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# Theory

The Newsletter of the Research Committee on Sociological Theory  
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### Editors' Introduction

This issue of *Theory* looks back to some highlights of the mid-term conference in Trento and forward to the next ISA World Congress to be held in Yokohama in 2014. After the Presidents' message, the issue opens with a paper on *Community: five dimensions of a key sociological concept* by two Argentinian sociological theorists: Pablo de Marinis and Alejandro Bialakowsky. Marinis and Bialakowsky show us how community is a concept with

different possibilities and applications. We then publish two pieces by members of our community who were honoured in Trento. *Sociological Theory as an Image and a Map* derives from the speech Dominik Bartmanski delivered on receiving the Junior Theorist Prize and *On the Distinctiveness of Analytical Sociology* is a revised version of the speech that Gianluca Manzo delivered on receiving the Special Mention by the jury award in the Junior Theorist prize. We look forward to the future work of these sociological theorists. Finally, the issue contains the *Call for Papers for the RC16 sessions in Yokohama*. Please keep in mind the submission deadline for the ISA World Congress.

*Craig Browne & Paul Jones*

### **From the Presidents**

We are please to include in this issue of the newsletter our Call for Papers for the 2014 World Congress of Sociology, which will be held in Yokohama. The call for papers represents the theoretical and geographical diversity of our research committee. Our session organizers represent thirteen different nations, and span a vast array of topical areas including culture, media, cosmopolitanism, modernity, critical theory, Asian theory, visibility, intellectuals, urban space, sexuality, civil society, symbolic violence, globalization, and transnationalism. Particularly

noteworthy is the concentration of sessions on Japanese and Asian theorizing.

You will find contact details and descriptions for each of our 25 sessions. The official ISA Call for papers will go online in June, and we will accept submissions until September 30, 2013. All submissions should include a title and abstract, as well as contact details for all authors. If you have any questions about a particular session, please contact the session organizer(s) directly.

The Nominations Committee is continuing to prepare the slate of candidates for the election of officers, and we will provide more information about that process in a future issue of *Theory*. In the meantime, we look forward to receiving all of your paper submissions, and to organizing another exciting slate of sessions for the World Congress.

*Ronald N. Jacobs & Guisepppe Sciortino*

*Co-Chairs, RC 16*

### **Community: five dimensions of a key sociological concept**

Community has always been a key concept, notion or idea for sociology and other social and human sciences, as well as for other kinds of discourses, such as politics, religion and ethnicity. The present communication aims to contribute to a "sociological theory of community" that is not one-dimensional, by identifying some

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Dominik Bartmanski

## On the Distinctiveness of Analytical Sociology\*

\*This is a revised version of the speech delivered on the occasion of the acceptance of the Special Mention by the jury award of the ISA prize for the Best Junior Theorist paper at the Mid-term conference of the ISA RC 16 held in Trento in June 2012. I would like to thank the conference participants as well as Marco Santoro for their useful reactions to the first draft of the speech text. I am also grateful to Adrian Belton for revising my English.

My first words go to the prize committee, which has decided to award a special mention to my article “Analytical Sociology and Its Critics”. It is indeed a singular honor to receive the critical

attention of one of the most prestigious ISA research committees. It is also a great pleasure to see that the prize committee has had the intellectual openness to acknowledge the quality of an article that endorses theoretical and methodological positions that many of the members of the research committee are likely to dispute.

The present speech has a modest goal. It only provides a concise description of the basic elements composing the analytical sociology research program. It then employs this description to suggest that scholars who deny the originality of analytical sociology within the panorama of contemporary sociology rely on a selective, hence inaccurate, reading of analytical sociology. To avoid misunderstandings, let me state explicitly that this argument is not intended to contest that analytical sociology has its limitations and that it must be further improved. The sense of my remarks is that critics can contribute to this improvement only if they make the effort to understand all the facets of the analytical sociology research program.

In fact, this is not the case. Analytical sociology is often reduced to a new brand name for the doctrine of methodological individualism (see, for instance, Little, 2012), or, more radically, to nothing more than a new label for sociology based on rational-choice theory (see, for instance, Abbott, 2007; Gross, 2009). If one considers that the quest for micro-

foundations is largely shared among sociologists, then analytical sociology would not lack originality because it would simply amount to existing specific approaches but, on the contrary, because it simply equates to the “mainstream core of practices in contemporary (American-dominated) sociology” (Lizardo, 2012, p. 9).

I regard these assessments as factually wrong because they do not take into due account all the elements that make up the analytical sociology program. My argument is that the distinctiveness of analytical sociology within contemporary sociology evaporates as soon as one isolates one or a few elements from the entire set of elements that the programmatic manifestos of analytical sociology propose in order to define the approach.

The analysis of the literature contained in Manzo (2010) suggests that analytical sociology should be primarily understood as a complex, multi-faceted research strategy combining two sets of general principles. In the most parsimonious form, four of them concern the construction of a theoretical model, whereas four others refer to the empirical validation of the model. When these principles are introduced incrementally (from the most general to the most specific), it becomes apparent that, as the number of principles considered increases, their combination makes it less and less easy to find one sociological

perspective that shares the same combination of elements. The initial apparent overlap between analytical sociology and the rest of sociology (in its current state) thus tends progressively to disappear.

Let me introduce these principles one by one (note that the order in which I introduce them is not intended to parallel the step order of a concrete research design). As regards the model building stage, the quest for clarity and for precision in the definition of concepts and in the writing style is a key requirement for analytical sociology (principle 1). Clarity and precision are at the service of explanation. While rigorous empirical description (of regularities to be explained) and understanding (of actors' reasons, hence of actions' meanings) are central tasks for analytical sociologists, the latter regard explanation as the ultimate goal of sociological analysis for analytical sociology (principle 2). Within analytical sociology, *explananda* of primary interest are cross-sectional population-level patterns and their temporal trends. Explanation is conceived in a very specific way by analytical sociologists. Explaining a (set of) social outcome(s) amounts to figuring out the concatenations of mechanisms that bring about the outcome(s) (principle 3). Analytical sociology conceives social mechanisms as chains of socially constrained micro-level events (principle 4).

In this regard, it is important to stress that, on a programmatic level, analytical sociology does not limit individual actions to instrumental actions. On the contrary, a very open conception of purposive action, which in its extreme variant equates rationality to acting with subjectively defensible reasons, is defended; emotions and heuristics are also crucial actor-level elements that are often postulated by analytical sociologists. The latter also pay attention to the articulation of these elements with structural and relational aspects of social life so that, in the end, from the analytical perspective, a social mechanism always consists of more or less complex bundles of structure-, network-, and action-level elements.

Once a theoretical model has been devised, one enters the model testing stage. Here, analytical sociology first requires that the macro-*patterns* to be explained with the model are precisely delimited and described on the basis of empirical data (principle 5). It is recommended that the theoretical representation of the explanatory mechanism postulated be translated into a formal model (principle 6). Analytical sociology suggests that, among formal models, computational models incorporating the theoretical mechanism of interest constitute the most flexible tools with which to study its population-level consequences (principle 7). Even more specifically, analytical sociology suggests

that one specific form of simulation is especially powerful in designing and in studying theoretical models of social mechanisms, namely agent-based, or, more precisely, object-oriented modelling (principle 7a). This simulation technique, indeed, imposes virtually no constraint on the sets of socially-constrained mechanisms that one wishes/needs to represent, thereby making it possible to determine *in silico* the extent to which the mechanisms postulated can reproduce the macro-level patterns of interest. The last general principle guiding the research strategy proposed by analytical sociology has to do with the fact that the potential overlap between the aggregate consequences generated by the computational model and the empirical data describing the population-level outcomes of interest does not necessarily prove that the postulated mechanism is at work in the real world because, in principle, alternative theoretical mechanisms can equally well reproduce the outcome. To overcome this difficulty, analytical sociology advises injecting survey, qualitative and/or experimental data into the agent-based model so that its micro- and network-level assumptions are empirically-grounded (principle 8).

Thus, programmatically, these eight principles suggest that analytical sociology is a complex web of theoretical and methodological guidelines that tend to crystallize into an empirically-oriented,

experimentally and computationally-based, macro-sociology with clearly explicated and empirically-grounded dynamic micro- and network-level foundations.

Is this set of elements really reducible to a re-statement of the doctrine of methodological individualism or of rational-choice theory, as some commentators claim? Can one reasonably state that this multi-faceted research strategy equates to the mainstream of American sociology, as others have recently argued? My impression is that critics of analytical sociology systematically endorse a wrong line of reasoning when they pick up and/or overweight this or that piece of the research program instead of considering it in its entirety. The complexity of this program implies that the more numerous the parts taken into account, the less easy it is to argue that analytical sociology lacks any intellectual distinctiveness.

In my view, there is an empirical fact that supports the argument according to which the combination of elements that I have summarized substantiates a truly original research program within contemporary sociology. This fact simply consists in the difficulty of finding sociological analyses that combine *at the same time* all the elements defining analytical sociology on a programmatic level. How often, one may indeed wonder, do we see articles published in the best sociological journals in which, *at*

*the same time*, (1) advanced statistical techniques and/or rigorous qualitative research protocols are used specifically to figure out the *explananda*, (2) formal models are devised to formulate hypotheses about the mechanisms responsible for the observed (robust) correlations, (3) simulation is used to go from the postulated mechanisms back to the patterns to be explained, and, (4) survey, experimental, and/or ethnographic observations are in turn used to discard alternative specifications of the substantive content of the formal model?

My impression is that the right answer is “very rarely”. It is certainly possible to point out an array of empirical studies that have started making the effort to approximate all the requirements of the analytical research program. Macro-patterns and diffusion processes related to sexual networks (Bearman et al., 2004), to unemployment (Hedström, 2005, ch. 6), to residential segregation (Bruch and Mare, 2006), to unpopular norms (Willer et al., 2009), to new technologies (Di Maggio and Garip, 2011), to fertility decisions (Gonzalez-Bailon and Murphy, 2013), or to educational inequalities (Manzo, 2013), for instance, have recently been investigated by means of a complex mix of statistical methods, social network analysis, agent-based simulations, and experiments, the aim being to uncover the reason- and network-

based mechanisms that have brought these patterns about.

These multi-method empirical analyses are still infrequent, however. This signals that the analytical sociology research program is not particularly common within contemporary sociology, that this research program has a clear specificity, and that there is room for its further development. In my opinion, this is precisely the very next step to be undertaken. It is now time to diversify the types of social phenomena brought under scrutiny in order to prove empirically that the analytical sociology research strategy, no matter how demanding it may appear at first, is workable in practice, and that it can help reinforce the explanatory side of our discipline.

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*Gianluca Manzo*

### **Call for Papers for the 2014 World Congress of Sociology**

1. Jeff Alexander. **Cultural Pragmatics and Social Theory: The Implications of Performance Theory for the Study of Society.** Over the last decade, macro-sociological theory has made significant strides in conceptualizing groups, individuals, and institutions in terms of social performance. Earlier, the concept of perfor-

mance related principally to the micro-sociological, Goffmanian tradition. The new development, by contrast, links classical and modern traditions of social theory with aesthetic theories of theatre, drama, and film. Contributors to this session are asked either to reflect on this recent performative turn in cultural sociology, providing new interpretations, or to advance this turn, demonstrating how cultural pragmatics, or other performative theories, can bring new perspectives to bear on social problems and/or on particular sociological fields.

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2. Gilles Verpraet. **Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism and Political Space.** The notions of cosmopolitanism exceed the nationalist positionings (Beck, Delanty), so to recognize the different cultures (Jullien), and to promote a reciprocity of perspectives (Schutz). The first step intends to question the conditions of intersubjectivity inside the transnational spaces when exist some cosmopolitan stages (Saito). It invites to develop the pragmatic studies of cosmopolitan relations (N Anderson). In a second stance, the sociological elaboration on the reciprocity of perspectives may enlighten the conditions of reciprocity inside international relations. At this level, can be considered the Asian debates between monologic universalism and dialogic universalism (Shijun). How to elaborate a culture-focused universalism? The session is concerned with thick descriptions of the cosmopolitan encounters considering their symbolic performances (Alexander, 2006) It questions the new styles of action that are developed in the micro/ macro links (Giesen), the political subjects who are connecting the global and the local issues. In this framework can be specified the new conditions for transnational solidarities, the connections of public spheres between Polis, nation and cos-