research life, where: (-) we could move beyond simple idealized formulas, drawing the sharpest distinction between theorizing and ideology; (-) each researcher could find their own unique path and personal blend, staying clear of orthodoxy; (-) initiatives of all sorts amongst theorists could be launched and multiplied, regardless of their performance, just for the joy of doing; (-) theorists could freely merge in all sorts of civil society initiatives so as to spur biodiversity in the public 'ecology of mind'; (-) a more confident and consciously self-congratulatory attitude could be promoted for any sort of theoretical achievement: each new idea deserves a party to celebrate it! Resist the present, with joy.

Craig Alan Richard Browne (University of Sydney, AU)
Political Imaginaries and Ideological Metamorphoses

* Political Imaginaries, Ideology, Social Transformation, Domination, Critique *

The history of ideology is one of mutations, variations and inversions of meaning. Ideology is a notion that has been promulgated through divergent conceptions and interpretations. The notions of social and political imaginaries were conditioned by the need to explain the metamorphosis of an emancipatory ideology into a legitimation of regimes of domination. Similarly, there is a considerable need to explain today the contemporary metamorphoses of ideologies. Notably, there is a need to explain the sources of the renewal of authoritarian and racist ideologies. These were either presumed to belong to the past - even though they persisted, or were considered an overhang of their suppression, rather than subjection to rational public critique through their open expression. The last decade has no less witnessed the internal erosion of highly influential recent ideologies through the effects of their partial realization, such as neoliberalism and globalization. Further, the ideological assumptions that underpin progressive ideals, like those of human rights regimes, have been exposed and challenged from the perspective of social justice and not just conservative standpoints. Political imaginaries, I argue, enable the elucidation of these metamorphoses and their implications because imaginaries comprise the deeper sources of ideologies, express the multiplicity of meanings and significations present in ideologies, and reconcile the rational and non-logical, or irrational, constitution of ideological understandings and practices. Imaginaries shape ideologies through their instituting generative matrixes of meanings, powers of projecting beyond existing reality or instituted society, and crystallizing antinomian relations to the world. Given these various attributes, the contemporary period's ideological metamorphoses are traced to modern political imaginaries' antithetical institution and the current, but protracted, crises in the representation of society.

Arthur Bueno (Universität Passau, DE)
Resonance and Revolution

* Georg Lukács, Hartmut Rosa, Struggle for Resonance, Alienation *

The relationship between resonance and revolution is far from straightforward. Rosa's theory expands Marx's critique of capitalism in novel directions, similarly envisioning a revolution aimed at overcoming the alienation of late modernity. At the same time, it provides valid reasons to exercise caution regarding central aspects of Marxist conceptions of social emancipation. Notably, Rosa's emphasis on the receptivity and the unavailability involved in resonant world-relations diverges from the focus on agency and instrumental control prevalent in most notions of revolution. Furthermore, resonance as an adaptive mode of experience is fundamentally at odds with the antagonism associated with repulsive world-relations, which,

however, plays a significant role in Marxist notions of radical change. A struggle for resonance may, then, appear as a contradiction in terms: it could entail the risk of the means (agential, instrumental, and antagonistic) undermining the ends (receptive, unavailable, and adaptive). I will argue, however, that the concept of resonance is not only politically compatible with but intrinsically linked to struggles for radical transformation. By reinterpreting Lukács' analysis of revolutionary consciousness through the lens of Rosa's theory, one can show that resonant world-relations may not simply result *from but arise through* collective struggles against capitalist alienation.

Carla Campardo (Sciences Po Toulouse, FR)
The Role of Race and Gender in the Constitution of the World Capitalist System From a Decolonial Perspective

* Race, Gender, Decolonial Theory *

After the neoliberal turn that marked the political, economic and intellectual sphere in Latin America at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, studies on dependent capitalism and the condition of underdevelopment entered a crisis. In this context, decolonial studies emerged to fill the intellectual void left by Latin American Marxism and to develop a new epistemology of loco citato thought: a critical reading of dominant capitalism and neoliberal hegemony, which reproduces coloniality on a global scale at different levels. Thus, the group starts from Wallerstein's theoretical construction of the world-system in order to develop notions, ideas and concepts that allow it to denounce contemporary forms of the relations of domination.In this sense, we seek to ask what is the role of race and gender in the submission of Latin America to the hegemonic countries and the dependent and underdeveloped role it occupies in the world system according to a decolonial theory. We argue that for such a theory the colonial process represented a new model of capitalist power in which all ethnicities acquired a racial and gender connotation, thus making new historical social identities emerge. The colonial process represented a new model of capitalist power in which all ethnicities acquired a racial and gender connotation, thus making new historical social identities emerge. The creation of a race and gender identity of the population served, in this sense, to legitimize the relations of colonial domination between conquerors and conquered and established a hierarchy, serving as the axis of the new model of power and contributing to the dependent insertion of the Latin American continent in the structure of the modern world-colonial system.In order to do so, we will conduct a review of the literature on the topic, performing a systemic approach to historical processes and a critical evaluation of the bibliographic sources on the subject. In this way we draw on the authors who formed the Modernity/Coloniality Group, like Anibal Quijano (2000), Santiago Castro-Gómez (2005) and Maldonado-Torres (2007) and bring a more feminist view of the theory, with Luciana Ballestrin et Maria Lugones (2008).

Natalia Coppolino (University of Catania, IT)

Utopia as a Method for Sociological Inquiry and Territorial Design

* Urban Utopia, Territorial Planning, Social Justice, Real Utopias, Transformative Methodology *

The concept of utopia, traditionally relegated to the realm of idealistic thought, has regained prominence in contemporary sociological and urban debates as a critical tool for rethinking territorial planning.Far from being an abstract exercise, utopia emerges as a theoretical and methodological device for challenging the hegemony of neoliberal rationality and envisioning alternatives grounded in social justice, environmental sustainability, and collective well-being. This paper aims to explore the potential of utopia as a method by analyzing how the concept of urban utopia has evolved over time: from classical and Renaissance thought, where ideal cities reflected moral and cosmological orders, to the socialist utopias of the nineteenth century that imagined egalitarian models of coexistence, and finally to the functionalist proposals of the twentieth century, based on rational order, zoning, and technical efficiency.

In parallel, particular attention will be given to "utopias of the possible" and to the practical initiatives that embody their principles.

The analysis draws on the theoretical contributions of Karl Mannheim, David Harvey, Erik Olin Wright, and Ruth Levitas. Mannheim conceptualizes utopia as a transformative force capable of disrupting the existing order; Harvey critiques the contradictions of the capitalist city and advocates for the collective right to the city; Wright introduces the paradigm of "real utopias," oriented toward building feasible and egalitarian institutional arrangements. Levitas, in turn, understands utopia as a heuristic device composed of critique, anticipation, and reconstruction, offering a methodology that integrates imagination with spatial and social planning.

Adopting utopia as a methodological lens implies a radical rethinking of the values, tools, and goals of planning. In this perspective, utopia is not an escape from reality, but a critical practice capable of guiding transformations toward more just, inclusive, and sustainable urban futures.

Martina Cvajner (University of Trento, IT)

Exploring Existing Social Interaction Through Virtual Reality: Testing the Uncanny Valley Effect

* Uncanny Valley, Interaction *

The current developments of the fields of virtual reality and human-robot interaction provide a precious resource for all social theorists interested in the analysis of social interaction. Are the existing theories of social interaction able to provide insights on virtual environments and interactions with non-human actors? Philip Smith (2014) has already observed how the uncanny valley effect could be an important stimulus for cultural sociology. The present paper explores the Uncanny Valley Effect (hereafter UVE) in human-robot interaction using an innovative virtual reality (VR) methodology. Conducted in three experimental iterations with a

total of 60 participants, the study aimed to test the existence of the UVE by examining human responses to humanoid and mannequin-like robot models in a controlled VR environment. Participants engaged in customizing these robot models and simulated real-world interactions, providing a unique context for evaluating their perceptions and preferences.

Validated measures, including Likert scales and open-ended questions, were used to assess participants' responses across three dimensions: humanness, eeriness, and attractiveness. Consistent results across the three iterations confirmed that participants perceived humanoid robots as more humanlike and attractive, while mannequin-like models elicited higher levels of eeriness, supporting the theoretical framework of the Uncanny Valley. Notably, unexpectedly high attractiveness ratings for humanoid models—potentially influenced by participants' satisfaction with their customizations—challenge some assumptions about the relationship between realism and discomfort. The study also revealed significant gender and cultural differences in participants' preferences, further complicating the interplay between anthropomorphic design and user perceptions.

By directly testing the Uncanny Valley hypothesis, this study contributes to social theory by revealing the psychological and social dynamics underpinning human-robot interactions. It highlights VR's potential as a powerful tool for exploring these phenomena, offering insights into the cultural and aesthetic factors that shape human responses to non-human entities. Moreover, the findings raise critical questions about the sociotechnical imaginaries driving the design and acceptance of robots in diverse societal contexts.

Ronjon Paul Datta (University of Windsor, CA)

Checking Accounts: Foucault, Morality and the Politics of Discourse in the Twenty-First Century

* Discourse, Exclusion, Jurisdiction, Post-Truth, Foucault, Politics *

Most Foucauldian work on "the political" has focused on his analytic of power and attention to "governmental rationalities" with their "programmes." In emphasizing that modern modalities of power are "positive," in contrast to being "negative" (e.g., the power to say "no"), Foucauldian social analysts have failed to appreciate Foucault's own theory of "systems of exclusion." Those systems are constitutive of the order of veridical discourse affecting how normative judgments are made. However, the recent problematization of "post-truth" and "free speech" in social media, arguably a reflex against the hegemony of post-political expertise, invites a return to Foucault's archaeological concern with the politics of discourse and systems of exclusion. While generative AI simulates the "rules of formation" in discourse (cf. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*), Foucault's rather Durkheimian approach to systems of exclusion provides the tools by which to analyze how "post-truth" amounts to an *inversion* of the characteristic way that "veridiction" (accounts of the "is") and "jurisdiction" (arguments about the "ought") are linked in political modernity. Absent a "modern morality" that

Foucault claimed in *The Order of Things* is "impossible," modern rule has typically meant that jurisdiction follows veridiction. The present can thus be understood as characterized by the emergence of a counter-political metaphysics in which "the ought" takes priority over "the is" and "fact-checking" as a priority is displaced.This suggests that the form of discourse *excluded* from the veridical domain (e.g., social media posts) has migrated to the *juridical* domain and "normative judgment" becomes hegemonic, displacing the importance of the veracity of accounts. A neo-Foucauldian approach to the present thus becomes possible, and the paper will conclude with what this might mean for a renewed problematic of ideology pertinent to the contemporary problematization of the political and its reactions to the erosion of fact-based politics.

Stéphane Dufoix (Université Paris-Nanterre, FR)
Epistemic Justice as a Future of Sociology: The Need to Decolonize Sociology
* Epistemic Justice, History of Sociology, Academic Dependency, Decolonization of Sociology *

If the idea of "epistemic injustice" was coined by British philosopher Miranda Fricker in 1990 and made popular in her eponymous 2007 book, its content is rather strictly limited, even in its more recent developments, insofar as it does not examine a more global "epistemic violence" – historically exercised in colonial or neo-colonial territories by colonial powers, and now perpetuated within a canonical narrative that almost entirely invisibilizes the existence of sociological practices, reflections, schools, theories, concepts, epistemological and methodological stances. Formulations like "epistemic violence" (Spivak), "epistemicide" or "cognitive empire" (Sousa Santos and Ndlovu-Gatsheni) in the last forty years or so attest to these challenges.

However, the interesting point is that these reflections are not so recent at all. Earlier on, at least from the 1950s onwards, sociologists from Brazil (Alberto Guerreiro Ramos), Singapore (Syed Farid Alatas), Colombia (Orlando Fals Borda), India (Satish Saberwal) or Morocco (Abdelkébir Khatibi) – to cite but a few – have pointed to this main problem of Western social science. Their acknowledgement and struggle against "academic dependency" on the Western theories, concepts, authors etc. have almost only met absolute silence.

The growing numbers of non-Western sociologists and sociological literature from non-Western countries, as well as the recent epistemological success of some counter-hegemonic academic movements – notably the Modernity/Coloniality one – has made it even more urgent to rethink the relationship between the sociology of the future and the future of sociology.

My assumption relies on two ideas: The future of sociology lies in the rewriting of its forgotten and silenced past; The sociology of the future has to take the issue of epistemic hegemony into consideration in order to envision a new horizon of sociological universalism that would pay greater attention to the diversity and "relevance" of social situations in different countries of the world.

These two paths, that certainly could not be understood separately, certainly constitute both the most necessary evolutions within the discipline, while being rather absent from the priorities of most sociologists – in the North or in the South.

Martin Durdovic (Czech Academy of Science, CZ)
Sociological Theory and Energy Social Research
* Energy *

The increasing social impacts of energy technology innovations and the repercussions of the energy crisis of 2021-2022 highlight the urgent need to study the relationship between energy and society. Over the past 15 years, energy social research has been steadily developing, as evidenced by journals such as Energy Research & Social Science and Energy Policy. As energy-related issues become an integral part of sociological expertise, it raises questions about the specific role sociological theory can play in energy social research. Conversely, it also prompts an inquiry into the challenges and opportunities that the topic of energy presents for the development of sociological theory. This oral presentation will primarily draw on articles published in the Energy Research & Social Science journal to discuss trends and limitations in the use of sociological theory within energy social research. It will consider various theoretical approaches from the social sciences and humanities that have influenced energy research. Additionally, a reflection on the current state of the field will be provided, along with possible avenues for future exploration.

Gregor Fitzi (Viadrina University Frankfurt Oder, DE)
Intermittent Futures in Transnormative Societies
* Normative Intermittency, Failing Social Structuration, Crumbling Late Capitalism, Ideology, Utopia *

Appadurai has demonstrated the difficulties of thinking systematically about the social future. Aspirations draw the blurred contours of the future as a social product, while statistical predictions set it on the obligatory track of probability. Societies struggle in a tension between 'ethics of possibility' and 'ethics of probability'. The coming avalanche of numbers must not automatically prevail. Yet, is it possible to construct other futures? The social opportunities to practice futures are unequally distributed and the conflict of dreamscapes is open-ended. The question then arises as to how sociology can contribute to the study of future openings or their obstruction as social possibilities.

Historically, each epoch produces its own images of possible futures, so that a sequence of ‚past futures' (Koselleck) can be reconstructed. But how can sociology understand whether contemporary societies still have this capacity? Thanks to Mannheim, the question of social durée can be systematised by theorising two opposing social management of time. Ideology

is responsible for the reproduction of the established status quo. Utopia, on the other hand, materialises social projection into the future and the possibility of constructing a different social structuration. It is a latent knowledge of possible futures that needs to be actualised.

The question today is whether the social function of future time management is present, latent or completely paralysed. Sociology can make a decisive contribution to its own future by critically answering this question. Due to a recurrent failure of normative structuration processes (Fitzi 2022), contemporary societies have great difficulties in dealing with their possible future. The paper analyses the shortcomings and possible development of transformative social action that could encourage the resumption of conscious future construction in contemporary societies.

Helena Flam (Leipzig University, DE)
On the Role of Emotions in the De-Institutionalization Processes
* Emotions, De-Institutionalization *

A major contributor to neo-institutionalism, Ronald L. Jepperson, relatively recently wrote (2021 [2019]:47) that It is unclear how one can do research on the institutionalization and de-institutionalization processes. In my presentation I would like to address the processes of de-institutionalization. I will depart from a definition of institutions understood in a Weberian manner as a complex of organizational structures, featuring a (mostly hierarchical) division of labor, a set of tasks, a dynamic relationship with (equal and dependent, variously defined) outsiders as well as the foundational, legitimating myths, beliefs, rituals and (cultural) practices. In contrast to the normative-cognitivist neo-institutionalists and "institutional work" advocates, I will ague that institutions and more specifically their emergence, maintenance and destruction are intensely emotional and greatly affect the emotional rule regimes characterizing these institutions. In the final part of my presentation I will provide two examples of emotion-laden de-institutionalization processes. The first focuses on the Catholic Church in the US. It illustrates how revelations about the sexual harassment undermined the emotional rule regime on which a denial-prone, individualized approach to this issue within the Catholic Church hitherto rested, replacing it with an unprecedented, collective decision-making, leading up to a new policy. The second focuses on the recent de-institutionalization of the affirmative policy and Critical Race Theory/Slavery Studies in the US and the Trumpists` use of the "emotional discomfort" argument as the de-institutionalization instrument.

Stefan Gandler (Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro, MX)
The Future of Social Theory Will Be Non Eurocentric – or Will Not Be: Theoretical Reflections on a Critical Theory From the Americas
* Realist Ethos, Bolívar Echeverría, Reification, Georg Lukács, Baroque Ethos *

Indeed, social theory has to reinvent itself, rethink its relations to the world, to other disciplines and to its own history. One of the core moments will be overcoming socio-theoretical Eurocentrism–which exists also in Critical theory.

In the tradition of the Frankfurt School, the key concept needed to understand the specific dynamics of the formation of consciousness (partially formed by the collective unconscious and spontaneous forms of organization in collective life) is that of reification, inherited from Lukács' "History and Class Consciousness". Despite the relevance of this work for understanding capitalist society, one of its foremost disadvantages is in its inability to significantly describe the breadth of forms of everyday life that underlie capitalist reproduction. In a certain sense, we can see the concept of 'reification' as something which captures a specifically prevalent form in North-Western Europe, one which the Ecuadorian-Mexican philosopher Bolívar Echeverría conceives as the 'realist ethos.'

It is because of reification that one is unable to perceive of the inherit contradictions in social forms today. In turn, it redefines them as 'things' which are unquestionable, eternal and no longer subject to change. The 'baroque ethos', on the other hand, allows one both to perceive of and live with these contradictions without negating or denying them; unlike the realist ethos, it plays with them and, in a certain sense, refunctionalizes them. On the one hand, what Echeverría calls the 'baroque ethos,' which in Latin America coexists with the 'realist ethos,' is not adequately acknowledged by classical critique of ideology based solely upon the concept of reification; on the other, it is necessary to note that Echeverría's theory of the historical ethe pays a certain price for the contributions it makes, thereby falling prey to some of the limitations that have actually been overcome by the critique of ideology.

João Mauro Gomes Vieira de Carvalho (LabPol/UNESP, BR)
What Means Democratic Crisis? Theoretical Outline for a Sociological Approach
* Democratic Crisis *

Western public is prone to perceive a crisis in democracy. Many authors and social scientists discuss the democratic backsliding, the erosion of institutions, and the rise of authoritarianism. Most analyses are however made from an institutionalist point of view. Much less is said from a sociological perspective. Being a science of crisis, Sociology can address the problem and elaborate it theoretically. To contribute to that effort, this paper aims to draw a sociological concept of crisis, grounded on some of the current trends of the discipline, with a focus on

interpretative sociology. That concept understands crisis as a moment of possible disruption, when the tension between reproductive and transformative forces is especially sharp. Thereafter, it argues in favour of using that concept to reflect on democratic crisis, drawing back to the sociological aspects that provide the basis of modern democratic politics, such as the State, public sphere, and representative party politics. It shows how those sociological grounds of democracy are under pressure of disruptive forces. To clarify the issue, it will analyse the crisis of the public sphere as an example, showing how economic and technological developments have disorganized the channels of communication and imitation that shape public opinion, destabilizing the mediation between State and society, simultaneously posing a problem in the form of disinformation and populist mobilization, but also opening new opportunities for democratic politics. It concludes that a sociological interpretation of the phenomenon of crisis is essential to better understand the crisis of democracy and reflect on its causes and characteristics, providing insights that contribute to democratic institutions in facing the challenges posed by our time and to improving towards the future.

Jayme Gomes (Freie Universität Berlin, DE)

Decline and Fall of Sociological Theory?
A Discussion of Diagnosis and Prospects

* Sociological Theory, Crisis, Decline, Future, Prospects *

Social sciences are usually taken to be self-reflexive enterprises. In other words, the investigations of societal processes and dynamics are understood to be codependent on the way these sciences reflect upon their own theoretical, normative, and epistemological status. In sociology's case, this self-reflexive character was historically tied to a central attention given by its practitioners to the role of sociological theory and, to a certain extent, that of its disciplinary classics. In recent years, though, many sociologists have pointed, in diverse ways, to a kind of crisis in sociological theory. The goal of the present paper is to analyze the meanings of this alluded crisis in the recent sociological literature, as well as its possible causes and prospects. Four specific dimensions of the field of theoretical production are specially analyzed and discussed: a) structural conditions for theory production; b) the means/incentives for professional sociologists to produce theory; c) the availability of integrative frames of reference in the field theory production; d) the ultimate-values underlying the theoretical production. The investigation seeks to understand if/how changes in these dimensions might have led to the alluded crisis and what open paths of change might be expected to lie on the horizon of sociological theory.

Ariane Hanemaayer (Brandon University, CA)

Making the Study of Impossibility Possible:
A Programme for Sociological Analysis

* Impossibility, Critical Sociology *

What is impossibility? And does it have a place in sociological analysis? This paper argues that impossibility is an important concept for critical sociology and spells out a research agenda for how one might go about using it in their explanatory work. In my paper, impossibility refers to the ability of an intervention to obtain the desired states of affairs through social or political technologies. In other words, are the present conditions enabling or constraining particular outcomes and/or states of affairs? To answer this question, I will advocate for a de-centring of the human and a focus on the relations that organize human activity. Foucault first called the prison an "impossible project" in an interview about his work in *Discipline and Punish*. Building on this metaphor, the critical tradition, as well as some empirical and historical examples from the sociology of health, I will sketch out a research agenda for the study of impossibility at three interrelated levels of analysis: the phenomenological, the institutional, and structural. The upshots of this concept, I will argue, is an evaluative framework for the assessment of political and institutional interventions. By analyzing the relations that organize human activity alongside the justifications and policies that claim to deal with identified social problems, sociologists can analyze the ability for that intervention to succeed. This is of particular importance to critical theory, which aims to both understand forms of power and emancipate people from oppression. Knowing the conditions of impossibility can enable sociologists to theorize alternatives, and assess under which conditions these solutions may (or may not) arise.

Hannes Hautz (University of Innsbruck, AT)

The Production of Data-Driven Student Subjectivities Through Learning Analytics: An Algorithmic Governmentality Perspective

* Learning Analytics, Subjectivation, Algorithmic Governmentality, Foucault, Critical Data Studies *

This paper critically examines the impact of learning analytics (LA) on students' processes of subjectivation in higher education. LA refers to data-driven technologies that collect and analyse information about learners—primarily via learning management systems—with the aim of understanding and optimising learning processes in real time. The existing body of literature on LA is largely affirmative, focusing on effective implementation and adoption of LA systems across all educational levels. What is largely ignored in the debates on LA is that the use of educational technologies is not a value-neutral process that objectively analyses, measures, and presents data but is itself actively involved in the generation of social reality. So far, little is known on how the use of LA influences the self-formation processes of students and shapes their subjectivities.

The paper introduces the Foucault-inspired concept of 'algorithmic governmentality' as a novel lens for critically analysing data analytics applications in education. Drawing on a mixed qualitative methodology, we examined student narratives to uncover governing practices of LA systems. The findings suggest that LA situates students within a digitally mediated regime of continuous competition and surveillance, akin to a perpetual algorithmic panopticon. This environment promotes technologies of governance and self-governance, encouraging students to align their conduct with normative expectations embedded within the algorithmic architecture, thereby becoming data-driven subjects. The introduction of LA tends to circumvent practices of reflexivity, constraining students' agency and contributing to the (re) production of educational inequalities.

The paper offers a theoretical contribution to the field of critical data studies and sociology of education, and offers empirical insights into the ambivalent power effects of data practices on students' self-concepts and behaviours. Thereby, the paper opens up possibilities for disrupting established approaches to LA and reimagining alternative digital futures.

Ana Paula Hey (University of São Paulo, BR/Innsbruck, AT)

The Possibilities of Investigating Forms of Differentiation, Hierarchies and Modes of Coordination in National Power Structures

* Relational Sociology, Power Structure, Field of Power, Elites, Inequalities *

My presentation will focus on the idea of power structures, and the construction of a national power structure, and its forms of differentiation, hierarchies and modes of coordination.

This concern stems from my experience in the field of the sociology of elites (intellectual, academic, cultural and political in interface/fusion with the field of power and the state), but above all with the aim of achieving an approach that allows us to think about power in its broadest sense and rooted in society. Here's a first point of departure for positioning myself in these studies: the elite is not just about its economic approach, with the tools of an economic sociology, but implies a relational sociology centred on the relationships between different social spaces, each with its own logic and dynamics.

Another aspect concerns the growing and intense internationalisation (or globalisation or transnationalisation), which in addition to adding changes in the economic sense of productive organisation, has brought above all „"the elucidation of how policies at the national level may be influencing elite power, as well as identifying and empirically explaining the dynamics of transnational convergence or divergence (Cousin and Chauvin, 2015)" ". An international comparative approach can „"bring to light some of the possible impacts of variation at the institutional level. Work focussed on a single country often finds it difficult to identify the effects at the national level due to the lack of variation or, on the contrary, may insist excessively on what they consider to be the essential characteristics of a country and/or a culture (Jodhka and Naudet 2017).

Till Hilmar & Sylvia Herzog (University of Vienna, AT)

Climate Boundaries: How Affective Notions of "Us" and "Them" in the Climate Crisis Are Linked to Broader Narratives About the Future

* Climate *

In this paper, we ask how solidarities and symbolic boundaries are formed and articulated in the context of the climate crisis in four European societies: Austria, Slovakia, Norway, and Spain. As a theoretical contribution, we combine a Durkheimian and a Bourdieusian approach to symbolic boundaries and argue that a feminist sociology of emotions perspective provides novel and timely impulses to understand constructions of "us" and "them" and resources of solidarity in the climate crisis. We define climate boundaries as the boundaries individuals draw by evaluating people and social groups to make sense of everyday attitudes and behaviors related to the climate crisis. The sociology of emotions perspective helps us better understand how individuals make sense of climate issues through their embeddedness in everyday social relationships, and how they perceive matters of justice, inequality, and solidarity around climate as integral to these everyday constellations. As a contribution to the RC16 conference theme in Innsbruck, we will foreground the question of how visions of the future that circulate as part of broader narratives about the climate crisis (and the emotions associated with them, such as climate anxiety, or hope) become articulated in personal stories. We pay special attention to how climate boundaries link spaces of experience (references to the past) with horizons of expectations (references to the future). By connecting the findings from our interviews with broader meanings that circulate in the public, we show that climate boundaries are a key element of civil sphere contestations. The empirical core of our project are 30 interviews on climate boundaries and solidarities with individuals with different class backgrounds respectively in Austria, Slovakia, Spain and Norway (120 interviews in total) as well as a comparative look at findings from public opinion surveys on climate as well as relevant public debates. We will devote special attention to the case of Austria in our presentation. Our paper is part of the Horizon Europe project CIDAPE – Climate, Inequality, and Democratic Action: The Force of Political Emotions (2024-2027). Keywords: climate, solidarity, symbolic boundaries, emotions, temporality

Mervyn Horgan (University of Guelph, CA) & Anders Vassenden (University of Stavanger, NO)

The Messy Meso: Social Theory's Group Problem

* Group, Ontology, Interaction Order, Macro-Micro Linkage *

The group's status as a unit of analysis in sociology remains strangely ambiguous. For many, all individual/society and micro/macro relations are mediated by groups: groups are the primary—and for some, exclusive—means through which individuals develop belonging and commitment (Fine & Hallett 2022). While analytically generative, beginning from the group

raises as many questions as it answers. This we call the *group problem*. From our vantage as theoretically-oriented ethnographers seeking to attune cultural sociology to everyday interaction, the *group problem* potentially limits both the kinds of discoveries sociologists might make about interaction, and the kinds of interaction order phenomena available to theorize.

Ethnographers, by virtue of their method, tend to start with groups. We take up two exceptions here. First, among public space ethnographers, while some begin with groups, others focus observations and theories derived from them on fleeting rather than sustained relations. Here features of various atmospheres, settings, and activities (rather than groups) facilitate or mitigate against interactions, particularly between strangers across various forms of social difference (Anderson 2011; Barker et al 2019; Horgan et al 2020; Low 2023). Second, while some ethnographers of people-processing institutions focus on work groups and group cultures, others centre institutional practices and interactions organized by bureaucratic necessity, where many dyadic encounters, in particular, are potentially one-offs and/or highly task-specific (Smith 1986; Vassenden et al, forthcoming). In much ethnographic work along these lines, it is implicit that 'groupness' cannot be assumed.

Our argument outlines how group-centered sociologies while valuable, may also hamper theoretical development, particularly around interaction order phenomena where persons are unknown to one another or have limited mutual knowledge. We treat these kinds of non-group-focused settings as, at best, generative for developing interactionally-attuned cultural sociologies. At worst, we suggest new ways of muddling through what we call social theory's *messy meso*.

Ronald Jacobs (University at Albany, US)
Sport, Wellness Culture, and the Contemporary Self

<div align="right">* Sport, Wellness Culture, Self *</div>

This paper explores how changes in physical culture are shaping contemporary understandings of the self. In sociology, early theories of the self were based on a dualistic mind-body framework, which conceptualized the development of the self as a largely mental process. This theoretical bifurcation was supplemented by a normative bifurcation that privileged mental pursuits over physical ones, and that imagined the process of self-actualization as a mental activity. But developments in neuroscience have rendered this kind of bifurcation untenable. As the product of an interaction between mind and body, the development of the self involves both physical and mental activities. Today, in fact, physical activity is seen as central to wellness, and core physical challenges (i.e., sport) are seen as one key route toward self-actualization.

While there has been a growing fusion of sport and wellness at the industry level, they do not offer the same physical technologies for self-control and self-development. In certain respects, in fact, there is a basic contradiction between sport and wellness, in terms of the resources they offer to the self. Wellness culture offers a series of strategic interventions and physiological/pharmaceutical shortcuts geared toward the optimization of the body, while sport offers an ethic of perseverance and growth based on the toleration and the embrace of physical discomfort. I explore these contradictions and identify some of the most prominent strategies for overcoming them, both in the high-performance world of sport and in the bio-hacking world of wellness. The paper ends by offering an account of how sociology (and sociological theory) could benefit from taking sport more seriously.

Paul Joosse (University of Hong Kong, HK)
Charisma, Suffering, and Saturnalia

<div align="right">* Charisma, Max Weber, Donald Trump, Sociology of Morality *</div>

This paper draws on the Nietzschean underlay to Weber's theory of charismatic revolution—specifically, the saturnalian reversal of values that occurs under the influence of *ressentiment*—in order to account for the ability of Trump and his followers to undercut and reinvent American moral culture. Reversing what Weber called the "theodicy of good fortune," charismatic leaders frequently adopt postures of moral abjection within present value systems while at the same time envisioning new social arrangements that will lift them into positions of authority. The condemnation of opponents is key to this process: from the devotionally-skewed perch where charismatic sightlines originate, such rebukes from moral authorities are rendered in parallax view, gaining a function that is opposite to condemnation's intended purpose insofar as it *authenticates* the righteousness of the one being condemned. In such circumstances, new charismatic identities are forged, existing amid an exclusive intimacy between leader and follower. Drawing on fieldwork and interviews with Trump supporters throughout the 2024 Presidential campaign, the presentation examines the salience of "garbage" to Trump's moral entrepreneurship. The case displays the importance of *ressentiment* for interpreting charismatic revolution, and it illustrates the reactive "thinness" of charismatic identitarian content. Recognition of this feature is, in turn, important for integrating charisma studies with studies of populism (which is itself usually characterized as being ideologically "thin").

Hubert Knoblauch (Technische Universität Berlin, DE)
The Empirical Theory of Science

* Empirical Theory of Science, Relfexive Methodology, Social Theorizing *

Empirical Theory of Science is a recent research program which builds on the "Philosophy" or "Theory of Science" and the multiple forms of Social Science Studies. In linking both, it is orienting towards the production of reflexive empirical knowledge about the (Social) Sciences, on the one hand, while integrating it into a general theory of Science in ways which accounts for the implicit normativity of science. In contrast to the philosophical foundation of the philosophy of science in the theory of individual cognition, it is based on a relational concept of knowledge based on Communicative Constructivism. Empirically, science is being studied in terms of interpretive methodologies on three levels of reflexivity, that is the institutional, the level of communicative forms and the level of subjective thinking. Relationing the empirical findings to the legitimizations of scientific knowledge and to different positionalities of knowledge, does not only allow for (self-)criticism of science but also for the creation of new forms. If time allows, the presentation will sketch two such forms which have been developed in the frame of a Social Science collaborative research center: Social Theorizing and Reflexive Methodology.

Romulo Lelis (Brazilian Center of Analysis and Planning, BR)
Rethinking Colonialism in Durkheim's Sociology

* Colonialism, Émile Durkheim, Ritual, French Revolution *

It has been widely assumed that Durkheimian sociology contributed to creating a sharp distinction between traditional and modern societies based on a Eurocentric bias that presents the latter as an exception to the former. Yet, a close examination of Durkheim's work may challenge this assumption. Through an in-depth analysis of his posthumously published lectures alongside *Les Formes Élémentaires de la Vie Religiuse* (1912), this paper demonstrates how Durkheim sought to make use of the model developed for studying Aboriginal Australians in his lectures in order to reevaluate European history. The topics covered include the genesis of property in Ancient Rome, the Crusades in the Middle Ages, the French Revolution, and the role of mythical truths in the Modern Era. In doing so, the paper reveals how Durkheim reversed the equation by establishing Aboriginal Australians as the model from which Europeans are understood as an outcome rather than a departure from it. It concludes by suggesting that Durkheim's encounter with colonial ethnography led to a critical reimagination of Europe through his reverse methodology.

Victor Lidz (Drexel University, US)
Comparing Two Integral Conceptions: Bourdieu's Concept of Field and Parsons' Concept of Social System

* Bourdieu, Parsons, Practice *

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice is the most widely cited theoretical basis for contemporary sociological research. In this respect, it is a successor to the theory of social action of Talcott Parsons. The two theories can be compared in many ways, but I will focus on Bourdieu's concept of field and Parsons' concept of social system. Field is a highly generalized category under which empirical domains can be examined. Fields have autonomy but may be subfields of others, may intersect with other fields, or have subfields. Each field contains some number of social positions, each controlling some capital, which may be economic, political, cultural, symbolic or a combination. Agents use capital in struggles with other agents. Parsons' analytic concept of social system derives from a mor general conception of social action with subsystems of mind, personality, social system, and culture. Social systems may be found at many levels of generality from dyads to whole societies. In each case, the four function paradigm applies. Whole societies will have four functionally distinct subsystems: institutions maintaining cultural patterns; community relationships of solidarity; political system; and economy. Each subsystem is internally differentiated and has processual interchanges with the other three.

Anna Lund (Stockholm University, SE)
Civil Sphere Ethnography

* Civil Sphere *

This presentation proposes a methodological position, which I call civil sphere ethnography. It produces knowledge about relations beyond situated knowledge or specific groups. Inspired by civil sphere theory, civil sphere ethnography acknowledges that feeling for others matters and is thus connected to a double epistemological break. First, the awareness that taken-for-granted concepts and values informs thinking. Second, there is a need to be aware of the sociology of culture paradigm and how it creates a critical sociological gaze that reduces societal relations to a question of dominance. In practice, civil sphere ethnography focuses on narratives, interactions, things, emotions, and subjectivities and how these multidimensional layers of lived experience interplay with civil sphere discourse. In other words, the civil sphere ethnographer observes how a social drama unfolds between civil and uncivil forces that put solidarity in play alongside relations of dominance. Harriet Martineau, one of the founders of sociology, pointed out that you cannot understand dancing unless you hear the music. A civil sphere ethnography allows us to hear the music so we can understand the dancing.

Andrea Maccarini (University of Padova, IT)

Socialization Theory at the Crossroads: Reflexivity, Resonance and Identity 'After' Modernity

Socialization, Reflexivity, Resonance, Relations of Concern, Anxiety

This paper is part of a wider theoretical project, which aims to develop a consistent theoretical frame through which socialization processes can be (re)conceptualized as relation-to-the-world. The aim is pursued by bringing together a strand of critical realist and morphogenetic social theory, Hartmut Rosa's theory of resonance, and a relational approach, conceiving of socialization as relational reflexivity.

 Such an enterprise could be interesting on two different, but related accounts. First, it could provide some conceptual tools to reconstruct socialization theory, which I claim to have lost complexity and explanatory power within the field of sociology, after its classical modern formulations and the related critique. Such a reconstruction could also unfold a significant interpretative potential of the current structural and cultural trends that are challenging the process of identity building and possibly deeply changing human self-understanding.

First, I outline some of the main challenges to which contemporary socialization theory must respond. I suggest that social acceleration, the culture of human flourishing as 'optimisation', some particular uses of communication technology, the decreasing effectiveness of social institutions – which I view as a crisis of their function of 'exoneration' (Entlastung) – and growing radical individualism constitute a thick bundle of connected social / cultural facts, that are resulting in increasing pressure upon human subjectivity. Human relations with reality are dramatically changing, thereby making the property of reflexivity and the process of becoming fully human epistemologically and ontologically vulnerable.

Then I try to establish – at least in an introductory way – some conceptual links between the theoretical approaches mentioned above, showing how they could work together to produce important insights and ultimately an integrated model. In doing this, I also suggest that Erik Erikson's classical ideas of generativity and mature integrity still represent a meaningful inspiration for sociological studies of socialization and identity building, if these are meant to be sociologically rigorous while not losing a critical thrust.

Jason L Mast (Trento University, US)

Democratic Futures: Toward a Theory of Societalized Politics

Societalization, Civil Sphere, Genre Theory

Recently, western democracies have been wracked by unanticipated swells of populism, ethno-nationalism, and isolationism, all of which greatly unsettled the neoliberal, globalist, and multicultural trajectories many assumed were durable and determined. The shock produced by events like Brexit in the United Kingdom and Donald Trump's victory in the U.S.A.

– and the electoral success of parties such as the Sweden Democrats, the Party of Freedom in the Netherlands, the National Rally in France, the Brothers of Italy, Vox in Spain, and the Alternative for Deutschland (AfD) in Germany – indicate that taken for granted cultural assumptions are being not only called into question but upended. This project approaches these developments theoretically as representing severe challenges to the foundational cultural elements that control, anchor, and organize liberal, western democratic social orders. Building on civil sphere, societalization, and genre theory, this project introduces a theory of societalized politics to illustrate the purchase of conceiving of these developments as civil sphere processes. Introducing six features of societalized politics, the theory posits that western democratic publics are responding to elites' discursive practices that cast their respective civil spheres as imperiled, core-groups' civil hegemony as being decentered, and the greater community's collective identity as threatened with erasure. Such societalized politics also represent democratic institutions as being infiltrated and compromised, and construct antagonists responsible for orchestrating the subversion. Civil sphere theory represents civil discourse as assembled atop a symbolic foundation of binary cultural codes (BCCs). Attending to the ways elites play upon and flip the codes, the theory outlined here demonstrates how societalized politics introduce flux into this symbolic structure. Finally, it illustrates how societalized politics introduce dimensions of the apocalyptic genre into civil discourse.

Christos Memos (Abertay University, UK)

'For the First Time We Live in a World in Which We Can No Longer Imagine a Better One' (Adorno): Critique of Subjective Reason, Social Tendencies and the Utopia of the Qualitative

Subjective Reason, Social Tendencies, Utopia

'Thinking' according to Ernst Bloch, 'means venturing beyond.' The retreat of utopian thinking and the inability to imagine an alternative and qualitatively differently constituted world is part of the retrogression of sociological theory, which runs parallel to the retrogression of society. Following Horkheimer, this paper argues that the renewal of sociological theory amounts to an uncompromising critique of subjective reason which instead of offering a social critique has been degraded to a subjective faculty of the mind, mere rationalization, and a technical and instrumental logic that seeks to co-ordinate the right means with a given end. As such, subjective reason has been rendered incapable of thinking about ends, purposes, or the objective content of concepts, highest values, and goals. In this regard, the paper argues that the task of sociology must be the advance of objective reason, that is, the critique of the social conditions that establish the – objective – reality of the identified situation. Sociological theory can reinvent itself only if its critique of society grasps society and provides a theory of the social constitution of concepts, phenomena and of conceptualized human social practice. The issue at stake for critical sociology, then, is to expose the social tendencies and to perceive

the direction in which the global social process is seeking to move, and to deduce from that whether and how one might intervene in these tendencies. Finally, the paper maintains that objective reason`s fundamental critique can forcefully advance the potential for the utopia of the qualitative (Adorno), that is, the idea of utopia as the transformation of the totality in and through the movement of negation of the existing social relations in the here and now.

Katharina Miko-Schefzig (Vienna University of Economics and Business, AT) & Boris Traue (Université du Luxembourg, LU)

Between Ambiguity and Positioning: Reclaiming the Transformative Potential of Sociology

* Positioning, Value Neutrality *

In light of contemporary challenges, the question of value neutrality in the social sciences has resurfaced with renewed urgency. The confusion that comes with polarization – clashes of perspectives and values – obscures the horizon of social development. How can sociology engage with contradictory societal knowledge to reopen the temporal horizon?

Critical approaches within sociology are often accused of „"overpositioning"" by proponents of interpretive traditions who emphasize methodological neutrality and wish to preserve normative ambiguity. In this joint presentation, Katharina MikoSchefzig and Boris Traue challenge such criticisms, arguing instead for a reflexive and normatively aware engagement that acknowledges the societal implications of sociological research and its role in adjucating social conflict.

Boris Traue explores the inherent tension between complexity and positioning, highlighting positioning as an epistemic necessity rather than a flaw. Avoiding engagement, or what he terms „"underpositioning"" (Traue, 2023) risks obscuring the social realities under investigation.

Katharina Miko-Schefzig complements this perspective by showcasing the transformative potential of qualitative and performative methods. Her approach emphasizes „"multi-perspectivity"" (Miko-Schefzig, 2024) and „"moments of possibility"" (Routledge & Derickson, 2015) as pathways for empirical interventions in polarized societal debates and structures of injustice.

Both approaches suggest that positioning is not achieved by judging other actors against researcher-defined standards, but by inviting dicerent perspectives and confronting their contradictions in a conceptually transparent and methodologically controlled manner. Together, we argue that the interpretive and critical traditions are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary in advancing socially engaged research. By rejecting the critique of „"overpositioning"" and embracing reflexivity, interpretive sociologies can navigate normative commitments while maintaining methodological rigor. We believe that in providing a discoursive stage for contentious perspectives, sociology can accompany the major societal transitions that lie ahead. This presentation reflects on how sociologists can actively contribute to societal transformation, rethinking the relationship between knowledge production, positioning, and social change.

John Mirsky (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, US)

Towards a Fuller Sociological Analysis of Inequality: Anti-Blackness, Afro Pessimism and the Decline of Class

* Inequality, Anti-Blackness, Class *

Much contemporary sociological theory is purportedly focused on inequality around a multiplicity of axes of difference. But recent critical sociology has mostly focused on the axes of race (especially anti-Blackness) and sexuality (Queer theoretical perspectives.) This paper does *not* contend that such perspectives are unimportant; on the contrary, they are crucial intellectual frameworks necessary to understand the complex dynamics of the social world. However, their important addition to the sociological imagination does not definitively make them ontological, "real" mechanisms, true for all places and times. Instead, I argue that theories of Anti-Blackness and Anti-Queerness can be meaningfully described as Weberian Ideal Types that over-accentuate perspectives to call attention to key mechanisms. In this paper, I focus on the decline of class-based perspectives in sociology and argue that critical race and sexual perspectives are enriched by incorporating additional axes of difference. Further, I argue that the seeds of this idea are found in the sociological work of three pivotal theorists within the sociology of inequality—Patricia Hill Collins, Kemberly Krenshaw, and W.E.B. Du Bois. Indeed, an overemphasis of race and sexuality is anathema to a rich sociological application of intersectionality.

Karel Němeček (Masaryk University, Brno, CZ)

Investing as a Practice of Futuring: On Imagined Futures Among Micro-Investors in the Czech and Slovak Post-Socialist Context

* Investing, Futuring, Control, Capitalism, Modernity *

The submission provides preliminary theoretical insights from my dissertation. According to Alex Preda (2004), the figure of an investor is a core yet undertheorized figure characteristic of modern capitalism. A lot has been written about ascetic protestants or industrialists. However, investors lack such attention. Preda challenges us to change it – a challenge my submission contributes to. I argue that investors are not just the core figure of modernity's past, but of its yet-to-come horizons. If the idea of an open, undetermined future is a fundamental characteristic of modern consciousness (Koselleck 2004), then practices of investing represent a tension, since they rest on aims to rationally capture the unknown horizons (Esposito

2024). If we theorise investing through the central tension between autonomy and rational mastery characteristic of the imaginary signification of modernity (Castoriadis 1997; Wagner 1994), it falls firmly towards mastery. Hence, I discuss future imaginaries (Beckert 2016), the major meaning-making forces behind investing, as reflecting the tension between open future and control-driven forecasting. To better account for this tension between control and uncontrollability (Rosa 2020), I approach the figure of an investor as not being unidimensional. Instead, following Želinský (2024), I observe an inner dynamic within the figure. Some investors are on the side of opening the horizons, others are on the side of following well-trodden paths, closing the uncertainty (despite both striving to capture the yet-to-come). With Sloterdijk (2013) we may link these types to the figure of a pirate, swimming into unknown waters in hopes of discovering a bounty, and to an insurance agent, meticulously describing, mapping and record-keeping to ensure that the possible will be the probable. The discussion about investing and the future is illustrated with preliminary results of my ongoing dissertation research on the boom in micro-investing in the Czech and Slovak post-socialist context.

Dawn Norris & Nicole Horáková (University of Ostrava, CZ)
Economic Structure, Alienation and the Moral Dimension of Work: A Crosscultural Re-Examination of Classical Theories
* Work, Unemployment, Identity, Communism, Capitalism *

Classical theories of work propose specific relationships between capitalism, alienation, and the moral dimension of work. However, there are very few empirical studies that examine these connections by comparing and contrasting continuously strong capitalist societies and relatively recent (e.g., post-communist) market economy societies. We take a social psychological approach to examine these connections among employed and unemployed people in the United States (continuously strong capitalism) and in two (post-communist) Czech Republic cities, Prague and Ostrava. Empirical data from 93 in-depth interviews and several on-site observations suggests that: 1) a continuous capitalist history generally produces strong individual occupational identities rather than alienation from self and work; and 2) market economies in post-communist countries – while not producing individual occupational identities – may produce muted to moderate "worker" or "society's helper" orientations with a strong moral dimension. We also analyze variations between manual and non-manual workers. Our findings suggest that current economic and social structures, as well as a country's history and its societal transitions, lead to greater nuance in the connections between capitalism, alienation, and the moral dimension of work than initially theorized by classical authors such as Marx and Weber. We take one step toward clarifying important dimensions to be examined by future work.

George Pavlich (University of Alberta, CA)
Sociology: Quo Vadis?
* Sociology of the Future *

During the 1950s and 1960s, a branch of the discipline announced itself as a 'sociology of the future.' Its adherents mostly pronounced imagined futures and campaigned to realize what they took to be 'more advanced' social forms. Creating and criticizing 'utopias' was their calling card. 'Future makers' that sprang from past ideas shackled sociology to utopian thought, and some — like H.G. Wells — even saw this as the essence of sociology. Despite its futuristic positioning, this approach echoed colonial and Eurocentric tropes of a past plagued by dispossessing class, race, and gender marginalizations. Here, varied notions of the 'other' supported hegemonic narratives of social progress, enabling an administrative sociology that claimed to be a scientific, value-free, and progressive policy-manifesting discourse. With specific reference to examples from apartheid South Africa, this paper cautions against administrative, problem-solving approaches whose complicity with bigoted injustice ran deep (including a sociologist who became the second prime minister after the 1948 National Party victory). Those approaches lost sight of a critical and principled promise to challenge societal paths taken, forming, and leading to ways of being-with that are frequently illegible to current horizons. What forms might a critical sociology of the future assume?

Julia Pfau (Bielefeld University, DE)
The Emergence of Personalized "-Isms" in World Politics
* Bourdieu, Charisma, Isms, Political Sociology *

"Trumpism – that is nationalism, protectionism and establishment contempt – is still an extremely strong movement in Europe" (Welt 2020). This project mobilizes Bourdieusian field theory to explore the emergence of political „"-isms"" like Trumpism, Thatcherism, and Reaganism, examining their development, usage, and adaptation across different historical and political contexts. These terms, inspired by politicians, often lack precise definition, relying instead on an assumed common understanding. This paper investigates why such new vocabulary is created for phenomena that could be described using existing terms like populism or nationalism. It also questions the role of individual politicians in shaping these concepts. Thatcherism and Reaganism are identified with the rise of neoliberal policies and maintain rather stable definitions, while Trumpism is more fluid, reflecting various ideologies and behaviors beyond the U.S. context.
The project claims that „"-isms"" emerge from external descriptions outside political fields, diffusing through a globalized media landscape. The media serves as a dynamic system where political narratives are created and influence each other, allowing these „"-isms"" to become signifiers for political trends. This enables media agents to interpret and adapt foreign political

phenomena into domestic contexts, promoting a global understanding of national politics. The paper aims to comprehend translation processeses that develop between national political and media fields that allow personalized „"-isms"" to stabilize as concepts. While new „"- isms"" like Orbánism in Hungary and Mileism in Argentina have emerged, only a few achieve global traction. Notably, it is primarily anglophone political figures whose „"- isms"" are consistently reproduced in international media and academia. Others are replaced by established concepts or discarded entirely, as they lack the media and academic resonance needed to maintain a presence in global discourse.

Angelika Poferl (TU Dortmund University, DE)
Making Things Visible: On the Cosmopolitics of Interpretation

* Reflexive Modernization, Normativity, Interpretive Sociology, Cosmopolitics of Interpretation, Existential Aesthetics of Human Rights and Human Dignity *

Engaging with a sociology of the future and with the future of sociology requires us to take a fresh look at the foundations of sociological analysis. Theoretical concepts such as "world risk society", "reflexive modernity", and proposals for a "cosmopolitan" sociology have been far ahead of their time in this regard. They reject national "container concepts" as well as the immunization of institutionalized categories and distinctions that have become obsolete (e.g., between "us" and "others"). At the same time, they emphasize the transformative power of normative ideals (such as freedom and equality). The potential, but also the dangers, of current social developments are being intensively discussed. Prospective diagnoses assume a "metamorphosis of the world" (Beck).However, the question of the methodological consequences arising from the theoretical discussion of social transformations and what this means for the future of interpretive sociology remains open. This question is all the more urgent against the backdrop of diverse (globally and transnationally circulating) knowledge cultures whose ideas differ from one another or which (such as feminist, postcolonial, and neomaterialist currents) have emerged from criticism of the "blind spots" of institutionalized knowledge production. The focus is on forms of inherent epistemological normativity. In addition, current threats to academic freedom raise normative questions at the meta-level. This paper examines the significance of normativity in interpretive sociology from a cosmopolitan and knowledge-sociological perspective. The thesis is that neither an uncritical-normative attitude of "world improvement" nor an uncritical-neutralizing belief in "value-freedom" can do justice to the complexity and challenges of interpretive sociology. As an alternative, the concept of a cosmopolitics of interpretation is proposed. This is discussed using the research topic of an existential aesthetics of human rights and human dignity as an example.

Nicholas David Goodchild Regan (The Australian National University, AU)
Psychosocial Theory and the Postliberal Far-Right

* Postliberalism, the Far-Right, Psychosocial Theory, Psychoanalysis, Critical Theory *

The ascendance of the far-right necessitates reconsidering the relationship between psyche and society within social and political theory. Donald Trump's 2024 presidential election victory signified the demise of establishment neoliberal and neoconservative Republican politics. However, the ideological content of Trumpism remains vague. So, what might the future orthodoxy of the American right be? Disparate and seemingly contradictory tendencies make up Trump's 'America First' political coalition, which includes paleoconservatives, Silicon Valley libertarians, and white nationalists, among other groups. However, one programme which has been elevated with Trump's selection of JD Vance as Vice President is 'postliberalism', also known as 'common-good conservatism'. Postliberal thinkers are predominantly Catholic (with some Eastern Orthodox and Anglicans) and include political theorist Patrick J. Deneen and journalist Rod Dreher, both of whom have been intellectually and personally associated with Vance. While originally advocating strategies of localist retreat, postliberals are increasingly calling for political takeover in a fashion similar to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's model of 'illiberal democracy'. Interestingly, many postliberals have productively drawn upon the psychoanalytically informed works of Philip Rieff and Christopher Lasch to provide a secular foundation for their critiques of liberalism and professional managerial elites. This paper explores the postliberals' appropriation of Rieff and Lasch's psychoanalytic social theories and argues that, in order to properly understand and address the resurgent far-right, social theorists must reengage with psychosocial theory.

Ilaria Riccioni (Free University of Bolzano, IT)
The Future of Societies From the Organization of the Borders: Identity, Culture and Imagination in Contemporary Societies

* Future *

Mental patterns, it is known, evolve more slowly than life practices and technical and technological innovations, already William Ogburn, in fact, had theorized the concept of cultural lag coming to define the two speeds of culture into adaptive culture and material culture. Modern society exacerbates this cultural lag through the fusion of the two forgetting the process that generated them and reducing all social planning into an attempt to create the values lost in the immanence of material culture production, shifting the production of values from tradition to an instrumental reality.

In order to hypothesize a tendential form of future society, understood as a human aggregate of socii that place their commonality in shared purposes and values, it is necessary to be able to read the widespread social practices capable of revealing from everyday practices the most

prevalent forms of mentality of contemporaneity. Contemporary societies, deriving solely from themselves their own functioning, purpose and order of collective life, in total enfranchisement from traditional values, become immanent in the sense that this self-referentiality reveals them to be fragile and discontinuous, precisely by virtue of being founded on instrumental and not final values.

What are the possibilities for rebuilding a sense of commonality from new languages of resistance that can translate into a program of social change across geographic boundaries? The cultural production that countries manifest, especially in areas capable of coexisting diversity, is perhaps the key, the culture that through tools of sharing recalls humanity in its highest form, capable of giving meaning and creating significance to the historical and collective living of civilizations. Can the border become the opening threshold to the adventure of knowing the other?

The aim of this paper will be the exploration of a possible future society from the dialectic of borders in the broadest sense: geographical, cultural, political, disciplinary.

Victor Roudometof (University of Cyprus, CY)

De-Centering Globalization: Processes, Conditions & Worldviews

* Globalization, Glocalization, Localization *

This paper addresses the conference's focus regarding the concept of globalization. Considering 21st century developments, the post-1989 popularized notion of "globalization" has become empirically defunct and intellectually indefensible. To de-center globalization this article argues in favor of revising our understanding of the "global" beyond global modernization or the modernization of the "world". The author argues that to accomplish this objective, it is necessary to pluralize the concept. The author suggests a trinity of terms (global, glocal & local) that are used to accomplish this objective. This solution successfully differentiates among key substantive dimensions implicit in most analyses of the "global". Each of these terms should be seen as analytically autonomous from the others. Taken together as a whole, they form a trinity of inter-related but mutually exclusive concepts. The paper offers an overview of these concepts. For each one, specific terminology is introduced that distinguishes among the processes signified (globalization, glocalization, localization), the conditions indicated (globality, glocality, locality), and the worldviews that express normative endorsement of each concept (globalism, glocalism, localism). Specific examples are offered to render these distinctions concrete but also to differentiate them. It is argued that this solution successfully addresses past critiques and offers a step toward understanding the complexity of the present.

Giuseppe Sciortino (University of Trento, IT)

The Future of Social Theory. Is There Any?

* Future, Social Theory *

Social life is full of ghosts. As Keynes famously said, contemporary political choices are often shaped by the ghosts of dead economists. There are, however, also zombies. Pitiful creatures unable to rest because people keep treating them as if they are living. As people consider them alive, they are alive in their consequences.

Is social theory one of these zombies? It may be. It suffers from the law of diminishing returns: more and more effort for ever meager results. Besides a few students and the most backwards media, nobody really cares about its goods. The few social movements who are interested to exploit some of its spoils are reactionary: 'intersectionality' (Cambridge Analytica), Gramsci (Italian post-fascists), Thiel and Vance (René Girard). In recent decades, the few interesting ideas on social action and social order originated in neuroscience, evolution theory, cognitive anthropology and artificial intelligence.

The obvious signs of decay are, internal: social theory (and theorists) are increasingly infected by militancy, moralism and cynicism, the trinity of intellectual microbes spreading when antibodies are gone.

Many social theorists are ready to accept that social theory is 'in crisis'. After all, 'Crisis' is one of the most common, and most oversold, concepts of critical theory. Crisis, by definition, contains the possibility of transformation and the usefulness of critique. The paper explores the possibility that a sober assessment of the situation can be attained only by asking ourselves a much more precise question: is there still life in social theory? Has it been just a delusion of our imagination? Is there really any chance to revive it? Should we keep trying to revive it, risking overzealous treatment? Or should we rather let the dead bury the dead and start doing something else? While the paper will not surely provide adequate answers to these questions, it is hoped it will provide enough evidence on their urgency.

Ningxiang Sun (The University of Edinburgh, UK)

Trees All the Way Down: Rethinking Technical Objects Through Phylogenetic Social Theories

* Technicity, Materiality, Technical Objects, More-Than-Human Sociology *

This paper intervenes in contemporary discussions about materiality and more-than-human sociology by reexamining Simondon's concept of technicity through phylogenetic thinking. While recent material turns in social theory have generated rich discussions about objects, artefacts, and non-human agencies, there remains a theoretical tension between acknowledging objects' material agency and accounting for their social embeddedness. Through examining Simondon's empirical analysis of technical objects and situating it within a broader intellectual

tradition of phylogenetic thinking shared by scholars like Ruyer, Focillon, Kubler, and Gell, this paper develops a theoretical framework that maintains objects' relative autonomy while recognizing their inherent sociality. By synthesizing Simondon's concept of technicity with later developments in object-centred social theories, particularly Gell's anthropological theory of art, I propose a multi-dimensional model for understanding how technical objects evolve within social relationships while maintaining their distinct developmental logic. This theoretical intervention contributes to ongoing debates about materiality in social theory by offering a nuanced approach to understanding technical objects as both socially embedded and possessing their own modes of existence, thereby enriching current discussions in more-than-human sociology and broader social theory.

Csaba Szalo (Masaryk University, Brno, CZ)

Theorising Extraordinary Events: Genealogy and Reflective Judgment

* Events, Genealogy *

By examining the intersections between Foucault's genealogical approach and Nietzsche's concept of the damaged individual, this paper contends that the sociological theorisation of the Kantian reflective judgment holds relevance in addressing events that could potentially disrupt our naive faith in historical reason. For Michel Foucault, the genealogical inquiry is about disrupting the teleological narrative about reason in history. The genealogical theoretical alternative consists of keeping up passing events' singularity released from the passion for origins. Hence, interpretations oriented to disclosing coherence, rationality, and continuity, making historical events into elements in a configuration, are unmasked by genealogy as actualisations of the myth of descent. However, the mythologies of descent play a significant role not only in the discourse of historical understanding but also in the endlessly repeated dramas of domination, which connect singular historical events into a teleological narrative. The paper delves into the pivotal role of reflective judgments in articulating teleological and aesthetic claims with intersubjective validity about extraordinary events. It emphasises that alongside concepts of power, concepts of life and the mortal body are inescapable in making reflective judgments about historical transformations. In this line, this paper also explores how current, socially rationalised dispositifs demand the sacrifice of individual lives, for instance, in wars and road violence events.

Mitsuhiro Tada (Kumamoto University, JP)

Making Lifeworld Together: A Sociology of Understanding the Majority in the Age of "We" and "They"

* Lifeworld *

In recent years, social divides have widened globally, accompanied by a decline in democratic values. The retrogression toward authoritarianism suggests a challenging outlook for humanity's future. This presentation identifies a key task for interpretive sociology (Verstehende Soziologie) in this era: understanding the majority. Alfred Schutz, a phenomenological sociologist, characterized the lifeworld (Lebenswelt) as the "paramount reality," where diverse individuals are actually living, each shaped by their own internal time. Within this reality, which is ontologically given to the individuals, boundaries between "We" and "They" are drawn through reductive imagination. While modernization (particularly, the Democratic Revolution) inclusively broadened the membership of "We" through citizenship, struggles over "living space" (Lebensraum) have reemerged today, aimed at excluding minorities as "They" in pursuit of ethnoracial or ethnonational homogenization. Subjectivist sociology, along with the New Left movement, has explored the lived experiences and perspectives of oppressed minorities through understanding to critique socially constructed (often unconscious) biases that are taken for granted, particularly by the so-called "man on the corner" within the majority. Today, however, as globalization and neoliberal (or rather retroliberal) reforms widen inequalities and disrupt established life-course patterns, many within the mainstream majority also feel alienated, marginalized, and deprived. Sociology must therefore examine the majority through understanding to illuminate these sentiments and their underlying causes, fostering mutual recognition and societal reintegration. This is because even those who have embraced extreme views or ideologies cannot be excluded from the society: they, too, are making the lifeworld together. Simultaneously, interpretive sociology can, as part of "sociological enlightenment," revise stereotyped everyday knowledge with evidence-based facts, encouraging people to critically engage with and, as "well-informed citizens," counter the spread of alternative facts.

Anne Elizabeth Taylor (Mount Holyoke College, US)

Towards a Sociology of Joy

* Jeffrey Alexander, Cultural Pragmatics, Cultural Sociology, Joy, Civil Repair *

Across the many eras of Jeffrey Alexander's sociology, a through line stands out: a commitment to theorizing the paths societies take to repair and renew social bonds. This is worth digging into – for the contrasts it poses between both his influences and his opponents and for the possibilities it carves out, as well. First, though his work shares the same theoretical roots with Parsonian Functionalism and its interest in stability, Alexander's understandings of solidarity

incorporate the very real facts of societal conflict. Second, Alexander does not stop at the level of conflict, as many of his contemporaries do, and instead envisions repair as means to explain how people overcome obstacles, like trauma or democratic upheaval. Third, while Alexander's empirical interests are notably secular his theoretical project does not accept the secularization thesis. Trading the Weberian rational/irrational binary for the Durkheimian sacred/profane, Alexander challenges modernist assumptions and prioritizes the symbolic frameworks undergirding society to theorize the ways language forges understanding as well as the variances that forge innovation. Fourth, Alexander's work reflects serious consideration for even his harshest critics – most notably his cultural pragmatics project that theorizes the nexus where meaning, action, structure and agency merge. This synthesis of what most of his peers accept as mutually exclusive results in a flexible conceptual apparatus that can account for both the solidarity and conflict. And this commitment also carves out a path to theorizing beyond stability, conflict, and repair – to a "sociology of joy" – which I argue is built on three theoretical requirements afforded by Alexander's work: a solidarity that affords space for human creativity, pleasure, and belonging, an ability to overcome obstacles—both structural and symbolic – that threaten solidarity, and a sensitivity to meaning and contingencies of action necessary to understanding solidarity and conflict.

Eleanor Townsley (Mount Holyoke College, US)
Performing Algorithms

* Algorithm, Performance, Algorithmic Culture *

This paper reflects on the moral possibilities associated with digital performances as algorithms rearrange the elements of social action. It asks: What is the nature of social performance in algorithmic culture, a context that is both post-*ritual* and post-*secular*? New technologies typically map existing distributions of social power, and the internet is no exception. Building on and intensifying the capitalist extraction of social value, online platforms -- their data infrastructures and the algorithms that integrate them -- have rearranged social action. It comes as no surprise to critical sociological theory that algorithmic bias defines the new technologies, or that mathematics and computing have been weaponized to cause social harm. That said, ritual and human-scale elements of social performance have also been developed online, and these digital performances contain powerful moral possibilities. Importantly, algorithmic culture is distinctly participatory, and online communities and participatory culture are central to the social sacred. They provide resources for extended social solidarities, new forms of artistic practice, and alternative models for collective action.

Jan Váňa (Czech Academy of Sciences, CZ)
Social Theorizing Through Literature: Towards a New Epistemological Framework

* Theorizing, Social Aesthetics, Sociology of Literature, Literary Theory, Epistemological Symmetry *

I propose a new direction for social theorizing that revisits the origins of social theory in the nineteenth century. As Wolfgang Lepenies notes in *Between Literature and Science* (1988), sociology emerged partly by distinguishing itself from literature, which was considered a "less scientific" culture of feelings. Both disciplines aspired to be leading voices in modernizing societies, but sociology's boundary work relegated literature to an object of study rather than a partner in theorizing. Traditional sociology "of" literature sees literary works as mere evidence or a resource. However, sociology has long drawn on literature's unique insights, from literary references by Durkheim, Weber, Marx and Simmel to Mills' view of literature as a reservoir of sociological imagination. Thinkers like Hoggart, Coser, and Nisbet have recognized fiction's indispensable role in sociological thinking. More recently, Harrington, Abbott, and Swedberg have explored how literary writing entices, shapes, and mediates social theorizing. Building on these ideas, I develop an epistemological framework for social theorizing through literature in a more systematic way, focusing on two key topics. First, literary *meaning-making* arises from a unique reading experience grounded in socio-historical contexts of text's production and reception. It is thus essential to combine phenomenology of reading with macro-social perspectives. Second, the notion of *aesthetic autonomy* has had a convoluted, and often controversial, trajectory within both literary studies—from formalism to new criticism, (post-)structuralism, and new historicism—and sociology—e.g., homology in Lukács, Goldmann, and later adopted by Bourdieu. I understand literary theorizing as a result of meaning-making conditioned by historical developments of relatively autonomous aesthetic forms and conventions of their uses.

These questions are central to the Literature and Society Laboratory, a collaborative project that connects literary scholars and sociologists to explore the relationship between the "social" and the "literary" as sociohistorical categories.

Frederic Vandenberghe (IFCS-UFRJ, Rio de Janeiro, BR)
A Manifesto for Social Theory

* Future of Sociology, Meta Theory, Social Theory, Crisis *

In the span of a generation, social theory as an integrative enterprise that seeks to maintain the dialogue between social, political, and moral philosophy on the one hand and the various social and human sciences on the other, has simply disappeared. Theorising in the old style integrates metatheory (reflection on the philosophical foundations and textual reconstruction of the classics), social theory (construction of a system of concepts valid for the social and

human sciences as a whole) and the theory of society (analysis, diagnosis and critique of social formations) in a unique framework. This conceptual scaffolding is no longer seen as being part of sociology. Nowadays, the practitioners of the discipline would rather outsource these conceptual issues to philosophers. Sociologists have abandoned the task of analysing society in its totality and as a whole to Critical Theory and to the Studies, by which we mean to refer to a motley crew of post-structuralist, subaltern, de-colonial and trans-feminist critiques of knowledges, discourses and practices that are permeated by power. The consequence of this retraction is that sociology becomes unable to understand the societal developments that are undermining the ground on which it stands. Paradoxically, the science that thrives on crises can no longer explain its own demise. Going against the tide, we will write a small manifesto for social theory as a space of articulation between philosophy, the social sciences and the new humanities. We will defend the idea of social theory as a critical and reflexive continuation of the philosophy of history, as well as moral and political philosophy, in times when both sociology and societies are challenged in their foundations.

Gilles Verpraet (Université Paris Nanterre, FR)
Social Imaginaries Between Constellations and Configurations
* Constellation of Value, Social Configurations, Cultural Pragmatic, Forms of History *

The question of future has been divided between past and present, between ideologies and utopias (Mannheim, Benjamin). This formulation considers today the heuristic tensions between constellation of values and the emerging network society; more or less unified (Scott Lash , Faist; Hajer).
Sociologies centered on the categories of appropriation, experience and cultural pragmatics examine the double accommodation of futures between constellation and configuration (Piaget, Bergson), between appropriation and construction of purposive trajectories (Lefebvre, Beck). The tensive adjustment leads the actors and their pragmatic of cultural appropriation (Alexander, 2006), modifying their habitus and subjective refiguration (Boltanski, Chateauraynand, Low). Their weberian purposes and motives negotiate the rising influence of the numeric network logics, moving by symbolic equivalence and commutation (Sperber, Bauman, Rosengrun).
This social conjecture of transient appropriation by numeric dispositives inside networks society enhances the cultural and social tensions between numeric synchronies and social diachronies, with their effects of resonance and social dramaturgies (Rosa, Benjamin). Processual sociologies (Abbot, Renault) by conflictual cooperations (Fisbach, Harcourt; Elias) contribute to clarify the development of these democratic tensions. Cases and struggles of sustainable development can be examined in this temporal and cognitive framework. This intellectual conjuncture questions the current redistribution of futures between cultural sociologies and sociologies of knowledge.

Celso M. Villegas (Kenyon College, US)
Civil Sphere Theory as a Research Programme: Knowledge Accumulation, Conceptual Development, and New Heuristics in the Study of Solidarity
* Civil Sphere Theory, Research Programme, Auxiliary Hypotheses *

This paper reconsiders the development of Civil Sphere Theory as an active and cumulative research programme in a Lakatosian way. It accepts that the programme's core — The Civil Sphere (2006), the corpus of texts that formed the book, and Jeffrey Alexander's continuing contributions — are, in a Lakatosian sense, already "born refuted" and instead trains its focus on the empirical anomalies and key restatement of terms that constitute the "protective belt" surrounding that core. It does this in three ways. First, with regards to the binary codes of the civil sphere, the paper traces the cumulative development of concepts dealing with code shift, inversion, hybridization, and rerouting that preceded the publication of The Civil Sphere and have been continually demonstrated in case studies around the world. Second, with regards to the institutions of the civil sphere, the paper traces positive developments that have reconsidered some putatively noncivil institutions as civil (e.g. the state) as well as interstitial, paracivil, and "shadow" formations that operate in parallel to civil spheres. Finally, with regards to the boundary relations of the civil sphere and civil repair, there are rich developments in the study of migration and national belonging that push towards a synthesis of civil sphere theory and theories of boundary formation. The paper concludes with a reflection on Alexander's status as a "classical" theorist but also as one of many in a programme that includes but now exceeds him, and what that means for future work that engages with CST.

Frank Welz (University of Innsbruck, AT)
Sociological Theory: Before or After the Summit?
* Kantian Matrix, Future of Sociology, Historical Epistemology *

The future appears high in the sky, the past flat on the horizon. In sociology, the opposite seems to be the case. In retrospect, we interpret its development since the mid-20th century as a rise and its subsequent institutional stabilization as a decline. Starting from the close link between the *future of sociology* and the *sociology of the future*, my presentation asks why the discipline, after its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s, largely ceded the debate on the future to economics, data science, and human genetics.
To address this question, I distinguish between the cognitive and institutional development of a science, interpreting both as expressions of societal change.
Cognitively, I first distinguish between two theoretical traditions: the "Kantian matrix" as an analytics of truth, and the historical tradition of theory-building.
Institutionally, secondly, I contrast the conditions of welfare capitalism (1950–1980) with those of contemporary neoliberal capitalism. These distinctions help to reconstruct the

shifting power relations that once enabled the former importance of sociological theory and later fostered the fragmentation of the discipline and the current dominance of the Kantian matrix—whose consequences my contribution critically reflects upon.

I argue that the current hegemony of the Kantian matrix reflects an adaptation to the neoliberal knowledge regime—at the expense of sociological reflexivity and, ultimately, its relevance for the future.

Giovanni Zampieri (University of Padova, IT)
Rethinking Words and Worlds. The Emic/Etic Distinction as a Tool for Theory-Work

* Emic, Etic *

Based on the work of linguist Kenneth L. Pike (1967), the distinction between "emic" and "etic" categories has been at the forefront of anthropology, cultural history, and ethnographically inspired approaches for some decades now (e.g., Harris, 1976; Ginzburg, 2012). While the former refers to the situated point of view of the subject one studies, usually framed as "distant" in space or time, the latter is used to categorize the observer's interpretations, whether they are engaged in fieldwork or busy consulting archival sources. However, with some relevant exceptions (e.g., Mennell, 2015), this way of framing has not consistently permeated sociological theorizing—even in those approaches that embraced the Weberian Verstehende as the capstone of their endeavor. Borrowing from debates at the intersection of microhistory, anthropology, and historical sociology, in this contribution, I suggest that the distinction between "etic" and "emic" configures a productive analytical tool for theory work. Besides being a valuable instrument to reframe the history of sociological thought and reorganize current sociological approaches, I argue that it might offer a helpful instrument to rethink how theorists create and use their concepts when facing complex sociohistorical phenomena that require us to recenter the actors' point of view to enhance scientific understanding and increase the possibility of social change.
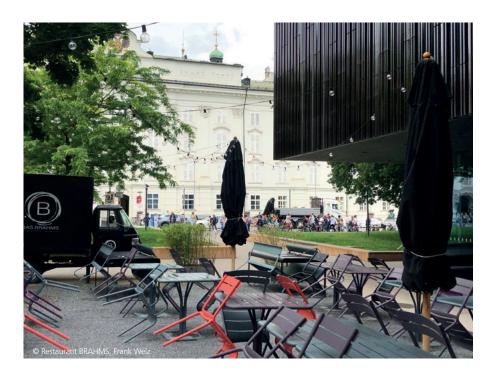
Dominik Zelinsky (Slovak Academy of Sciences, SK)
Techno-feudalism or Routinization? A Weberian Perspective on the Demise of Charismatic Capitalism

* Charisma, Capitalism, Routinization, Techno-Feudalism *

Several authors (Varoufakis, 2024; Dean, 2023) have recently proposed that the era of capitalism has come to an end. Instead, we now live in an emerging new order they call 'techno-feudalism', dominated by large technological companies that reduce populations to digital serfdom. This paper seeks to add nuance to this claim by mobilizing classical Weberian

theory of domination. Specifically, I argue that we do not live through the end of capitalism, but rather through a period in which forms of culture and power that accompany its economic assemblage undergo a process that Max Weber called 'routinization'. While modern capitalism, especially in the Silicon Valley variety, has been dominated by charismatic forms of sociability and charismatic cultural patterns, such as the importance of genius founders and their transformative vision, this model has come under pressure due to its economic volatility. Moreover, the idea of charismatic CEO has been profoundly polluted by recent scandals involving figures such as Elizabeth Holmes, Adam Neumann, and Sam Bankman-Fried. In response to these economic and cultural challenges, we now witness new cultural forms emerging that reference more stable of economic practice as well as more centralized power – a return back to tradition and bureaucracy that Weber envisioned at the end of every charismatic upheaval.

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Arrival

Arrival at Innsbruck Airport

Innsbruck Airport offers direct flights to Amsterdam, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Frankfurt, London, and many more! For further information, please see https://www.innsbruck-airport.com/en. Bus shuttles or taxis take you to the city center within minutes.

Taxi in Innsbruck: phone +43 512 5311

Arrival and public transport:
https://www.innsbruck.info/en/destinations/arrival-and-transport.html

Arrival at Munich Airport

Train connection
For further information about the train connection „Munich Airport" to „Innsbruck Hbf" (main railway station; address: Südtiroler Platz 7, 6020 Innsbruck) please check here:
https://fahrplan.oebb.at/webapp/?language=en_GB#!P|TP!H|586066

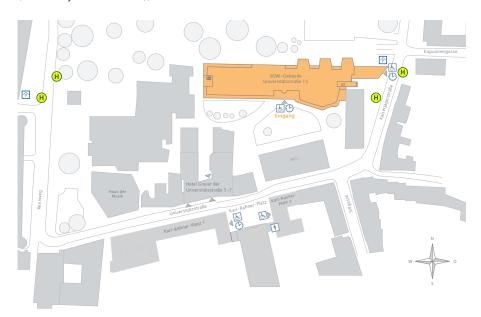**Bus connection**
„Flixbus". www.flixbus.com
Search for „Munich International Airport" to „Innsbruck" ("Innsbruck Südbahnstraße"). The bus station in Innsbruck (Innsbruck Südbahnstraße) is close to the main railway station. The ride takes 2:25 hrs.
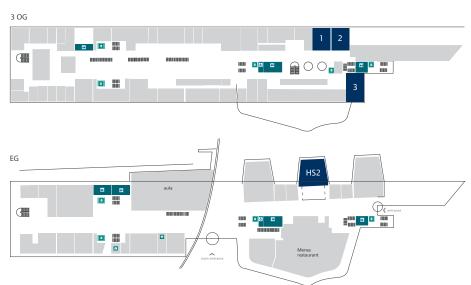
Shuttle Bus Taxi Transfer
If you want to book a taxi from Munich Airport to Innsbruck (and back) please see „Four Seasons" Taxi. https://www.tirol-taxi.at/index.php?hID=1&lID=1&p=1

Site Plan – SoWi

(University of Innsbruck), Universitätsstr. 15

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About Innsbruck

Innsbruck Tourist Information Office: Burggraben 3, phone +43 512 5356; see also: Welcome to Innsbruck! – What's on today? (www.innsbruck.info/en) for information about sightseeing, events, restaurants, and summer/winter sports.

At a Glance – Facts on Innsbruck

Innsbruck is the capital of the Austrian Tyrol province
- approx. 132,000 inhabitants
- located at 575 m above sea level
- rivers: Inn and Sill
- situated at the foot of Patscherkofel (2,247 m) and Nordkette (2,334 m)
- University town: campus spreads all over town. During term 28,000 students live in Innsbruck.
- Olympic town: in 1964 and 1976 venue of Olympic Winter Games

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On and around the campus, there are the following and other restaurants, cafés and bars:

NOI – Original Thaiküche	www.noithaikueche.at Kaiserjägerstraße 1 (Campus)	Thai cuisine
Il Dottore	www.il-dottore.net Kaiserjägerstraße 1 (Campus)	Italian cuisine
Café Bar Dinzler	Kaiserjägerstraße 1 (Campus)	bar/café: coffee, beverages & snacks
Sowi Bistro	Kaiserjägerstraße 1 (Campus)	Pizza, Kebap, Döner
Victoria Sushi Bar & Restaurant	www.victoriasushibarinnsbruck.at Kaiserjägerstraße 4a	Asian cuisine; Sushi, Maki,
Café-Bar Kapuziner	Kaiserjägerstraße 4a	bar/café: coffee, beverages & snacks
Shifu	www.shifuasia.at Kaiserjägerstraße 4a	Asian-crossover cuisine
The Galway Bay Irish Pub	www.thegalwaybay.com/en Kaiserjägerstraße 4	Irish Pub: craft beer, pub food
Schwarzer Adler	www.deradler.com Kaiserjägerstraße 2	Tyrolean cuisine
MPreis	Universitätsstraße 15b (Campus)	Tip grocery store & bakery
Solo Vino Solo Pasta	Universitätsstraße 15b (Campus)	Italian
Sixty Twenty	Universitätsstraße 15 a (Campus)	student bar/café: coffee, beverages & snacks
Himal	himal.at Universitätsstraße 13 (Campus)	Nepali kitchen
Woodfire	www.woodfire.at/en Universitätsstraße 5-7	steaks & fish
Una Pizza	Universitätsstraße 3	Italian
Stiftskeller	www.stiftskeller.eu Stiftsgasse 1 (Old Town)	Beer garden, Tyrolean cuisine (many more restaurants in Old Town)
Auis	www.auis.at Museumsstrasse 24	fish, steak, pizza, pasta, risotto, curry, wok, burritos
Treibhaus	www.treibhaus.at Angerzellgasse 8	alternative café/pub, restaurant, music
Moustache	Herzog-Otto Straße 8 (Old Town)	alternative bar/café: coffee, beverages & snacks

Piano Bar	www.cafepiano.at Herzog-Friedrich Straße 5 (Old Town)	Tyrolean & Italian cuisine
the naked indigo	www.thenakedindigo.at/de/kategorie/hot-pots Innrain 2 (Market place)	Tip vegetarian/vegane
Ludwig	www.ludwig-burger.at/innsbruck/burger.html Museumstraße 3	Burger & fries
Thai-Li-Ba	www.thai-li-ba.at Adolf-Pichler-Platz	Asian cuisine: Chinese, Thai, Indonesian & Vietnamese cuisine
360° Bar / Lichtblick	www.rathausgalerien.at/en/culinary/cafe-360 Maria-Theresien-Straße 18, 7th floor	Tip café/bar/wine lounge (restaurant) high above the rooftops of Innsbruck

Focus on tourism

The 'Innsbruck Tourismus' tourist association represents Innsbruck as well as 25 holiday villages in the town's vicinity

- approx. 2.2 million annual overnight stays
- in Innsbruck alone approx. 5 million guests, incl. day visitors
- summer and winter tourism, with a slight advantage on summer tourism Eating and Drinking: great gastronomical variety, ranging from gourmet restaurants to the 'Tiroler Wirtshaus' inns
- offering wholesome popular local fare (dumplings, noodles, filled 'Krapfen', lamb, beef, sweet dishes), cafés and pastry shops with gateaus, cakes, and coffee specialties – clubs and bars to go out in the evening, meet locals, sample wines, ...

© Innsbruck St. Nikolaus, M. Vollm

Sports & leisure

A multitude of summer sports (hiking, climbing, Nordic walking, running, cycling, mountain biking, golf, swimming lakes) and winter sports (downhill and Nordic skiing, glacier skiing on the Stubai glacier, snowboarding, snowshoeing, tobogganing, ice sports, etc.)

- guided hikes with ASI (Alpinschule Innsbruck)
- 9 skiing and hiking areas serviced by chairlifts and cable cars
- free transport for skiers and hikers alike
- free summer and winter activity program for ALL guests of Innsbruck and its 25 holiday villages.

Cultural highlights

Annual events such as the Festival of Early Music, Summer Dance Festival, Easter Festival

- sights: the Golden Roof, the medieval historic quarter, Ambras castle with its Renaissance 'Chamber of Art and Curiosities,' Imperial Palace and Church with the Renaissance cenotaph tomb of Emperor Maximilian I., Bergisel ski jump & Hungerburgbahn designed by British-Iraqi star architect Zaha Hadid, etc.

Modern architecture

A dialogue between urban design and natural landscape. Around the turn of the millennium, Innsbruck experienced a veritable boom in high-quality architectural design, which found its expression in administrative buildings, sports venues, shopping centers, exhibition halls, cafés, and numerous other projects. As this trend continues, inhabitants and visitors enjoy the attractive changes in the cityscape, a harmonious blend of modern and historical architecture.

Nestled in a gentle basin and ringed by towering mountains, Innsbruck's unique location certainly requires some unique architecture. This has become evident in sports venues and projects dedicated to other leisure activities, representing the close link between urbanity and nature. Probably the most striking examples of such interaction are the Bergisel ski jump (2002) and the Hungerburgbahn funicular railway (2007), both designed by Zaha Hadid. Besides being an exceptional sports venue for professional athletes; its viewing deck and panoramic restaurant have turned the Bergisel ski jump into a popular tourist attraction.

Lake Unterer Pfendlersee © Innsbruck Tourismus / Danijel Jovanovic

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Staying longer?

The Innsbruck region is a true paradise for hiking fans. Firstly, because the capital of the Alps is surrounded by various hiking routes and tours. And secondly, the lifts and cable cars allow everyone to join in the alpine fun, even those with little experience or lower fitness levels.

An interactive map and Guided Active Programme will help you find the right tour for you (Innsbruck Tourism):
https://www.innsbruck.info/en/hiking.html

Hiking Tour: Arzler Alm

- mountain restaurant close to the city (address: Rosnerweg 113; altitude: 1067m) offers Tyrolean cuisine and a marvelous view (Tuesday to Sunday)
- https://arzleralm.at/ phone: +43 676 45 00 665
- 3 km hike. Starting point: Hungerburg funicular stop. To get there, you can either take the Hungerburgbahn-funicular or the bus line "J" (numerous bus stops in the city center, e.g., "Landesmuseum," "Museumsstraße," "Marktplatz"; exit at final stop "Nordkette")
- Detailed map including directions
  https://www.bergfex.at/touren/2279e181f724bfd658ab11726c3d7a80/

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Looking forward to meeting you!