

# Virtual Warm-up Event "Making Theory Work"

ahead of the  
**HERSS SUMMER SCHOOL 2021**  
30.09.2020, Hanover, Germany



# Making Theory Work

**VIRTUAL WARM-UP EVENT**

**Julian Hamann, Christian Imdorf, Anna Kosmützky**

**30.09.2020, Hanover, Germany**

# What the literature says about theory work

'Theory' and 'theorizing' can mean a bunch of different things (cf. Abend 2008; Krause 2016), including, but not limited to:

- Interpreting major figures ("What has Robert K. Merton *really* meant with this?")
- Explanation of particular social phenomena ("What are the factors that explain student drop out rates?")
- *Weltanschauung*, i.e., an overall perspective from which one sees the world ("Education is important for the advancement of societies")
- Applying existing concepts to new observations ("Research performance assessment is an example of governmentality")

# What the literature says about theory work

Literature on theory work covers activities as diverse as constructing arguments, reasoning, rhetorical, and visual presentation.

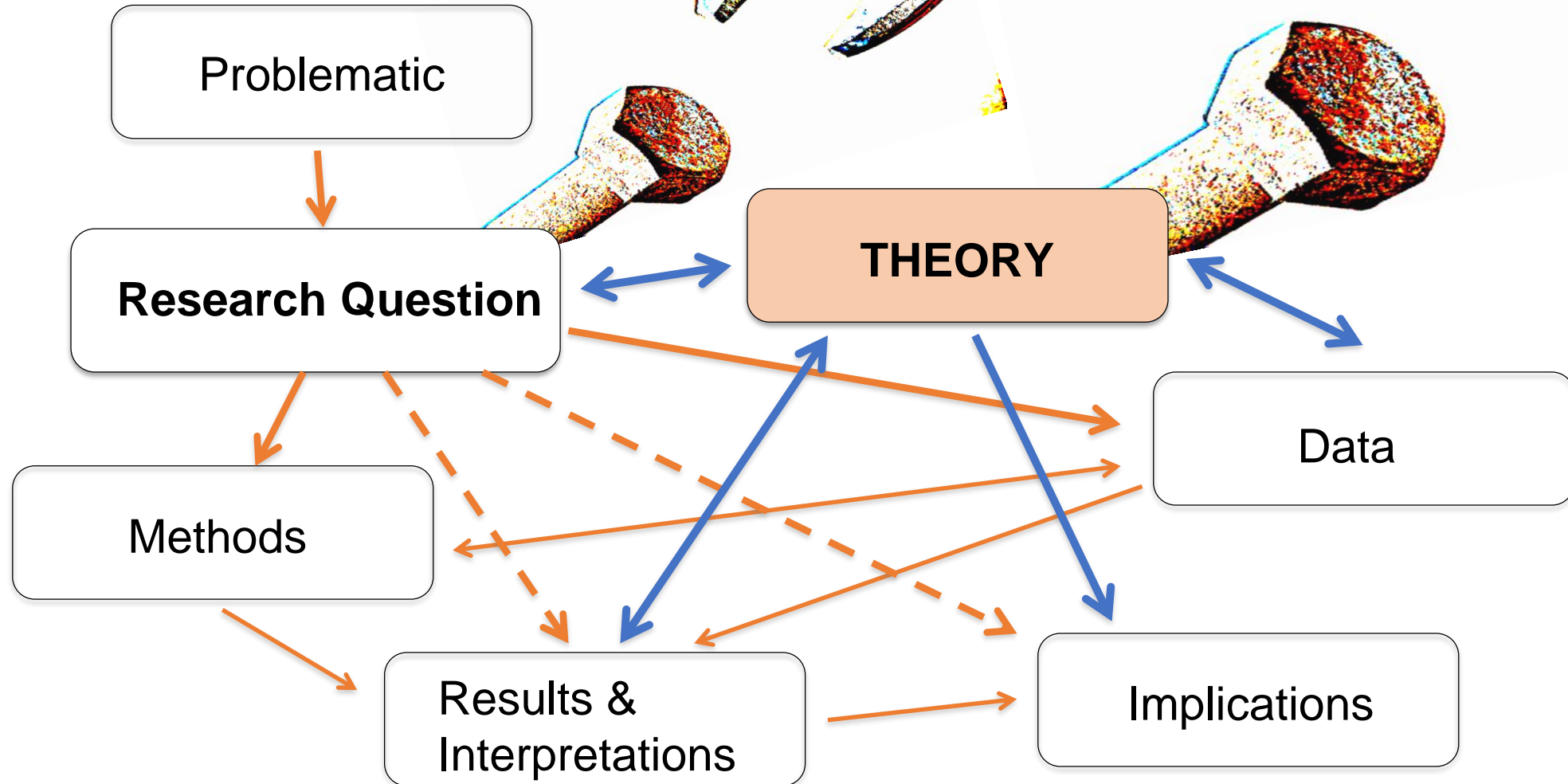
Three main perspectives:

Instrumental perspective on theory as a craft, i.e., there is a normative idea of 'good theory' (e.g., Timmermans & Tavory 2012, Becker 2014)

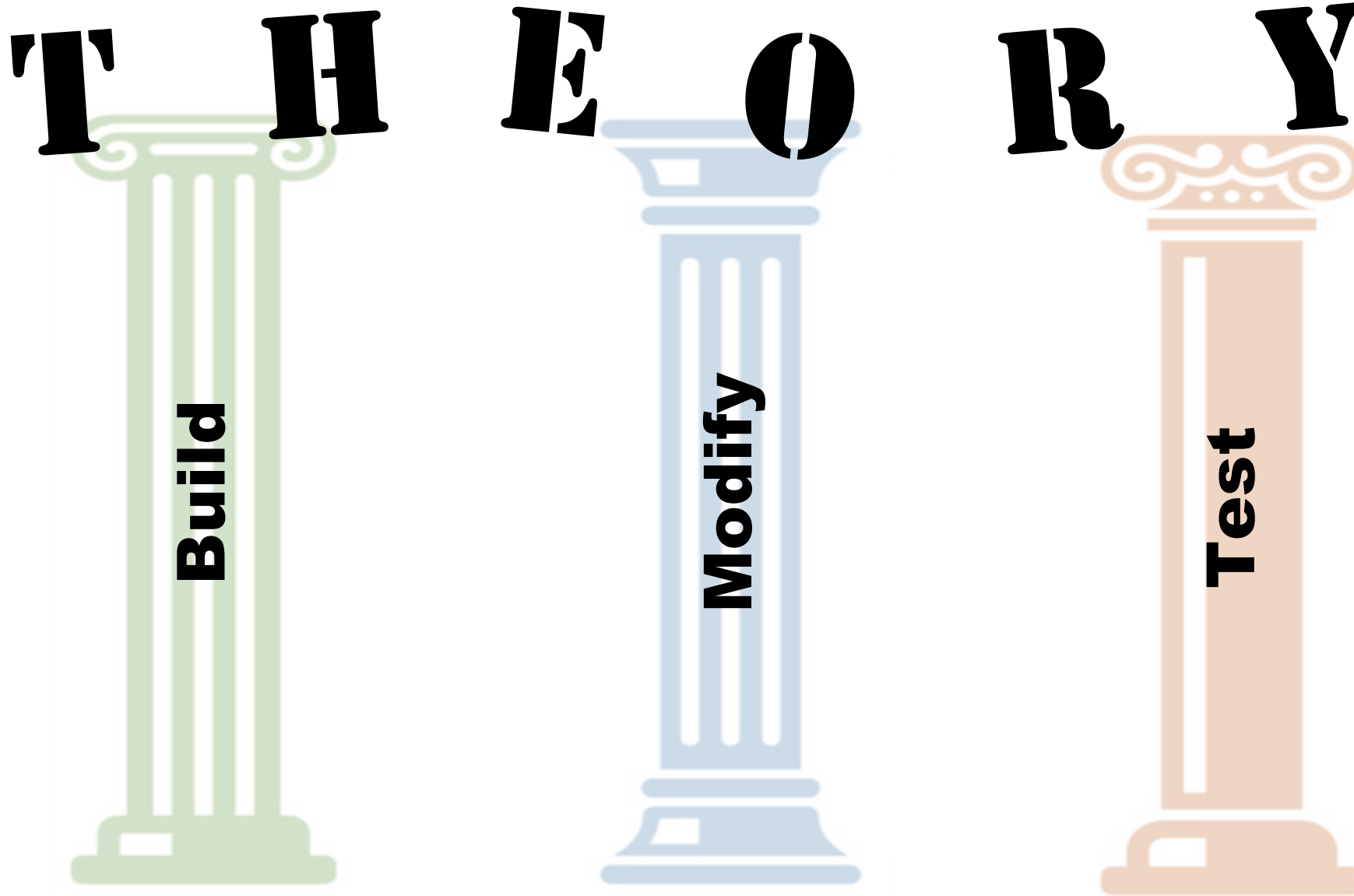
Praxeological perspective on theory as a practice, i.e., how researchers accomplish 'theory' in their daily routines (e.g., Swedberg 2014, Schmidt 2016)

Political perspective on theory as epistemic power, i.e., who can define what society and its elements are about (e.g., Bacevic 2017, Go 2017)

# Theory work is integral part of any research

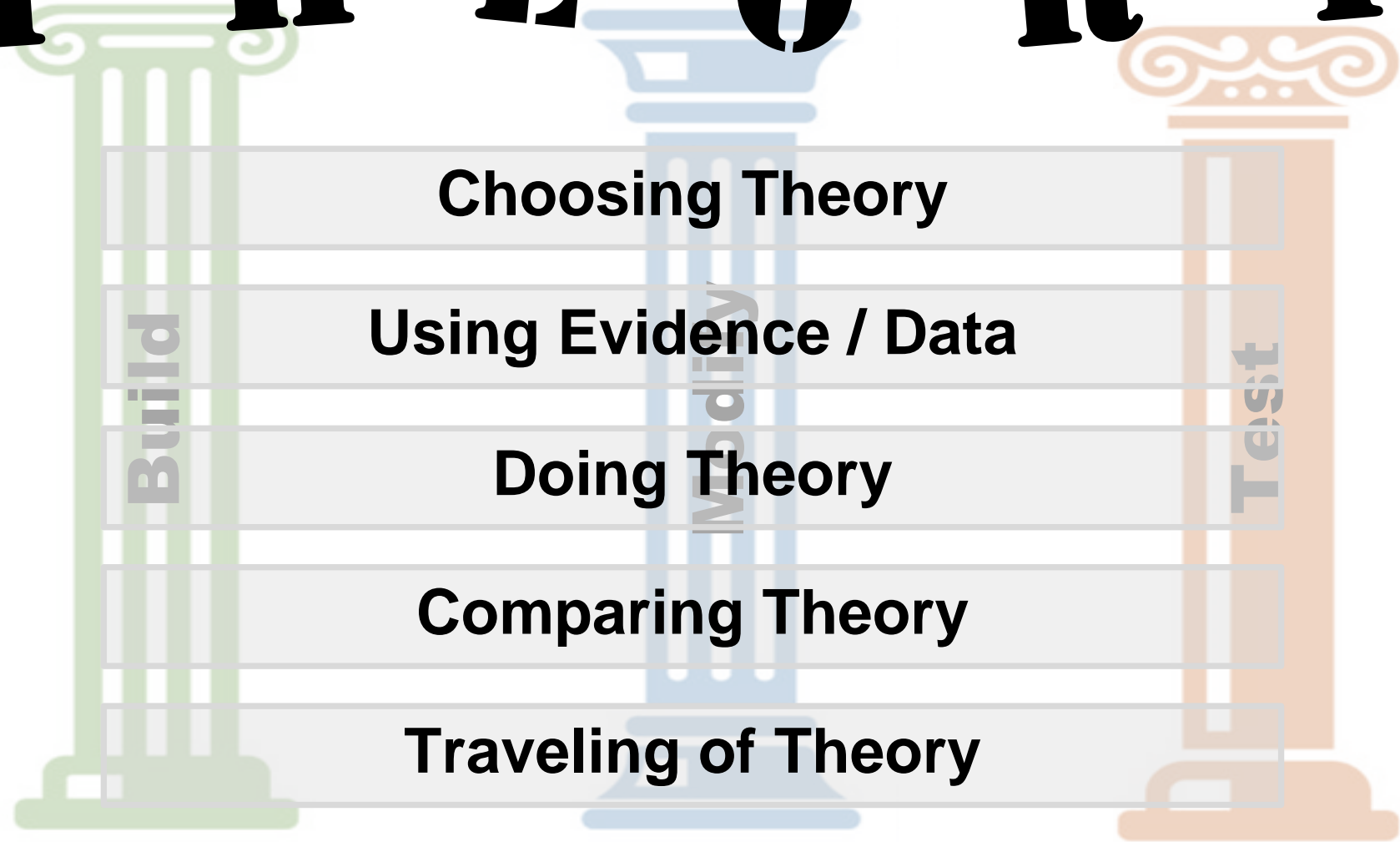


# Three pillars of 'Making Theory Work'



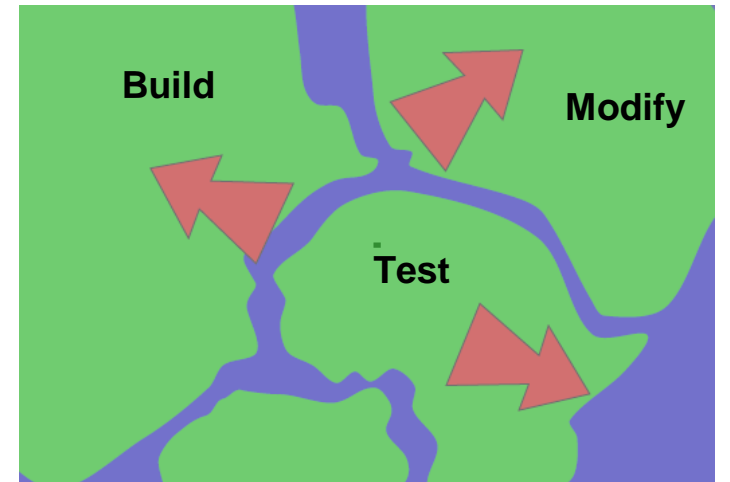
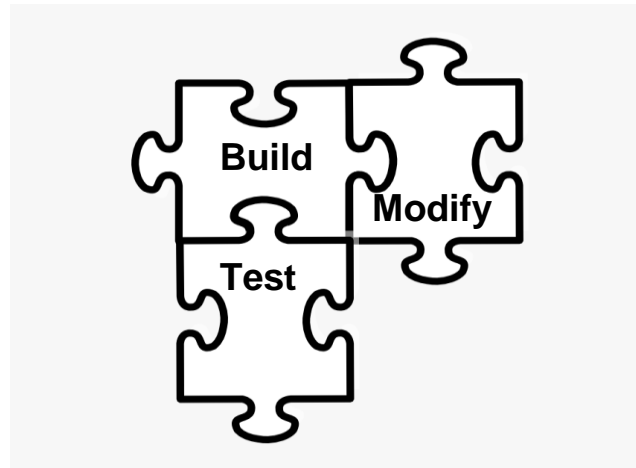
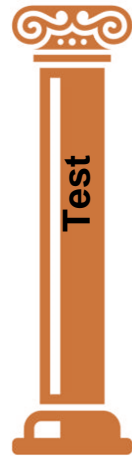
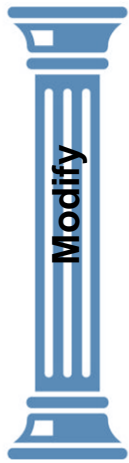
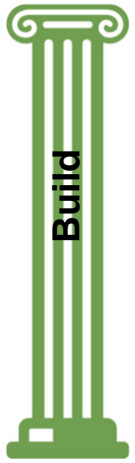
# Transversal approaches and issues

# T H E O R Y



# Three pillars of 'Making Theory Work' – alternate depictions

Pillar, puzzle, or tectonic plate?





# Making theory work in HERSS

- HERSS define themselves by their research objects and often include a focus on applicability, (best) practice, and reform → theoretical reflection is all the more important to provide a common ground for knowledge production (comparability, generalization, and the transfer of results), also in order to avoid an empirical parochialism and methodological nationalism.
- HERSS scholars study their own practice (“members of academia conduct research on academia“) and research subjects are closely related to research objects → theory work can help to reflect on epistemological perspectives and positions and to maintain analytical closeness as well as distance.
- HERSS have no standard way and no canon for theory work but rather the thematic research communities have different preferences for the three pillars → reflection on the different practices of theorizing and theory work within the HERSS research communities supports the development of the field(s) and their thematic trajectories and interrelations.

# What the summer school offers

- Discussing the craft of theorizing and applying theory
- Exploring routines and strategies of doing theory
- Thinking about opportunities and blind spots of theory work
- Uncovering the positions and relations theories can have in our research
- Presenting and discussing your research project
- Meeting new people, making connections, and building networks

Making theory work

Developing your research project with peers and more experienced colleagues

A week of intellectual exchange and networking events

# The program: 3 keynotes

Gabriel Abend: "The meanings of 'theory'"

Jana Bacevic: "Doing (with) theory - between theory and practice"

Monika Krause: "On reflexivity"

We are looking forward to  
three eminent scholars  
sharing their views  
on theory work!

# The program: 6 workshops

1. "Theorizing through fiction" with Sina Farzin
2. "Methodological practices as integration of theory, research interest, and method" with Rainer Diaz-Bone
3. "Revealing implicit theories" with Ariane Berthoin Antal
4. "Rational-Choice-Approach in higher education: theory, operationalization and empirical results" with Markus Lörz
5. "Theorizing as conceptual innovation" with Monika Krause
6. "Future imaginaries of the public university" with Richard Watermeyer

Short videos with introductions to the workshop themes by the workshop hosts are available on the HERSS website:

[herss-summer.eu/current/virtual\\_warm\\_up](https://herss-summer.eu/current/virtual_warm_up)

# The program: participant contributions

- Sessions with presentations and posters by the Ph.D. and Postdoc participants
- Hands-on format: theory garages as follow-up to the workshops
- Networking meeting hosted by the „Hochschulforschungsnachwuchs (HoFoNa)“ and the „Interdisciplinary Network for Studies Investigating Science and Technology (INSIST)“

The summer school focuses on the work of early career scholars and makes it visible within the research community!

# COVID-19 pandemic: Three scenarios

1. In-person lectures and workshops at the Leibnizhaus Hanover, Germany  
(→ that's what we hope for!)
2. Online lectures and hybrid on-site / online workshops  
(→ perhaps a more realistic scenario?)
3. Fully online lectures and workshops  
(→ let's hope we can avoid this!)

All three scenarios will guarantee the HERSS Summer School to take place from 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> September 2021!

# HERSS SUMMMER SCHOOL 2021 “MAKING THEORY WORK”

**Organizers: Julian Hamann, Christian Imdorf, Anna Kosmützky**

**[www.herss-summer.eu](http://www.herss-summer.eu)**

# Literature on 'making theory work' (1/3)

## **Different meanings of 'theory' and 'theorizing'**

Abend G. 2008. The Meaning of 'Theory'. *Sociological Theory* 26(2): 173-199.

Krause M. 2016. The meanings of theorizing. *The British Journal of Sociology* 67(1): 23-29.

## **Theory as a canon of texts**

Levine DN. 2015. Social Theory as a Vocation. *Genres of Theory Work in Sociology*. New York: Routledge.

Outhwaite W. 2009. Canon Formation in Late 20th-Century British Sociology. *Sociology* 43(6): 1029-1045.

## **Theory as a (political) practice**

Bacevic. 2017. Theory as practice: for a politics of social theory or how to get out of the theory zoo. Available at: <https://janabacevic.net/2017/06/12/theory-as-practice-for-a-politics-of-social-theory-or-how-to-get-out-of-the-theory-zoo/>

Go J. 2017. Decolonizing Sociology: Epistemic Inequality and Sociological Thought. *Social Problems* 64(2): 194-199.



# Literature on 'making theory work' (2/3)

## **Theory as a craft**

Jasso G. 2002. Seven Secrets for Doing Theory. In: Berger JB & Zelditch M (Eds.) *New Directions in Contemporary Sociological Theory*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 317-342.

Timmermans S & Tavory I. 2012. Theory Construction in Qualitative Research: From Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis. *Sociological Theory* 30(3): 167-186.

Becker HS. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about Your Research While You're Doing It*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Becker HS. 2014. *What About Mozart? What About Murder? Reasoning From Cases*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Swedberg R. 2016. Can You Visualize Theory? On the Use of Visual Thinking in Theory Pictures, Theorizing Diagrams, and Visual Sketches. *Sociological Theory* 34(3): 250-275.

Mears A. 2017. Puzzling in Sociology: On Doing and Undoing Theoretical Puzzles. *Sociological Theory* 35(2): 138-146.

Farzin S & Laux H (Eds.). 2014. *Gründungsszenen soziologischer Theorie*. Wiesbaden: VS.

# Literature on 'making theory work' (3/3)

## **The process of theorizing**

Swedberg R. 2012. Theorizing in sociology and social science: turning to the context of discovery. *Theory and Society* 41(1): 1-40.

Swedberg R. 2014. From Theory to Theorizing. In: Swedberg R (Ed.) *Theorizing in Social Science. The Context of Discovery*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1-28.

Krause M. 2016. The meanings of theorizing. *British Journal of Sociology* 67(1): 23-29.

Schmidt R. 2016. Theoretisieren. Fragen und Überlegungen zu einem konzeptionellen und empirischen Desiderat der Soziologie der Praktiken. In: Schäfer H (Ed.) *Praxistheorie. Ein soziologisches Forschungsprogramm*. Bielefeld: transcript, 245-263.

## **Is theory over?**

Anderson C. 2008. The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete. Available at: <https://www.wired.com/2008/06/pb-theory/>

Seidman S. 1991. The End of Sociological Theory: The Postmodern Hope. *Sociological Theory* 9(2): 131-146.