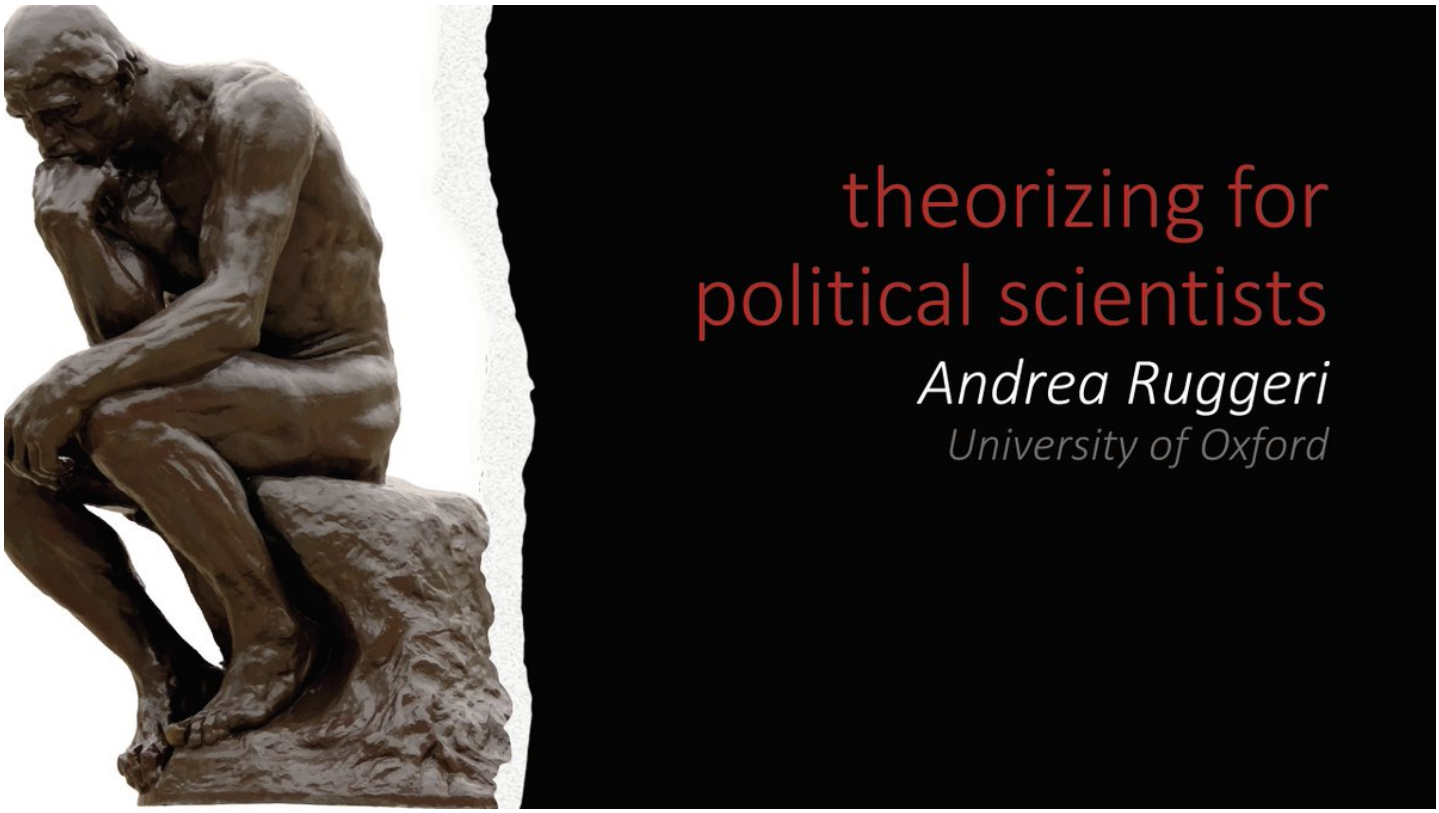
Twitter Thread by Andrea Ruggeri



Andrea Ruggeri
@aruggeri_eu

It was fun! I do it to learn more from graduate students' research projects and to push me to think systematically about theorizing. It is my "research gym", the only gym I'm decent at. I prepared a handout and slides (but I forgot to use them. Here some thoughts on theorizing. https://t.co/0tCBlllIZh



> Just finished an extremely helpful and fun workshop on theorising organised by @aruggeri_eu (who never stops working for his students)! Was great catching up virtually w/ @natrupesinghe @EvgenijaKroeker @CeciliaCorsini Mikael & Ellen!
>
> — Giuseppe Spatafora (@gspataf95) January 29, 2021

“By theorizing I mean the process that comes before a theory is presented in its final form” Swedberg 2016, 7

“Although everyone is for "more theory," most of us have rather little understanding of how to get "more theory”.” Dina A. Zinnes, 1980, 315

Why thinking about theorizing?

- Often, we are asked what our theory is. And we should, indeed, be able to answer that in a quick and sharp fashion.
- However, how do we get there? How do we shape, draft and calibrate our theory?
- This central issue is about theory making or theorizing.
- Oddly, the art and craft of theorizing is not explicitly tackled in graduate courses (except in formal analysis/game theory).
- It is assumed that we learn about theorizing through emulation, comparison and practice.
- My intuition is that, even though we cannot teach theorizing as an out-of-shelf technique/tool, we can aim to improve some guidelines and tricks that can facilitate a more systematic and fruitful theorizing.

How do we shape, draft and calibrate our theory? It is assumed we learn about theorizing via emulation, comparison and practice. Theorizing is a process and we should not confound it with the outcome(a theory). There are pre-theoretical steps/tips that can facilitate the process.

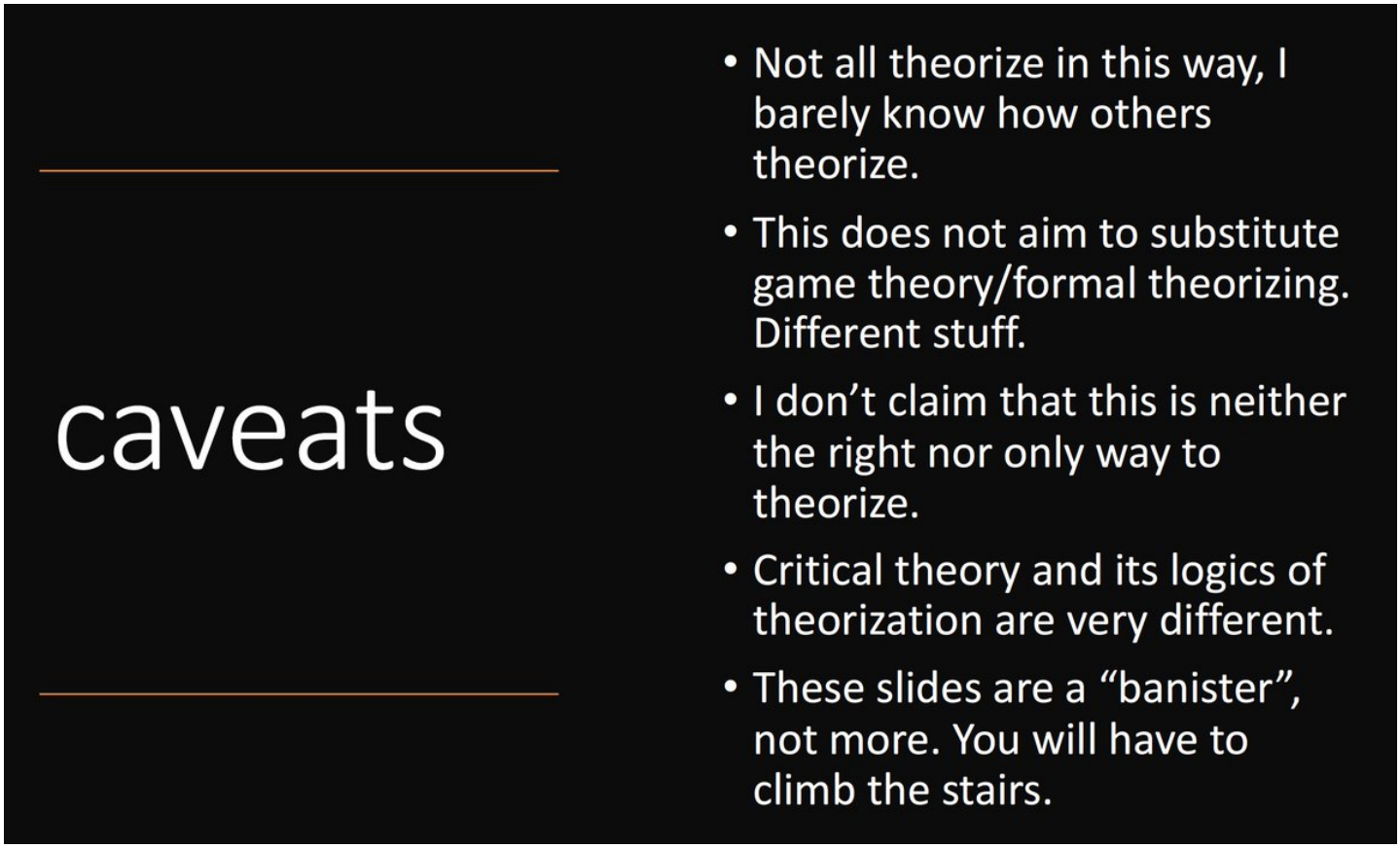


"Le problème ce n'est pas la chute, c'est l'atterrissage". Kassovitz, 1995

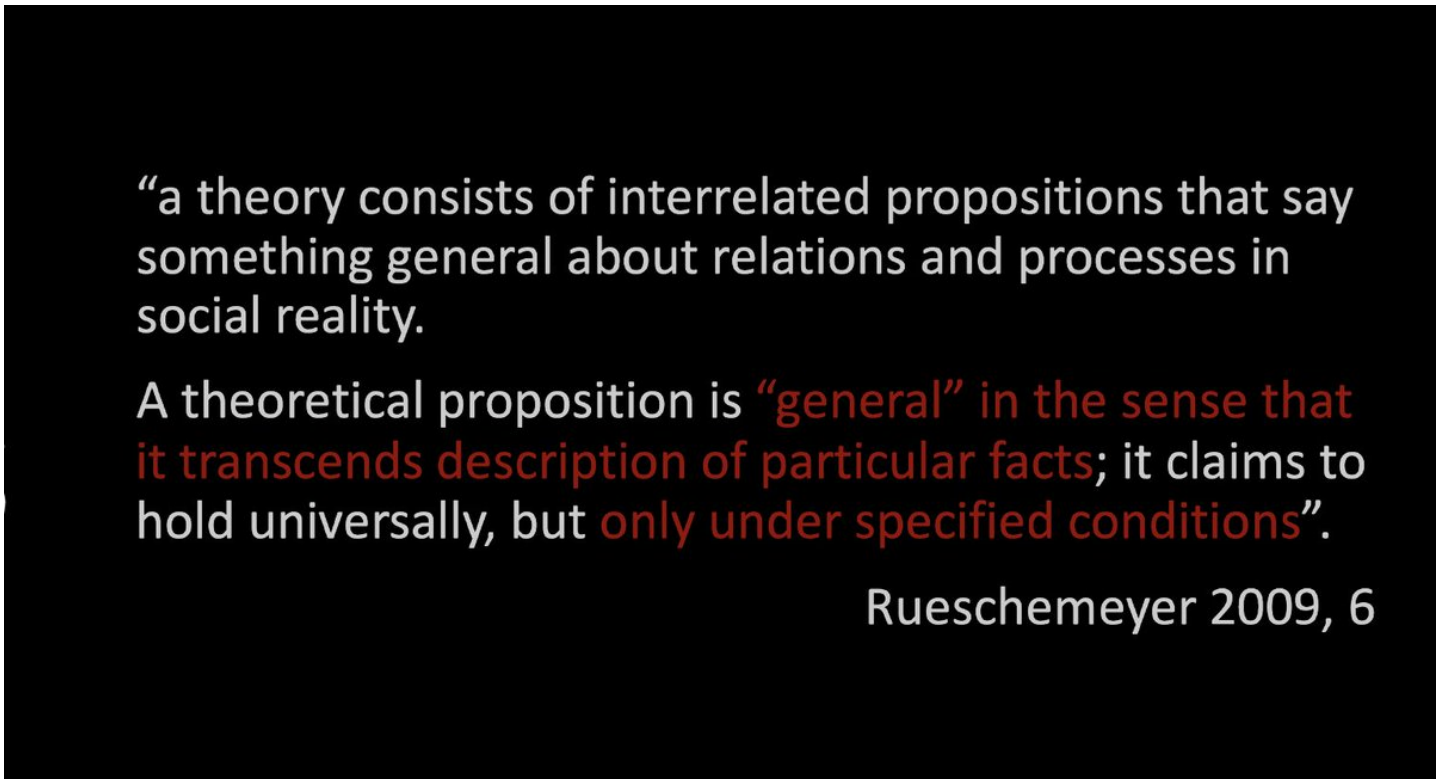
NOPE!

- Kassovitz on this is wrong.
- Theorization is the process, a theory is its outcome.
- You usually see only the outcome.
- Rarely you are walked through the process.
- Few, if anyone, show the process.

Caveats: this is my way to help theorising. These suggestions are just a theorizing “banister”, nothing more. You will have to climb the stairs for your theory.



What we're aiming at: a theory is a tentative conjecture about the cause of some phenomenon of interest. Logical statement based on assumptions that explain a causal mechanism from which we can derive observable hypotheses and therefore expectations.



"Analytical Thinking": Simplifying should not be oversimplification but can help us to navigate the complexity of the social reality. Only from a simple framework we can start then adding items. Theorizing is like cooking, it easy to add elements but hard then to remove them.

Economica



Munari

Da cosa nasce cosa

GLF Editori Laterza

Start with:

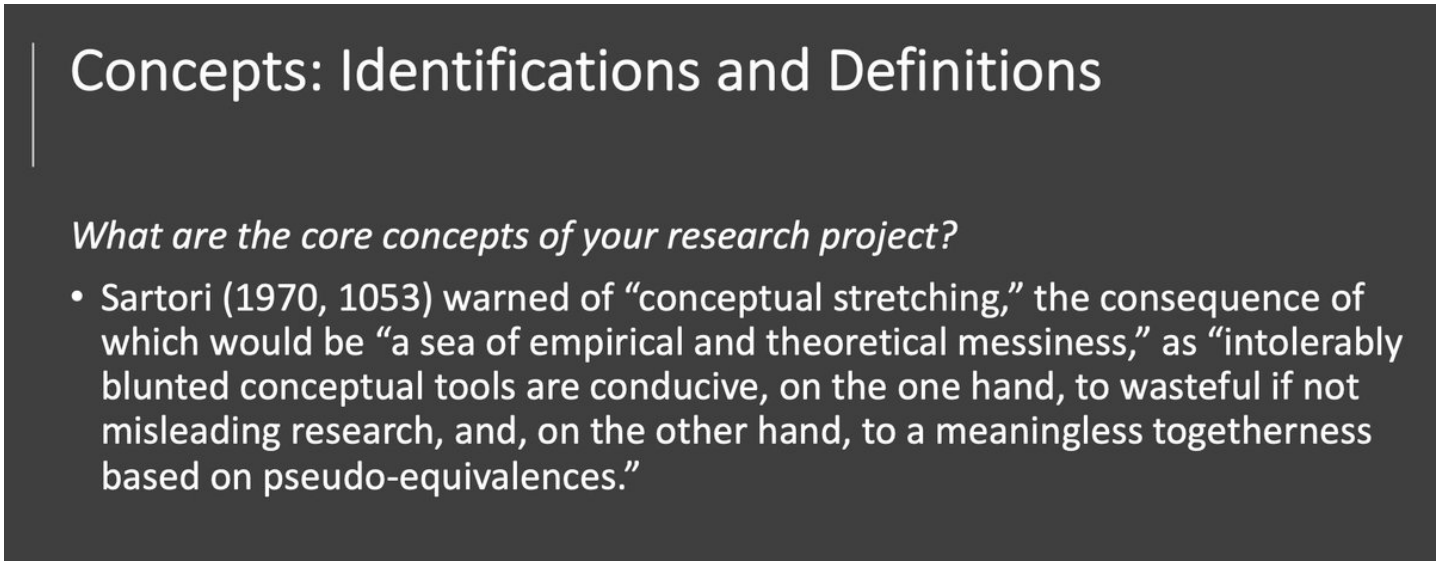
a. Clear/sharp research question. For help see my piece with @adammccauley on research questions.

b. You define your actors and level(s) of analyses: who they are? Why? What are their interdependencies? What could be alternative levels of analysis or actors?

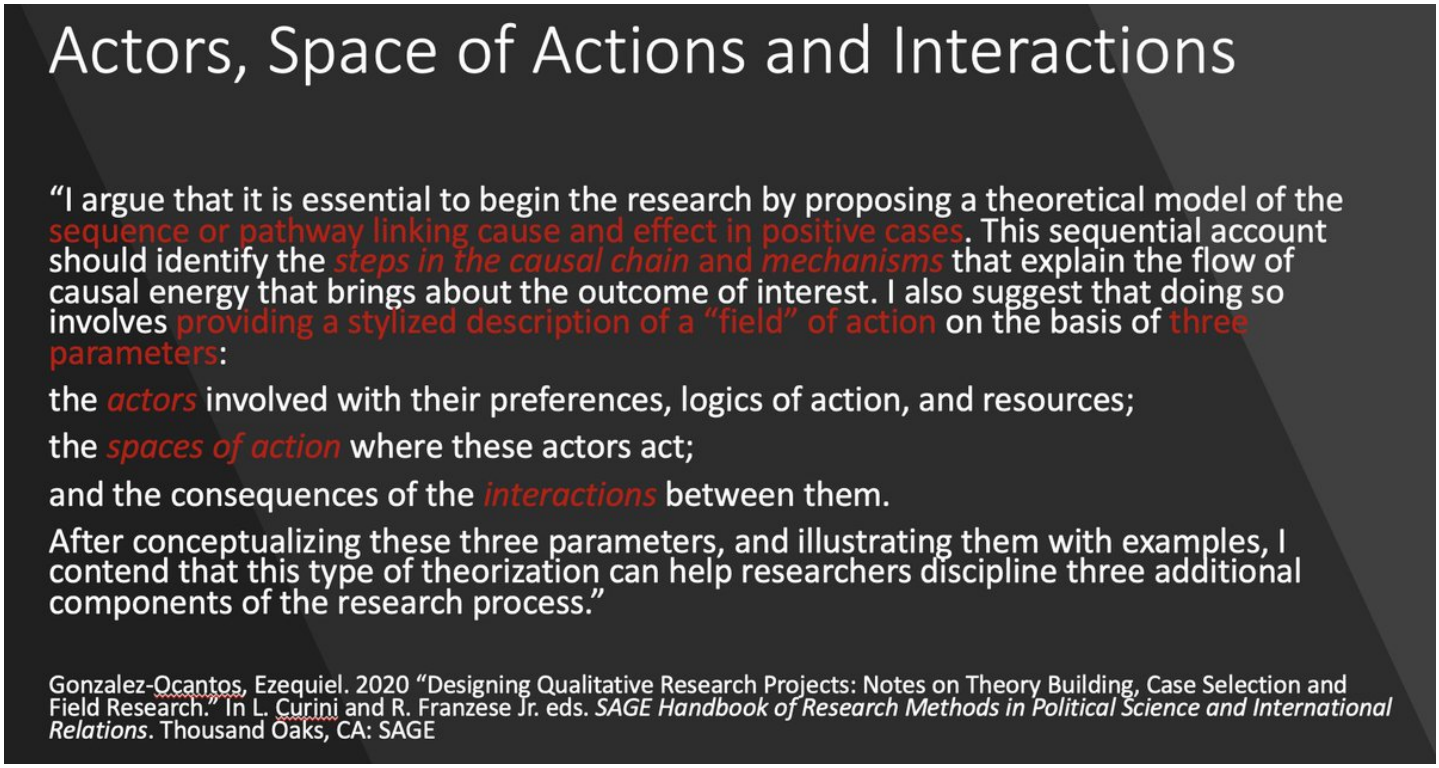
Research Questions Pillars

What's the puzzle?	• Are there contradictory findings?	○ clashing findings
	• Is an outcome unexplained?	○ unexpected outcome
	• Is the question puzzling per se?	○ question attractiveness
Filling a gap?	• What do you know?	○ previous knowledge
	• How main contributions about this differ?	○ contradictions
	• Strong/wrong assumptions previous work?	○ challenge assumptions
	• Where is agency?	○ level of analysis
	• Is this gap due to non-interesting topic?	○ interesting
Real world problem?	• How relevant is this?	○ societal relevance
	• Would an non-academic care?	○ audience reach
	• Could it be translated into polices?	○ policy implications
	• Are there ethical implications?	○ academic ethics
Methodological rigour?	• Can you answer this question?	○ scope
	• How can you answer this question?	○ method awareness
	• Can you use new methods?	○ method sophistication
	• Are new data necessary?	○ data awareness
Will you enjoy it?	• Is this topic "yours" or imposed?	○ autonomy
	• Can you add a creative twist?	○ creativity

c. Define and link to relevant literature your core concepts:
•What are the core concepts of your theory (DV, IVs, and mechanisms).
•Define them succinctly.
•Explain what are "adjacent" but not "correct" concepts.
•Explain what alternative important concepts could be



Who are the actors, their arenas and their interactions and interdependencies? My. friend and colleague @egocantos wrote very useful in order to think systematically about: actors, space of actions and interactions.



"To explain an event is to give an account of why it happened...this takes the form of citing an earlier event as the cause or the event we want to explain . [But] to cite the cause is not enough: the causal mechanism must also be provided, or at least suggested." Elster (1989,3)

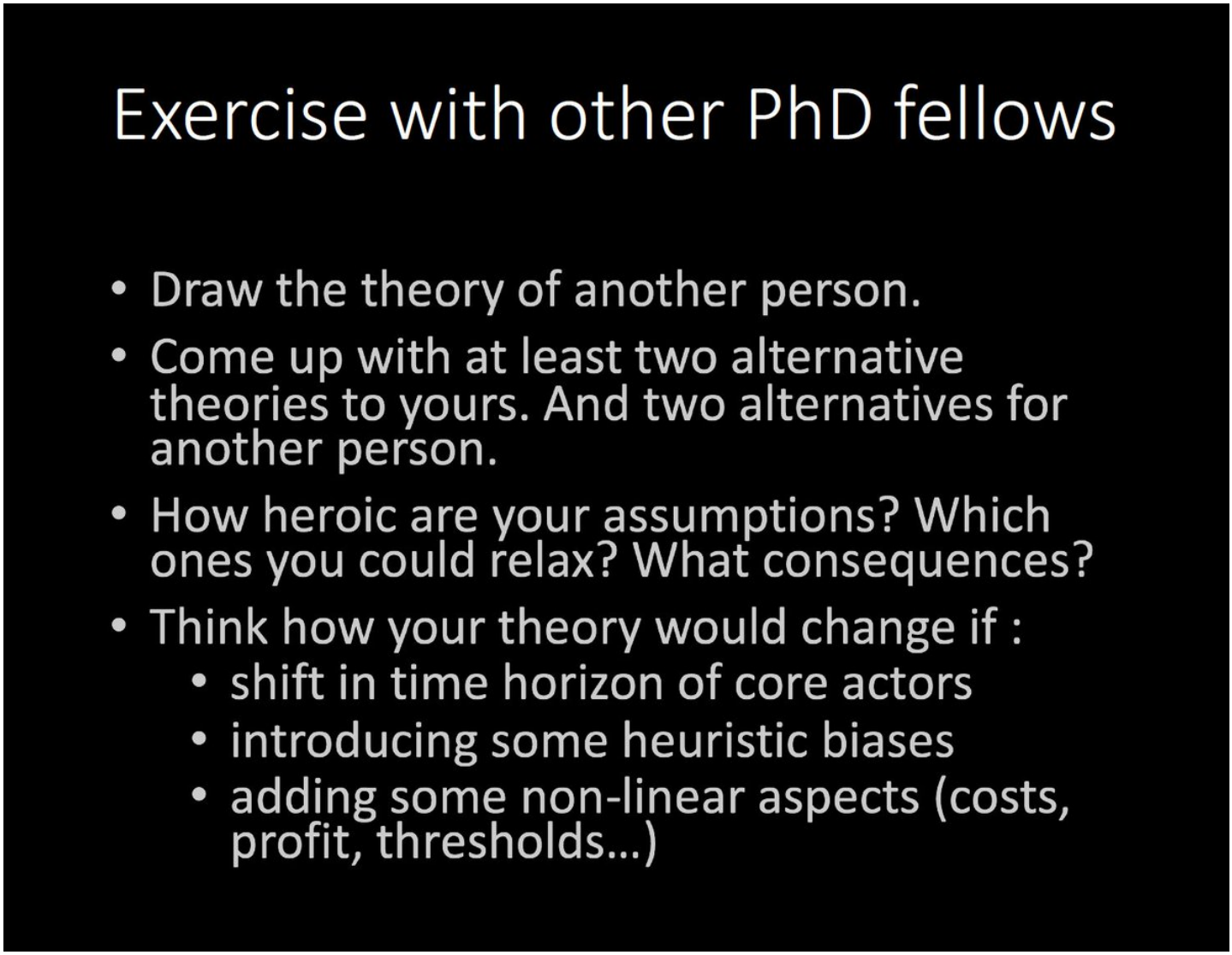
- "The entity one seeks to generalize about is not the parameter of a statistical model but **the process by which something has been brought about** and the mechanisms governing this process. […] Properties of actors and/or their social environments often influence the outcomes of individuals' actions. These properties as well as the action outcomes can be measured and represented in the form of variables, but the **causality does not operate at the variable level.**" Hedstrom (2008: 320)
- "A mechanism-based explanation **describes the causal process selectively**. It does not aim at an exhaustive account of all details but seeks **to capture the crucial elements** of the process by abstracting away **the irrelevant details**. The relevance of entities, their properties, and their interactions is determined by their ability to make a relevant difference to the outcome of interest". Ylikoski (2012: 24)

I use some examples from my recent book, "Composing Peace" w/ @_vincenzobove & @ruffa_chiara on, first, using tables to present mechanism and also drawing theory based on the Coleman's boat diagram.
We aim to explain what is the "story" (as Dina Zinnes'd say) on how X affects Y.

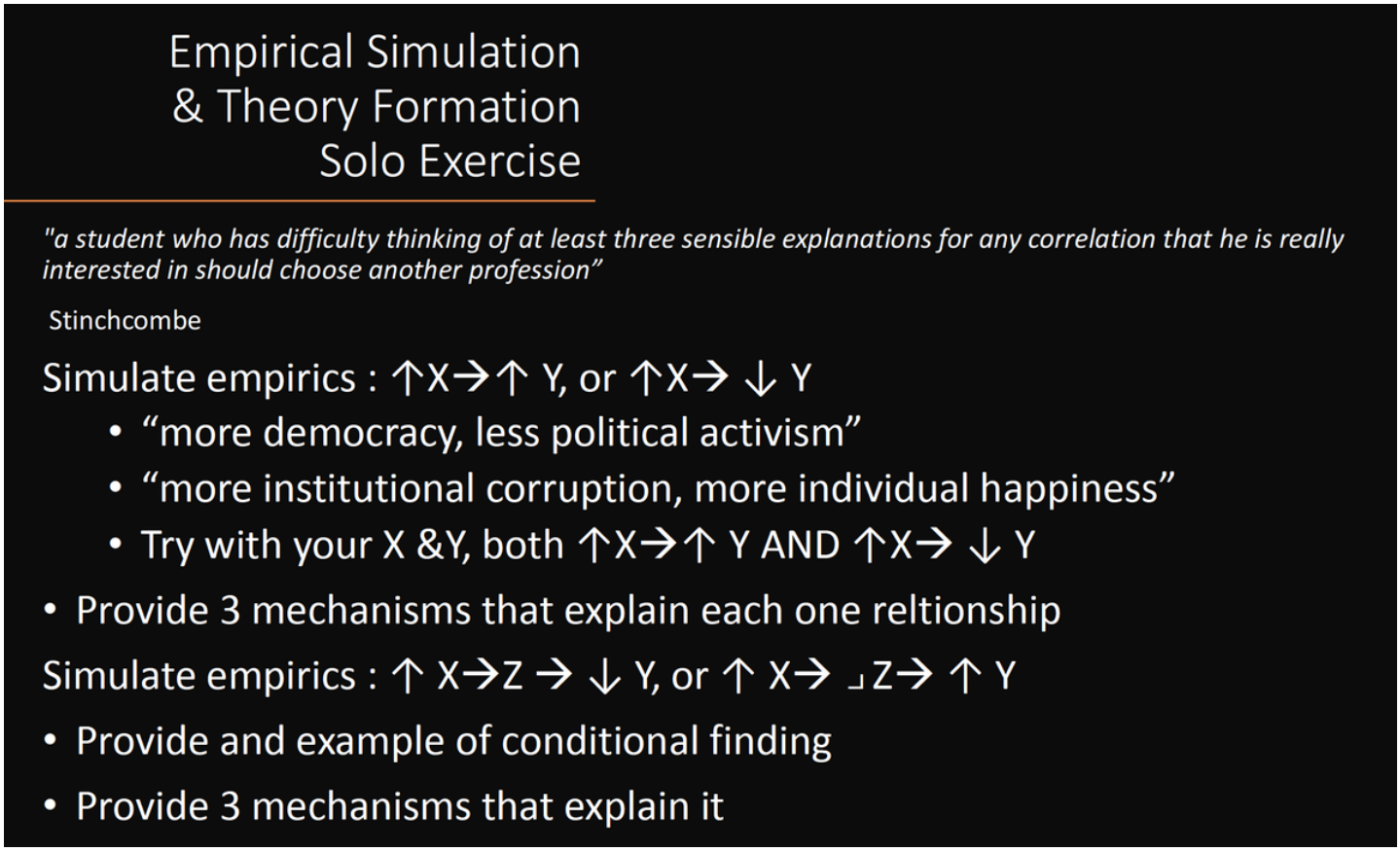
Table 1.1 Previous mechanisms and our mechanisms

Issue	Previous mechanisms		Assumption	New mechanism	
Asymmetric information	*Informative fungibility*	Any PKOs are able to minimize uncertainty by sharing information with locals	Information gathering as mere function of presence and size. The presence of a PKO is sufficient to gain access to this information	*Informative trust*	PKOs are able to gain more information due to building trust because of low levels of social, economic, and cultural diversity.
				Informative communicability	PKOs able to hear and understand context due to similarities in norms and culture with locals
Commitment problem	*Muscular deterrence*	PKOs can impose costs of misbehaviour by conflict actors	PKOs' latent capacity to impose costs is related to size and mandate	*Resolve deterrence*	PKO's heterogenous composition signals to local actors the resolve of UN and international community.
				Skilled persuasion	Able to affect local preferences due to skill portfolio of peacekeepers and their daily practices.

An exercise I suggest is to draw a theory using different modalities (2X2 Matrix, Coleman's diagram, Sequencing graphs). It is important to specify actors, relations , core phenomena. But also try to draw other people theories.



Another exercise to learn how to play with theorizing and mechanism building is to "simulate findings" between X & Y and explain them!



A checklist for start theorizing & link to my workshop handout. Of course, this is not a "general fixer" and it is a hands-on workshop focusing on research projects presented by phd students. But I hope this could somehow help also other graduate students. https://t.co/nep9UYeoee

Theorizing checklist

- Concepts and conceptualization
    - Do you borrow? Or do you innovate? Define!

- Ideal types & typologies
    - On what theoretical axes/parameters are created?
    - What is their purpose?

- Analytical framework
    - Level of analysis
    - Actors
    - Arena(s) of actions
    - Interactions/interdependences

- Theory 1: Assumptions
    - What are the pre-existing ones in previous work?
    - Which ones do you challenge? And what are the theoretical consequences?

- Theory 2: Mechanisms

- Empirical Implications
    - If so, what we should we observe?
    - And if you were wrong, what should we be observing?