

Professor John Mohr – A Tribute by the ZiF Research Group on Multimodality

Professor John Mohr passed away on August 24 2019 surrounded by family and loved ones. Professor Mohr had been diagnosed in 2017 with an aggressive form of ALS.

John Mohr and the “Cultural Turn”

Professor Mohr is recognized as one of the leading cultural sociologists of his generation. He developed research and innovative methods that led to advances in disciplines across the social sciences and humanities. Professor Mohr is considered a pioneer in modeling cultural forms, and his work is widely cited. His research has been celebrated in the fields of social organization, culture, and social theory for its several far-reaching contributions to the theory and method for measuring of meaning, and his advocacy for the use of “big data” text mining for investigating “meaning structures”. Amongst other things, his scholarship has been foundational to Sociology’s renewed focus on culture – the “cultural turn” – through research initiatives that unified meaning-making practices and processes with methods in quantitative analysis, big data, and social networks. His research program provides a model for bridging the fields of “qualitative and quantitative methods, mathematical and computational techniques, the formal and the hermeneutic, and the historical and the contemporary.” As a thinker and communicator, Professor Mohr served a major intellectual role in a number of ideational fields and spanned many academic communities; a visualization of the socio-semantic space within which he contributed has been presented by Roth and Basov (2020).

Co-Convener of the ZiF Research Group on Multimodal Rhetoric

Professor Mohr was a founding member and co-convener of the ZiF Research Group (RG) on Multimodal Rhetoric in Online Media Communications. Although his untimely death prevented him from participating in carrying out the group’s research, he remained highly active throughout the preparatory, review, and early planning phase of the research group. The absence of his personal self, his expertise, and counsel are an invaluable loss that the RG feels at every step along the way. Professors Robin Wagner-Pacifi (The New School for Social Research, USA) and Ronald Breiger (University of Arizona, USA) —both close collaborators of Professor Mohr— speak for all of us when they reflect:

“as a person, John Mohr was a wonderful colleague, with a rare combination of intellectual brilliance, an unusually wide and serious range of interests that he connected in a unique and profound way ..., an extraordinary ability to listen to others and to learn from them while teaching them, an ever-present sense of dignity and respect in dealing with others, a vast patience, and an uncanny ability to mediate and to bring colleagues together, much as he brought the three of us together” (Wagner-Pacifi and Breiger 2020).

The ZiF RG team for Multimodality misses the participation of Professor Mohr; we remain grateful and fortunate to have had the continued support and participation of his colleagues Professor Wagner-Pacifi and Professor Ron Breiger, as well as Devin Cornell who was

formerly a graduate student collaborating with Professor Mohr. Together, the ZiF research group on Multimodality aspires and remains committed to build on the scientific legacy of Professor John Mohr to explore truly transdisciplinary socio-cultural concerns ranging over the domains of culture, theory, and method.

BIOGRAPHY / IN BRIEF

Professor Mohr completed his PhD (1992) in sociology at Yale University. Professor Mohr joined the Department of Sociology at UC Santa Barbara in 1991, subsequently also serving with affiliated professorships in the Department of Communication and Technology Management. At UC Santa Barbara, he served in several additional important leadership roles, including Associate Dean of Graduate Division from 2000-2004; Associate Director of Institute for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Research from 2008-2012; and Director of Social Science Survey Research Center from 2008-2013. Professor Mohr was one of the key drivers of the University of California's efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in the social and physical sciences. He served as past Chair of the ASA's Culture and Theory sections, and was Co-Chair of the Historical Sociology Section. He was also a member of the prestigious Sociological Research Association. He also served on the editorial boards of *Sociological Theory*, *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, *Poetics*, and *Theory and Society*.

RELATED LINKS

Wagner-Pacifici, Robin, and Ronald Breiger. 2020. "In Appreciation of John Mohr." *Poetics* 78 (February): 101436. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2020.101436>.

Roth, Camille, and Nikita Basov. 2020. "The Socio-Semantic Space of John Mohr." *Poetics* 78 (February): 101437. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2020.101437>.

UC Santa Barbara (2019): Office of the Chancellor. UCSB Memos to the Campus: Online: September 5 2019. URL / <https://chancellor.ucsb.edu/memos/2019-09-05-sad-news-professor-john-mohr>