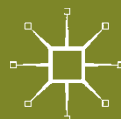


PALGRAVE
HANDBOOKS



THE PALGRAVE HANDBOOK OF RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY

Edited by
François Dépelteau



The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology

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THE PROMISES OF THE RELATIONAL TURN IN SOCIOLOGY

THE GOALS

By publishing handbooks, Palgrave Macmillan's objective is to provide overviews of specific fields of research. Those publications are principally for specialists and students. By and large, these books present the general goals, approaches, concepts, methods, and past and ongoing researches proper to the field. It is also expected that these voluminous publications will contribute to setting the agenda for future developments within the discipline. With these two ambitious goals in mind, I quickly accepted the invitation to edit a handbook of relational sociology.

The timing was too propitious to decline the offer. Indeed, relational thinking has spread to other disciplines such as psychology, psychoanalysis, archaeology, economics, social work, international relations and political science. There are texts on risk assessment for suicide, qualitative methods, social theory, the study of radicalization, emotions, music, football fan clubs, social movements, family farm resilience, the study of personal decisions and so on. Besides, the relational turn is made by competent sociologists living in multiple countries. As we will see in this handbook, it is a rich and diversified field of research fuelled by various pre-existing approaches and theories. This approach is not short of internal challenges and it does question some established ideas and practices in the discipline. It makes this process even more promising. I do not know if relational sociology will change the discipline in any significant way as most of its co-producers intend to do. But it could be—or it is becoming—a precious, valuable space for fundamental and rigorous deliberations in a time where human beings (still) need to re-evaluate the ways they relate to each other and to non-human interactants. As a non-relational colleague told me recently: 'The world is aflame and we need a better sociology.' Social life has always been messy, and I cannot agree more: sociologists can and must do better, even if they did good work in the past.

What is special about relational sociology? As we will see, this book is not a revolution or a rupture. It will not save the world and does not propose any utopia beyond the idea that by understanding better we could do better. Overall, we do not even have one unified and coherent ‘theory’ to propose, even if many of us are working hard to achieve this goal. What might be special (but not unique) about relational sociology is that it brings us (back) to fundamental dilemmas and issues. This is one of its main characteristics, if not the most important one in addition to the focus on ‘relations’. We are talking about questions such as: Should we think in terms of social ‘substances’ or social processes? Should we rely on dualisms separating objectivism and subjectivism, social structures and agency, or societies and individuals? Should we give causal powers to social structures over individuals and groups? What about the importance of non-human interactants in sociological explanations?

This questioning process might be more promising and rich than elsewhere since these central issues are raised by specialists with different views and influences. It does not often happen that we find such a group of sociologists working on a broad and fundamental topic (the study of relations), who come to the discussion with so many influences and orientations. As we can see with this handbook, relational sociology is made up of a high number of theoretical influences, classical and contemporary, from G. Tarde to N. Luhmann. Once again, this mixture of a general interest for relations and a high diversity of influences is a fertile soil for fundamental, rich and promising discussions, especially when competent specialists are willing to play the game. We have something in common and we have different ideas to bring to the table. We can compare and test various relational ideas thanks to discussions and empirical demonstrations. In sum, we try to find the best option(s) we can imagine at this point in the history of human and rigorous reflexivity on social life.

We are talking about (meta)theoretical questions and issues, not metaphysical ones. Because it is sociological, this approach is about how we should interpret the characteristics of our (hyper)modern social relations—of our social lives. Moreover, we are talking about a sociology of relations and social processes based, like other sociologies, on rigorous analyses. As usual in social sciences, this type of reflexivity is justified by the idea that this ‘scientific’ knowledge of social relations can be more accurate—and therefore useful—than ideological, religious, mythical, traditional or common-sense knowledge.

What I briefly described above partly reflects ongoing processes within relational sociology, and partly stems from intellectual aspirations. Evidently, there are different paths we can follow in a near future as relational sociologists. We can all develop and diffuse our own version of relational sociology, following our own influences, interests and inspiration. This is the hyper-individualistic route. Some will be more successful than others when adding to their list of citations and becoming recognized in the field, and maybe outside of it. In this line of argument, relational sociology is another highly fragmented intellectual constellation of heterogeneous research by individual, with little discussion between them.

As a collective, we could also be satisfied by establishing relational sociology as a theory and a set of methods used by other scholars and graduate students. In this view, relational sociology becomes another non-Kuhnian or non-hegemonic ‘paradigm’ competing with other ‘paradigms’ in sociology. Maybe this is what relational sociology is becoming. If this is what we are doing, we are contributing to what J. Turner (2001, 1) called the ‘hyperdifferentiation of theories’ in the discipline. We compete ‘for an attention space’. In fact, we create our own space (or a relatively ‘close’ field) without any significant discussion with non-relational colleagues. Rather than trying to improve sociology overall, we add another ‘paradigm’ or another theory by doing what we have done in the last years in relational sociology: publishing a handbook, creating a new book series, being on editorial boards of journals, publishing books and articles, organizing sessions in congresses, creating new relational courses and so on. This common practice in contemporary sociology might be rewarding at the individual level and for specific groups, but it comes with a high price for the discipline. As J. Turner (2001, 1–2) said:

One of the effects of hyperdifferentiation is that many new resources niches are created, allowing scholars and their students to operate without having to justify their importance vis-à-vis other theories, and this is especially so as sociological theory has abandoned the requirement that it be tested against empirical facts.

I think J. Turner exaggerated to make his point. Sociologists constantly test or support their theory with plenty of data. The typical problem is more that few sociologists compare the value of their ‘facts’ with ‘facts’ produce by other theories. In this way, we all ‘corroborate’ our theories and, therefore, contribute to the hyper-differentiation condemned by J. Turner in his first chapter of the *Handbook of Sociological Theory*. Turner’s critique should, perhaps, be taken seriously. These individualistic and ‘paradigmatic’ routes produce negative unintended effects overall, such as: a surplus of controversy (or noise for non-specialists), indifference towards other approaches, and(or) a lack of discipline and unity (an anomic sociology). At the end of the day, we face the disinterest of people within and outside sociology. It is seen as ‘just another theory’. Sociologists end up without any significant ‘public’ outside their little group of colleagues and classrooms:

Indeed, the diversity of approaches has led to a smug cynicism about the prospects of theory being anything more than texts produced by people who call themselves sociologists and who, for many, should not have a privileged voice. (Ibid. 2001, 2)

Sociology is now so diverse that it is difficult to see any unity ever emerging. Sociologists do not agree on what is real, what our core problems are, what our epistemology is, and what our theories should look like. (Ibid. 2001, 14)

Some perspectives overlap and/or draw upon similar traditions, but most go their own way, defining problems and performing analysis without great regard for the whole of activity that constitutes theory today. (Ibid. 2001, 14)

But if we are simply a discipline housed in the tower of babel (and babble), sociology will remain a weak discipline, operating at the fringes of academic and public life. Only with some degree of theoretical unity—on epistemology and problems—will sociology become an important discipline. (Ibid. 2001, 15)

I am probably more ‘liberal’ than Turner—if ‘liberal’ is the right word here. I am not looking for any Kuhnian paradigm. The last thing we need is a hegemonic theory which could maybe make us look more ‘legitimate’ to the eyes of rulers of universities and governments, but which could also hurt sociology by killing the necessary controversies we need to study our complex social life more efficiently. My proposal is to move beyond the status quo thanks to the creation of new spaces of productive discussions on fundamental principles and issues. The emergence of relational sociology offers this opportunity. This is fundamentally why I was interested in editing this handbook. I see it as one event in a chain of interactions leading to the reinforcement of one open intellectual field where sociologists focus on relations to explain social phenomena.

Relational sociology is thus becoming a sort of inclusive space of deliberation over fundamental issues in sociology; a space co-produced by competent colleagues sharing a general interest in the study of social relations, and bringing different theoretical and methodological orientations. This mixture of one general interest, competency and diversity is a good recipe for such an intellectual movement. We could end up having a great balance between discipline and controversy, especially if a significant number of relational sociologists are looking for a movement of this kind.

In effect, like other social movements, the intellectual ones are spaces of creation and diffusion of ‘new’ ideas and related practices emerging from individuals sharing some identities and interests. Those are social processes which are kept alive through ongoing interactions between the co-producers. Concretely speaking, we are referring to sub-processes like the creations of organizations, mobilizations of resources, publications of texts, discussions in congresses and so on.

It is simply up to us to orient the coming interactions in one way or another. Once more, we have at least three ideal-typical options: (1) individualistic productions of relational theories and demonstrations; (2) the creation of another ‘paradigm’, which also fuels a larger process of hyper-differentiation of theories; or (3) the conscious co-production of a relational movement within sociology energized by a mixture of controversy and discipline.

THE ORIGINS

Beyond these general goals, this handbook can be better understood if we know a little about its genealogy. To make a long story short, the field of relational sociology started many years ago thanks to the works of founders such as P. Donati and M. Emirbayer in the 1980s and 1990s. Having said this, this handbook comes from a more specific chain of interactions—a sub-process within a larger process—which emerged later, in Canada, around 2013 or 2014. One interaction leading to another, this network became quickly international thanks to the episodic participation of colleagues such as N. Crossley, P. Donati, E. Erikson, J. Fontdevila, J. Fuhse, D. Silver and many others.

The ‘beginning’ of this sub-process was the creation of a research cluster of relational sociology established with my colleague Jean-Sébastien Guy, and thanks to the support of the Canadian Sociological Association (CSA) (see <http://www.csa-scs.ca/files/webapps/csapress/relational/>). This only took place a few years ago. Jean-Sébastien and I met by drinking beers at night during the congresses of the same association, after presenting at the newly created annual sessions of relational sociology. Very quickly, many colleagues joined this economically poor network (total money invested to date: 0). Please note that P. Donati also created a network of colleagues interested by relational sociology in Italia called Relational Studies in Sociology (<http://www.relational-studies.net>). Like everything else, the emergence of relational sociology is the outcome of multiple and decentralized associations or ‘assemblages’.

The research cluster through the CSA rapidly set in motion new connections and projects. It allowed people who did not know each other to work together through virtual relations or face-to-face interactions. For example, in 2015, Jan Fuhse, myself and other colleagues had informal discussions on Google on issues related to relational sociology. These discussions lasted for more or less two months. Thanks to the offer of Dan Silver, these discussions were edited and published in the *Newsletter of the Research Committee on Sociological Theory* (summer 2015) of the International Sociological Association, under the title: ‘Invitation to an Ongoing Experiment: Discussing What Relational Sociology Is’. These discussions will not change sociology as we know it, but showed that we can achieve more than individual publications. Another example: Peeter Selg (from Estonia) came to Calgary to the congress of the CSA to talk about relational sociology during the day and drink beers with us at night. Due to his enthusiasm and competency (for relational thinking), Peeter joined us as a ‘co-manager’ of the research cluster. Estonia became ‘officially’ integrated to the network. It will not bother V. Putin and his hegemonic aspirations, but it made the network broader and richer and the movement even more promising. Nothing was really planned. Just one interaction leading to another. Today, there are more than 120 colleagues from 25 countries in this network. It is still growing.

Each action fuels the movement, even when there is no coordination or direct connection. In the early days of this process, not so long after the publications of the books of Pierpaolo Donati and Nick Crossley on relational sociology (with Routledge), I co-edited two volumes on relational sociology in 2013 (with C. Powell). The publication of these volumes puts us in touch with many competent relational colleagues—including Donati and Crossley—who have developed various types of relational sociologies. We stayed in contact through virtual means and many of them are authors of chapters in this handbook.

In 2015, I met Frédéric Vandenberghe in Rio de Janeiro. It did not take me long to notice Frédéric's great knowledge of social theory and his general interest in relational thinking. He kindly invited me to present relational sociology to his graduate students in Rio. His help to find more competent colleagues (Christian Papilloud and Jean-François Côté, for example) for this handbook was very useful.

Networking is exponential, especially when the network is open. In 2016, with our colleague Gabriel Cohn, Frédéric and I co-organized a session on relational sociology at the Anual da Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Ciências Sociais (ANPOCS) in Caxambu, a small town located far, far away, in the middle of nowhere in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. The ANPOCS is the 'place to be' for Brazilian sociologists. For most or all of them, it was the first time they had been exposed to this type of sociology. I did not know what to expect. It turned out that many of them were highly interested by this perspective. The international networking continued to grow, often by 'accident'. In Caxambu, we had the chance to meet Philippe Steiner from the Université La Sorbonne, who told us he was writing a French book on relational sociology. It was also a discovery to see there is some emerging interest for this sociology in France, outside of Pierre Bourdieu's circles and after the initial attempts made by Guy Bajoit and Philippe Corcuff in the 1990s.

Shortly before the (long) trip to Caxambu, a new book series on relational sociology was created (called the Palgrave Studies in Relational Sociology: <http://www.palgrave.com/it/series/15100>). Palgrave Macmillan has been very supportive of our uncoordinated actions. It does help a lot too. In big part thanks to the research cluster, we quickly got several promising projects and manuscripts for this new book series, once again coming from competent colleagues from different countries. Some of them, such as Sergio Tonkonoff (Argentina) and Christian Papilloud (Germany), also wrote chapters for this handbook.

Thanks to the invitation of Chiara Piazzesi (a new member of the research cluster), who introduced relational sociology to her graduate students, there was also a presentation on relational sociology at the Université du Québec à Montréal in 2016. My PowerPoint presentation was pretty much useless. After

20 minutes, the ‘lecture’ became a lively and interesting three-hour discussion. I was happily surprised again since relational sociology is relatively unknown in Québec. I rarely saw colleagues and students being so engaged by what I had to say, and it is not because I was a great speaker. Some participants openly (and respectfully) disagreed with my views on social life, but there was clearly a strong interest towards this kind of fundamental discussion. I could multiply the little stories but the main idea is simple: it seems the timing is good for a relational turn (and movement) the way it is presented here.

This is an international and open process. Again, the network I briefly presented is just one sub-process. Relational sociology has appeared in Italia around Pierpaolo Donati; in the USA after the ‘relational manifesto’ published by Mustafa Emirbayer in 1997 and the works of Charles Tilly, Harrison White, Ann Mische and network analysts (just examples); in Australia thanks to the work and the network of Scott Eacott and the recent work of I. Darnhofer; in Scandinavian states thanks to Olli Pyyhtinen, Chares Demetriou, O. Kivinen and T. Piironen; in Germany with the work of Jan Fuhse and more recently Christian Papilloud; in Great Britain thanks to its association with critical realism (see the work of M. Archer and Douglas Porpora) and the works of Nick Crossley, Ian Burkitt, Paul Widdop, Sarah Hillcoat-Nallétamby and others; in Argentina with the publications of Sergio Tonkonoff; in Estonia thanks to Peeter Selg and his graduate students; in Canada with Andrea Doucet, G. Veenstra, Jean-Sébastien Guy, C. Powell, myself and several others. All of this and the positive experiences in Caxambu and Montréal showed that relational sociology is growing and that it could emerge where it is relatively unknown.

I suspect not all the authors in this handbook share my vision of relational sociology as an intellectual movement. Whatever their motive is, they are the co-producers of this publication. It was a pleasure and a humbling experience to work with these competent colleagues. I did very little in terms of editing, limiting myself to general comments and suggestions they could ignore very easily. Many of them helped me very generously with some parts of Chap. 1. Again, I do not know how they see the future of relational sociology but this group of people is a great asset for sociology. It is my hope that more competent and open colleagues will be included in the coming years and be involved in future projects.

CONFIGURATION OF THE HANDBOOK

I do not think it is necessary to describe all the chapters of this handbook. Readers can find abstracts on the Palgrave Macmillan website. It might be more beneficial to pay attention to the various sections of this book. Indeed, its configuration is a source of information about what relational sociology is and what it could become.

It goes without saying that one can organize the same texts in different ways. I have tried to ‘interact’ with those texts. I did not want to force them to fit into my ‘plan’, even if, obviously, another editor would had come with a

different make-up. It might look a little bit esoteric, but I tried to listen to the texts, their themes and influences, to see them as ‘interactants’ and work out how they could connect and oppose to each other, how they could relate, if they would be left on their own, so to speak. Of course, the configuration did not come from the sky or the texts themselves. Hopefully, it was found at the crossroad where the editor and the texts met—or something like that.

Thanks to each collaborator and the assemblage of their chapters, I think this handbook opens, expands and therefore improves relational sociology by presenting its origins, multiple approaches, various theoretical influences, diverse concepts and methods (or the need for more work in terms of relational methods). As noted, the chapters and their assemblage can also help us to ‘set the agenda for future developments’ within (relational) sociology. Ironically maybe, this assemblage of chapters might be a good example of what relational sociologists are trying to explain beyond all the differences and disagreements. A new interactant—the handbook—emerged from the writing, the assemblage and publication of distinct but related texts. The interactions between the handbook and its future readers will become other events prolonging the chains of interactions which have made relational sociology. Hopefully, some relational ‘goods’ will come out from this process, within and outside of sociology.

What do we find in this book? Part I is short (only two chapters, one by Vandenberghe and the other by myself), but they both give the tone to the whole project even if, once again, we were not coordinated (each chapter was written without any consultation). We offer two different general presentations of relational sociology in many ways. Frédéric is influenced by critical realism. I am too, but in opposition to it in many ways. However, we both focused on important characteristics of relational sociology, a central one being its great diversity in terms of theoretical influences and worldviews. I will not go into the details of any of these chapters in this Introduction, but I would like to insist on one important aspect of Vandenberghe’s chapter. He proposed some general ideas to help us to move beyond some great divides in relational sociology. I think his general ideas should be discussed at length; and more important perhaps, we should be inspired by this type of approach where fundamental differences are put on the table by the author, and where ideas are proposed to start discussion between colleagues with different backgrounds and views.

The aim is not to give the ‘right’ to colleagues to express their views in some weird post-modern or identity politics logic. Rather, it is to open up a space of sociological deliberation where different and rigorously developed relational views are expressed to be discussed, compared and evaluated according to their capacity to improve our understanding of social processes and relations.

Part II not only provides a good illustration of the richness and diversity of relational sociology. It also distinguishes three grand ‘families’ of influences in relational sociology. More precisely, it identifies three ‘families’ of approaches and theories associated to relational sociology and used by relational sociologists in one way or another. These types of influence are important foundations of relational sociology.

Section A of Part II presents chapters showing the connections between relational sociology and Gabriel Tarde (Tonkonoff), the debate between Tarde and Emile Durkheim (Toews), G. H. Mead (Côté), pragmatism (Kivinen and Piironen), G. Deleuze (Lenco), Michel Serres (Pyyhtinen) and Bruno Latour (Papilloud). Generally speaking, it is from these sources that come the most ‘processual’ and anti-‘substantialist’ productions in relational sociology.

Section B of Part II presents connections between relational sociology and the study of social forms, system theories and network analysis. We could be tempted to say that we are dealing with the ‘structuralist’ sources of inspiration of relational sociology. It is partly true, but this is not so simple, as we can see by reading these chapters. Here, we have chapters on Georg Simmel (one from Papilloud and one from Cantó-Milà), Harrison White (Fontdevila), network analysis (Erikson) and Niklas Luhmann (Guy).

Section C, the final section of Part II, is composed of approaches or theories associated with relational sociology and focusing mostly on power relations, inequalities and conflicts. There are chapters on Charles Tilly (Demetriou), Michael Mann (Saarts and Selg), Pierre Bourdieu (Papilloud and Schultze), post-colonial theory (Go) and feminism and ecological thinking (Doucet).

Part III of the handbook presents some of the most active or visible contemporary relational sociologists. There are chapters on Mustafa Emirbayer (by Liang and Liu) and Pierpaolo Donati (by himself). Fuhse, Crossley and I also present the main ideas of our respective versions of relational sociology. Porpora presents critical realism as a relational sociology. Readers should be able to connect these contemporary relational works to the three ‘families’ of Part II: Fuhse to White and network analysis, Emirbayer to Bourdieu (among others) and myself to the first ‘family’. Crossley seems to be more eclectic, even if I think his chapter is close to the first ‘family’ in many ways. But maybe this is wishful thinking on my part. Overall, I think his work (with the approach of Charles Tilly as it presented by Demetriou in this handbook, and Vandenberghe’s chapter, among others) could be used as a good starting point for discussions involving people with different views and influences. I can see potential bridges emerging from serious discussions on and beyond this kind of work.

Part IV shows how relational sociology can be applied to specific concepts or empirical processes, once again in various ways. We have texts presenting relational views on agency (Burkitt), power (Selg), radicalization (Demetriou and Alimi), the ‘meaning-making of riots’ (Morgner), music (Crossley), residential relocation decisions in later life (Hillcoat-Nallétamby), leadership and education (Eacott), and Marcel Mauss and the phenomenon of the gift (Papilloud). The last chapter, on Marcel Mauss, could have been inserted into the second section, but it did not fit well with any of the three ‘families’ (to my eyes at least). This is a good example of how careful we should be with any mapping work: it is always illuminating and reductive at the same time. The work I did here is no exception. I hope it will be improved by other colleagues.

Evidently, this handbook is not the bible of relational sociology. It is a specific selection of texts representing quite well, I would dare to say, what

relational sociology is these days. It is also an invitation to read more about relational sociology, and to do research. Interested readers will find many other texts from the collaborators of this handbook on similar or different topics, and from other relational colleagues we do not find here, even if most of them are cited in one chapter or another.

This handbook also shows some of the most important limits of relational sociology. For example, there is no chapter on research methods and relational sociology. This is the kind of void which should be filled in the coming years, if this sociological approach is to improve.

It is to be hoped that this publication will incite more people to co-produce work on relational sociology as an intellectual movement which could improve our understanding of our social life and universe. If any reader is interested in contributing, or even just watching it more closely, they are invited to contact Peeter Selg, Jean-Sébastien Guy or myself by email. One of us will add you to the list of members of the research cluster, you will be kept informed about coming projects and invited to participate.

I cannot finish this Introduction without noting again the marvellous opportunity this volume has provided working with such highly competent colleagues. If the quality of an approach or an intellectual movement has anything to do with the quality of its co-producers (and it obviously does), relational sociology could be a fertile social field.

François Dépelteau

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PART I

General Presentations of Relational Sociology

Relational Thinking in Sociology: Relevance, Concurrence and Dissonance

François Dépelteau

1 MORE DETAILS ON THE PROMISES OF RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY

Relational sociology offers at least three promises. The first is based on the hypothesis that we can improve our understanding of social life by studying relations between interactants. This statement may sound trivial to sociologists acquainted with so-called ‘micro-sociologies’, numerous anthropologists, historians, socio-psychologists and many others. However, the same statement is almost a heresy for colleagues proposing ‘macro’ sociological explanations where broad and external social entities determine the individuals. Beyond this old dispute, the main point is that relational sociology reminds us that when we talk about ‘societies’, ‘social structures’, ‘cultures’ or ‘social things’; when we establish correlations between independent and dependent ‘variables’ such as poverty and deviancy; when we insist on the importance of power and social inequalities; or when we try to fix a social problem or help an oppressed group; whatever we study and however we do it, the mode of production of social phenomena is based on relations between interactants.

Besides showing that relational thinking has always been with us in sociology, the following statements freely inspired by G. Simmel, M. Weber, H. Becker and B. Latour illustrate the kind of worldviews coming from a relational approach: ‘A society is the general term for the totality of specific interactions’; ‘social inequalities refer to practices of social closure where some people prevent other people access to resources’; ‘deviancy derives from labelling processes where some actors declare other actors as deviants through processes such as complaints, investigations and trials’; ‘the social world of art is made by relations

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between artists, producers, critiques, music instruments, an audience, projectors, microphones, etc.’; ‘sociology is the study of associations’. Again, relational sociologists pay attention to the specific relations from which societies, social inequalities, deviancy and so forth emerge, are transformed or disappear. Our theories, concepts and methods should allow us to see these processual interactions in-the-making. Of course, there are important disagreements among relational sociologists on the ‘causal powers’ of social patterns once they have emerged. Some think they have causal powers on individuals; others do not. Some of us focus primarily on social regularities (for example, see E. Erikson and J. Fuhse in this handbook); others include any kind of social processes without making priorities. However, and overall, pretty much all agree that whatever happens comes from social relations between interactants. ‘The world is relational and processual’ is more than a slogan. This mode of perception is the foundation for relational hypotheses, concepts, methods and observations because, once more, we think this is how multiple ‘social fields’, ‘interactional fields’, ‘networks’, ‘figurations’, ‘social systems’ or ‘social worlds’ are produced, transformed and destroyed.

Implicitly or explicitly, relational sociologists assume that these kinds of relational worldviews and analyses can improve our control over human social life. They can help us to deal with specific social problems. This is the second promise of relational sociology: becoming more conscious that whatever happens in our social life comes from our interactions, while presuming that this relational consciousness can improve our social life. In this logic, we increase our consciousness that even if social inequalities are prevalent in this world and even if social patterns exist, none of us fully control social processes or are simply determined by existing social patterns. Since social phenomena are the products of multiple interdependent people and their interactions, we all contribute to produce, change or destroy social patterns we call ‘institutions’, ‘social structures’, ‘social systems’ or ‘societies’; but unless the social field is composed by very few interactants (such as couples or conversations), we cannot change or destroy social phenomena alone; we cannot just self-act on social phenomena composed by multiple interactants (such as a large corporation or an empire) by creating or destroying them. The use of our ‘agency’ is also a relational affair. That is why more or less similar concepts such as ‘relations’, ‘associations’, ‘assemblages’, ‘networks’, ‘figurations’, ‘interactions’ or ‘trans-actions’ are central to this sociological approach. Obviously, adjustments and refinements would be useful at the conceptual level since these notions come from different pre-existing theories or approaches; and significant issues must be worked out at different levels, including the methodological one. Nevertheless, the use of these roughly compatible principles and concepts reveals the overall nature of the relational turn in sociology.

A sociological approach is not fueled by pure and platonic ideas one ‘free spirit’ could find or imagine outside the reality. Knowledge is made by interactions between multiple co-producers. In other words, relational sociology is a distinct sub-field within a larger field called ‘sociology’. It is a loose intellectual

movement happening through a constellation of other similar movements we call ‘schools’, ‘traditions’, ‘paradigms’, ‘approaches’ or ‘theories’. Like other similar groups, the relational movement is co-produced by specialists who aim to reform sociology. In effect, social movements are also cognitive spaces where new worldviews, values, ideas, and so on are created and diffused (Eyerman and Jamison 1991). This leads us to the third promise of relational sociology: this is a new space of ‘scientific’ deliberations and creativity where, broadly speaking, we are invited to discuss, re-evaluate and reformulate our basic views of the social universe; and where, sociologically speaking, the basic principles, ideas and practices of the discipline are discussed, reaffirmed, challenged, reformulated ... As we can see by reading many chapters of this handbook, it means that we go back to the foundations of sociology through the reinterpretation and new critiques of the works of founders such as G. Simmel, K. Marx, G.H. Mead, M. Weber, M. Mauss, E. Durkheim and G. Tarde; we re-read and integrate philosophers such as A.N. Whitehead, M. Foucault and G. Deleuze; we (should) carefully look at the works of relational colleagues from other disciplines (some will be identified below in this chapter); and, within this relational spirit, we work on and with the ideas of contemporary sociologists such as N. Luhmann, N. Elias, R. Bashkar, P. Bourdieu, H. White, B. Latour and C. Tilly. Existing concepts such as the notion of ‘agency’ have been re-defined in relational ways (Emirbayer and Mishe 1998; Burkitt 2016 and in this handbook). Approaches or theories such as network analysis (Erikson 2013 and in this handbook), P. Bourdieu’s and N. Elias’s theories (Dépelteau 2013) or critical realism (Archer and Donati 2015; Donati and Porpora in this handbook) are interpreted in comparison to relational thinking or connected to it. In one way or another, this theoretical labor is related to relational empirical observations and analyses on various social phenomena such as music (Crossley 2015, in this handbook), football fan clubs (Widdop et al. *Forthcoming*), the emergence and transformations of Russian dachas (Dépelteau and Hervouet 2014), processes of radicalization (Demetriou and Alimi 2017; Alimi et al. 2015), old people choosing to leave their homes (Hillcoat-Nallétemby 2017), the resilience of family farms (Darnhoffer et al. 2016), social movements (Diani and McAdam 2003), and so on. This is a vast intellectual and pragmatic experimentation with no central power and based on broad and evolving core ideas.

Therefore, relational sociology is not simply about meta-theoretical work on ideas and concepts which would be ‘detached’ from concrete and specific practices and social problems. As C.R. Mesle wrote in his book on the processual philosophy of A.N. Whitehead, ‘Ideas shape actions, so it matters how we think about reality, the world, and ourselves’ (2008, 3).

2 THE BALANCE BETWEEN CONTROVERSY AND DISCIPLINE

The process matters as much as the outcomes in movements such as relational sociology. Everything else being equal, if the process of deliberation is a good one, the outcomes should be better; if you get relevant and stimulating

outcomes, the process should be more dynamic. As mentioned, this is a constant experimentation. In this sense, people who come with *the* answer or who are looking for it will probably be frustrated. Relational sociology is an intellectual movement and, as such, it has no central authority. This is not an intellectual ‘party’. It is made by interactions between various people with different backgrounds, who are typically unsatisfied with some aspects of the discipline and who are looking for changes. Like any other intellectual movement, it is fluid and relatively unorganized. The same kind of fluidity can be found within relational movements in other disciplines. For example, this is how P. Wachtel (2008, 7–8) presents relational psychoanalysis in his book *Relational Theory and the Practice of Psychotherapy*:

It is a loose coalition that is encouraging a diversity in viewpoint rather than seeking to impose a new orthodoxy. But this diversity of meanings also introduces confusion. Students in particular often are unclear about just what it means to be relational, and common misconceptions are potentially problematic both theoretically and clinically. ...

In part, the problem lies with the very success of the relational movement. As the term ‘relational’ has come into broader and broader use in recent years, there has been a corresponding decrease in the degree to which it communicates a clear and unambiguous meaning. This is perhaps an inevitable cost of success: relational perspectives have become increasingly prominent in the field of psychotherapy, and we have reached a point where many people want to jump onto the bandwagon. As more and more people use the term, sometimes more as a token of membership in a movement to which they wish to belong than as a substantive reference to a clearly specified set of theoretical premises and practices, the ripple of meanings makes a phrase like *relational psychotherapy* less than ideally precise. (Wachtel 2008, 7–8)

These words could be used to present relational sociology. Indeed, the label ‘relational sociology’ has been associated with many theories and researches based on ideas and practices which can be quite different. This is not a bad thing in itself. Increasing the number of associated specialists is good for intellectual movements, if it does not jeopardize the relative coherence of some ideational core and its related practices. Otherwise, these movements are at risk of becoming fashionable tendencies specialists join too easily or too quickly, without enough knowledge and discipline in relation to its core ideas and practices. This core might be open to debates and relatively loose and mutable, but it needs to be known before it can be discussed and potentially modified.

To come to the point, one key challenge for us is to find the right balance between controversy and discipline. We must constantly work on the ideational core and its related practices to make sure it produces original and useful knowledge. This constant effort is necessary partly because we are facing the difficult task of following the highly complex and dynamic social lives of human beings. Any ‘good’ crystallized theory becomes not only quickly obsolete. In fact, it is somehow irrelevant right from the beginning since its

rigidity is at odd with the fluidity of social phenomena. From the periphery of relational sociology and with others, Z. Bauman and B. Latour have strongly insisted on this crucial issue in recent decades. We can say that relational sociology should be seen also as an antidote to the rigidification of sociological theories. Therefore, relational sociology is the never-ending story of what A. Touraine called the ‘historicity of the society’ (the capacity of the ‘society’ to produce itself). I prefer the ‘historicity of multiple human social fields’ but the idea is similar.

At the same time, ideas and practices cannot be re-invented by some anarchist logic, text after text. As ‘radical’ and ‘exciting’ as it might look for some, full openness would destroy the existence of any approach. We would end up with an empty and meaningless label. The challenge is also to preserve some fluid, dynamic and distinct ideational core and its related practices as a common foundation for our discussions and research. Relational sociology cannot become a ‘Tower of Babel’ with no common language or some sort of anomic (pseudo) group of people which would all use the label ‘relational’ in their own way, according to their own desire. This is where we need some form of self-discipline, and maybe even some form of decentralized and soft social control where ‘libertarians’ or ‘anarchists’ would be gently reminded by others that this movement is also a ‘collective’ or a little ‘society’. An open ‘society’ for sure, but a ‘society’ nevertheless—something like a decentralized association loosely organized for a joint purpose. I would dare to propose: *An open association of sociologists focusing on relations and raising our consciousness about our inescapable state of interdependency.*

This is the type of relentless work I would like to encourage with this chapter by trying to identify the ideational core of relational sociology. It will be done by focusing on the work of self-declared relational sociologists. But I will start by connecting relational sociology to other relational thinking coming from other disciplines. In this respect, I also hope to encourage relational sociologists to pay more attention to what is going on in other disciplines such as psychology and psychoanalysis.

To respect the dynamic and complex nature of relational sociology, I am not proposing any empirical description of relational sociology as if there would be one crystallized ‘paradigm’ or ‘theory’. The ideational core of relational sociology that I will highlight cannot be found in any specific text. The presentation of this core should be seen as a Weberian ideal-type. We can formulate it by focusing on some important features of relational thinking we find in important relational texts from various disciplines including, of course, relational sociology. This ideal-typical ideational core is a heuristic device which can help us to better understand what relational thinking in sociology is mostly about as a distinct and fruitful approach, even if no relational text (or sociologist) ever proposed such a core in these exact terms. Please note that I *propose* this presentation of the core ideas of relational thinking in sociology, meaning I assume this presentation needs to be discussed and improved. This is an invitation to start a chain of discussion on the *ideational and practical* characteristics of this

intellectual movement, which refers to the worldviews, principles, concepts, methods and scientific practices of this approach.

3 A DIFFERENT MODE OF PERCEPTION AND ORIENTATION

Relational sociology has been presented as ‘a new paradigm for the social sciences’ (Donati 2011). P. Donati agrees that we have to be careful with this notion of ‘paradigm’ in sociology. Indeed, T. Kuhn’s notion raises three problems which are often ignored or neglected:

- The concept was designed to capture the history of natural sciences, not human and social sciences. The problem is that the ‘structures’ of the history of the latter might be simply different from the former. Therefore, it is not evident that the Kuhnian’s concept is adequate for us, especially if we try to define what are ‘normal’ human or social sciences. Taking natural sciences as models might be a huge mistake with negative consequences. (Many sociologists agree with this view these days.)
- The use of this notion of ‘paradigm’ was often associated with a quest for *the* paradigm and as such may justify hegemonic politics, which can be quite damaging and irrelevant in disciplines such as sociology, where the presence of various approaches and theories might be a necessity. In fact, there are good reasons to believe that sociology does better when nobody tries to impose their ‘paradigm’.

Having said all of this, if we forget about the quest for one dominant theory, it still makes some sense to use the concept of ‘paradigm’ when we try to define relational sociology. Indeed, relational thinkers (within and outside of sociology) typically start from the idea there is a ‘crisis’ in their discipline, and they ask for significant epistemological, ontological, theoretical and methodological changes. For example, relational approaches often start from a general, multi-disciplinary processual worldview challenging the idea that our universe can be understood as if it were made of ‘substances’, ‘essences’ or independent ‘entities’.

It is very important to insist on this fundamental and ideal-typical characteristic of the relational turn rather than simply stating that relational sociology is a sociology where ‘relations matter’, or vaguely saying that the object of sociology is the study of relations. Of course, the focus is on the study of relations between various and interdependent ‘agents’.¹ This is obviously why it is called *relational* sociology. It is a sociology where ‘every sociological object can and must be defined in relational terms’; and relational sociology ‘studies social realities as relations’ (Donati 2011, 14). In N. Crossley’s words, it is a sociology where ‘the most appropriate analytic unit for the scientific study of social life is the network of social relations and interactions between actors ...’ (2011, 1). Therefore, ‘relational sociology must endeavor to capture and analyze the social world in interaction, which is to say, as a process arising *between*

social actors' (Crossley 2011, 21). Or, in few words and 'at its broadest, relational sociology investigates social life by studying social relations' (Powell and Dépelteau 2013, 1).

All of this is true, but we cannot stay at this level. It can be argued that any kind of sociology leads to the study of relations. The founders of sociology can be all interpreted as relational sociologists if one highlights some citations and avoids others. It can also be argued that nothing new is done by focusing on relations until we start to define what is a relation in a more fundamental way (see Papilloud [Forthcoming](#)). In fact, relational sociology starts to be more fruitful when relational thinking is 'an invitation' to see social phenomena in a different way—in a different 'processual' way, to be more specific. By doing so, we allow ourselves to transform our experiences, to think and interact in different (relational) ways, because, for instance, the consciousness of interdependency brings to light the risks of egocentric quests for independency and freedom.

4 RELATIONAL THINKING IN VARIOUS DISCIPLINES

As already mentioned, reading on relational thinking outside of sociology can certainly help one to understand what is relational sociology. In this respect, I will offer some introductory and incomplete presentations in the next pages. I also hope these general explanations will encourage more relational sociologists to consult and integrate relational work coming from other disciplines, including those which are not presented in the coming pages.

4.1 *A Process-Relational Philosophy*

We can start with the accessible presentation of the obscure philosophy of A.N. Whitehead (*Process and Reality*) offered by C. Robert Mesle (2008). The author shows how A.N. Whitehead invites us, with new concepts, to think 'of the world as deeply interwoven—as an ever-renewing relational process', and how it 'can change the way we feel and act' (Mesle 2008, 3). If A.N. Whitehead is right, our world is not 'a world composed of hard, unchanging substances that endure unchanged under all the surface appearances of change. This must be a world in which energy erupts anew in each moment' (Mesle 2008, 7). Echoing and even radicalizing Heraclitus, Mesle writes:

Indeed, ... you can't even step in the same river once. The river changes even as we step into it, and so do we. Some things change very slowly, but all things change. Or, to put it better, the world is not finally made of 'things' at all, if a 'thing' is something that exists over time without changing. The world is composed of events and processes. (Mesle 2008, 8)

In his 'relational manifesto', M. Emirbayer (1997) presents a similar ontological distinction: we must choose between a sociology of substances (the

‘social things’ of E. Durkheim, for example) and a sociology of social processes. The relational turn in sociology refers to the attempt to perceive, define, study, and so on social phenomena as fluid social processes rather than solid, determining social substances.² We are talking about opposing worldviews which have been predominant in our Western culture. It can be difficult, psychologically speaking, to really embrace this kind of change of mode of perception. By thinking in this processual and relational way, the calming and reassuring search for enduring *Beings* (God(s), mechanistic laws, solid social structures, cultures and societies, etc.) is abandoned and we realize we are living through a constant state of *Becoming*. Everything is moving and changing—even ourselves—and quite often in precarious or destructive ways. In others words, rejected is the Platonician primacy of Being where ‘the world of change is merely a shadowy copy of a realm of eternally unchanging forms’; also gone is the theologian and the reassuring conception that ‘God was the ultimate unchanging reality’; the same is true for the Cartesian and dualistic perception ‘that the world is composed of physical and mental “substances”, especially including human souls, that (1) exist independently and (2) endure unchanged through change’ (Mesle 2008, 8–9). Nothing is guaranteed anymore, except never-ending metamorphoses. As exciting as it can be intellectually and maybe politically speaking, this worldview comes with a high price: anxiety. This is a new logic which can be hard to accept since modern sciences have been built to increase our level of control over phenomena thanks to the discovery of universal laws. Instead, we learn that we might be able to improve to some limited extent our control of social phenomena if we accept that they are fundamentally and always impermanent. Even worse for those who are looking for reassuring (modern) stories: this is not simply about liberating ourselves from old and recurrent traditions by using our Reason to create a perfect, stable and equilibrated society. Instead, we are left with the vision of a universe where ‘interdependency’ replaces ‘freedom’; a universe made by unpredictable chains of interactions including the inevitable unintended consequences of action, the presence of threatening interactants (from killers to viruses and asteroids) and, again, anxiety.

As a praxis, relational thinking can be hard to accept for another related reason: it is an invitation to a pragmatic and deep transformation of our habitus and behaviors. For instance:

- We are invited to think and act as interdependent ‘entities’, whereas many modern and post-modern desires are based on just the opposite: a quest for independence (for the individuals, the workers, the nations, the women, the gays and lesbians, the minorities, etc.).
- Power becomes relations and interdependencies, when we are used to seeing it as an object (a ‘capital’) that we can acquire and use to achieve our goals.
- As noticed already, modernity has been based on the idea of progress and utopias, whereas the relational mode of perception of reality is based on a sense of ontological vulnerability. There is the inconvenient truth that we

are fragile, temporary and interdependent beings, and a related invitation to orient ourselves in less egocentric ways if we do not want to destroy each other and make our environment more dangerous:

Process philosophers ... argue that there is an urgency in coming to see the world as a web of interrelated processes of which we are integral parts, so that all our choices and actions have consequences for the world around us. This stance requires us to challenge and reject the prevailing philosophies and theologies that give primacy to Being over Becoming, to independence over relatedness, to things over processes, to the idea that the human spirit is fundamentally isolated from the social and natural web in which we clearly all live and move and are becoming. (Mesle 2008, 9)

This is less about building a perfect world for one specific group (a nation, a class, a gender group, etc.) than co-producing a safer one by avoiding hurting each other. Utopias might have to be forgotten in favor of less exciting but urgent and realistic quests. Relational and realistic hopes might also be less dangerous than exciting utopias based on dreams of freedom and perfection.

In sum, relational thinking is much more than a call for studying relations. It is a worldview insisting on our interdependency rather than our independence. It is ‘the deeper recognition that nothing stays the same forever and that no person is an island’ (Mesle 2008, 9). ‘Deeper down, even islands, like waves, are merely faces of a deeper unity. If we cannot see that unity, we imperil the web in which we live’ (Mesle 2008, 9):

If reality is interconnected, relational, and dynamic, then thinking solely in terms of separation and changeless being is dangerous. Our ability to make sense of the world is at stake. The quality of our lives is at stake. Indeed, our survival is at stake. (Mesle 2008, 11)

We cannot afford ‘to think in terms of isolated atoms and “self-made men” anymore’ (Mesle 2008, 11). In this sense, relational thinking is a call to question Western dualisms between the mind and the body, objectivity and subjectivity, nature and culture or the individuals and the society that we find everywhere in sociology, philosophy and other human and social sciences. As such, it has been connected to other worldviews such as Eastern philosophies, Indigenous culture and somehow related ones such as ecofeminist views (Thayer-Bacon 2003; Doucet in this handbook). Justified or not, all these connections with other worldviews raise important questions about the limits of atomistic and mechanical views we inherited in human sciences from modernity and the successes of natural scientists. Relational thinking is a challenge to a Western culture in which we ‘tend to perceive the world as being composed of discrete, essentially unrelated entities that may or may not interact at times with other entities’, and where ‘we tend to end up with a single cause-and-effect understanding of interactions among different life forms’ (Spretnak 2011, 13). Instead,

All forms of life are composed of relationships and function in dynamic relationship with everything else. The fields of interaction include the vast stretches of the universe, the minute dance of subatomic particles, and the familiar level of perception we know as life on Earth. It is all in play, zinging with creativity every fraction of a second. Nothing exists in isolation. (Spretnak 2011, 12)

Therefore, when it is done properly, when it is ‘deep’ enough, relational thinking leads to significant questions and potential shifts in every discipline where it is applied.

4.2 *Relational Thinking in Archeology*

Basically, in archeology the emergence of relational thinking leads to ‘a “relational” understanding of past peoples and the animals, plants, and things with which their lives were entangled’ (Watts 2013, 1). One of the central ideas of relational archeology is also the typical rejection of the ‘abstract and immutable dualities of modernist ontologies’. And once again, the focus is on the relations between various and concrete ‘entities’ (peoples, animals, plants and things) which are involved in multiple fluid and dynamic processes, and which are also seen as being fluid and dynamic rather than as ‘substances’. Echoing the ‘trans-actional’ distinctions proposed by J. Dewey and A. Bentley (1949; Dépelteau in this handbook; Selg in this handbook; Hillcoat-Nallétemby in this handbook) and maybe what A. Doucet calls ‘intra-action’ (in this handbook), C. Watts uses the work of the biologist D. Haraway to explain how we develop ourselves through relations with our human and non-human ‘partners’ in a state of constant interdependency:

Such perspectives often highlight the transactions, translations, and transformations that are carried on between humans and non-humans, as opposed to the analysis of ‘interaction effects’ among pre-existing, self-contained entities. Generally speaking, this results in a concern with the relations themselves—the linkages rather than the nodes, the actions rather than the substances—in considering how various forms emerge and evolve together across space and through time. By tracing the contextual and contingent paths along which such forms come into being, as opposed to populating the categorical spaces of assorted dualist narratives, relational thinking shifts our analytical focus to the ways in which entities, thought as processes rather than existents, become entwined. This is lucidly illustrated in the work of biologist Donna Haraway, whose cyborg theory (1985) and concepts of ‘natureculture’ and ‘companion species’ (e.g., 2003, 2007) subvert traditional accounts of non-human animals and things as externalized entities with which we intermingle and of the ‘social’ contexts within which they are gathered. Instead, Haraway offers a rich and nuanced recasting of the relationships which ultimately bring about ontic categories (e.g., humans and dogs). We, as humans, develop relationally with our ‘partners’ in the world through a process Haraway (2007, vii) refers to as ‘lively knotting’.

In brief, life is seen as a continuous flow of interactions; modernist dualisms are rejected as we saw earlier; we find an anti-essentialist critique of ‘substances’ based on processual and relational thinking, as well as the idea that we constantly change, like everything else; the statement that the egocentric perspective is not a universal one (but a ‘Western conception of the person’, as the anthropologist C. Geertz explained)³ is reaffirmed; and we also find the idea that meaning and knowledge come from specific experiences, from ‘being-in-the-world’, which means ‘we encounter, experience, and understand things in specific, relational ways, within an elaborate field of possibilities’.

4.3 *Relational Thinking in Psychology*

In psychology, we can find relational thinking in various approaches and theories. I will start with the gestalt therapy’s version of relational psychology (see Jacobs and Hycner 2009). Here again, the perspective of the isolated and egocentric self is abandoned. And once more, the Cartesian dualism between the subject and the object is rejected, as A. Stawman notices in his chapter ‘Relational gestalt: four waves’. Echoing A.N. Whitehead and pragmatic philosophers, A. Stawman adds that the self is thought of in ‘process terms’: the self ‘is not in the mind but in the system of contacts at the boundary between the “me” and the “not me,” between organism and environment’ (Stawman 2009, 13). As noted, the idea of multiple ‘fields’ is important to represent the universe in which we live:

The experience of self ... is constituted in the experience of the continually shifting configurations and reconfigurations of the organism/environment field. Self becomes in the experienced resolution of relational existence. (Stawman 2009, 13)

In this sense, ‘the nature of being is relational’ (Stawman 2009, 14), and despite the limits imposed by the interdependencies, there is potential for ‘growth’ to the extent that we realize that the ‘I’ ‘overlap’ with the ‘Thou’ (rather than an ‘It’) throughout our respective experiences:

The central idea of intersubjectivity is that the extent to which my personal, ongoing resolution of the organism/environment field ‘overlaps’ with your ongoing resolution of the organism/environment field equates, roughly speaking, to the interactive influence that these two processes of resolution will bring to bear on each other. To the extent that you and I engage, so does our resolving of the field. (Stawman 2009, 22)

Finally, echoing sociological theories focusing on the ‘structural properties’ of specific, face-to-face interactions, A. Stawman suggests that relational gestalt approaches should also study what he calls the ‘relational ground’ of these interactions. More precisely, it means focusing on three ‘factors’—‘our biological constitution, culture and language’—which ‘give structural properties to the relational “spaces”, so to speak, within which individual life spaces are

nested' (Stawman 2009, 27).⁴ This insistence on 'structural properties' opens the door to difficult but crucial discussions on how we should see the socio-cultural 'context' of our actions. There is a great divide here in relational thinking (like elsewhere in human and social sciences) between the ones who give some 'causal powers' to social structures and cultures and those who do not.

Beyond the relational gestalt approach, K.J. Gergen (2009) is perhaps the most famous relational thinker coming from the discipline of psychology. He pushes the principle of interdependency and the rejection of dualisms to their limits, which brings him to reject any 'residue' of what he calls the 'individualist tradition' inherited from the Enlightenment—a 'view of the individual as singular and separate, one whose abilities to think and feel are central to life, and whose capacity for voluntary action is prized' (Gergen 2009, xiv). Here again, the rejection of any egocentric perspective leads to processual thinking. K.J. Gergen defines his ambitious relational approach in this way:

It is the challenge of the present work to search beyond the traditions of the Enlightenment. My attempt is to generate an account of human action that can replace the presumption of bounded selves with a vision of relationship. I do not mean relationships between otherwise separate selves, but rather, a process of coordination that precedes the very concept of the self. My hope is to demonstrate that virtually all intelligible action is born, sustained, and/or extinguished within the ongoing process of relationship. From this standpoint there is no isolated self or fully private experience. Rather, we exist in a world of co-constitution. We are always already emerging from relationship; we cannot step out of relationship; even in our most private moments we are never alone. (Gergen 2009, xv)

As K.J. Gergen and others such as J. Dewey and A. Bentley (1949) notice, these worldviews and principles oriented toward the study of relations between interdependent 'entities' lead logically to the rejection of causality thinking, since this last form of thinking 'relies on conception of fundamentally separate entities, related to each other like the collision of billiard balls' (Gergen 2009, xvi). Gergen is part of a group of relational thinkers who reject the idea that interactants are determined by external forces such as a society or a social pattern. Interactants contribute to the co-constitution of these phenomena, which are neither external nor internal. Many sociologists justify the need for 'external' forces to avoid explanations based on 'free will' or subjectivism. However, we are not limited to two problematic options. The individual is neither a 'freely choosing agent' nor a determined person, because people are the *co-producers* of whatever fields, configurations, networks and so on in which they live their lives. (Please note that the notion of 'co-producer' does not imply the interactants are all equal.)

In other words, K.J. Gergen invites us 'to consider the world in terms of relational confluence' (2009, xvi). In this respect, and once again, various dualisms are rejected. We recognize these dualisms in many texts where the authors 'theorize in terms of separate units, the self and other, the person and culture,

the individual and society' (Gergen 2009, xx). Echoing once again the conceptual distinction proposed by J. Dewey and A. Bentley (1949) between 'inter-actions' and 'trans-actions', K.J. Gergen adds:

Relationships on this account are the result of distinct entities coming into contact, they are derivative of the fundamentally separate units. My attempt here is to reverse the order, and to treat what we take to be individual units as derivative of relational process. Closely related, there is a strong tendency within many of these writings to employ a causal template in explaining human action. Thus, there is a tendency to speak of the culture, society, family, or intimate others as 'influencing,' 'having an effect on,' or 'determining the actions of' the individual. Again, such an analytic posture sustains the presumption of independent beings, and defines relationships as their derivative. (Gergen 2009, xx–xxi)⁵

Like others, K.J. Gergen invokes the principle of emergency to justify the importance of relational thinking. Our forms of action are connected to our ideas, he says, and we are at the end of our rope with the old, enduring mode of perception. This is another pragmatically oriented call for changing our mode of perception of our self and others:

Further ... the future well-being of the planet depends significantly on the extent to which we can nourish and protect not individuals, or even groups, but the generative processes of relating. ...

Although the central challenge is that of bringing the reality of relationship into clear view, I do not intend this work as an exercise in theory. I am not interested in creating a work fit only for academic consumption. Rather, my attempt is to link this view of relationship to our daily lives. The concept of relational being should ultimately gain its meaning from our ways of going on together. By cementing the concept to forms of action, my hope is also to invite transformation in our institutions—in our classrooms, organizations, research laboratories, therapy offices, places of worship, and chambers of government. It is the future of our lives together that is at stake here, both locally and globally. (Gergen 2009, xv)

Relational thinking also became relatively important in psychoanalysis. Generally speaking, being relational in psychoanalysis is related to what P. Wachtel calls a special 'attention to context and interest in the impact of relationships in the dynamics of mental life and of impact of the therapeutic relationship in particular in contributing to psychological change' (2008, 7). Once more, being relational means that thinking in terms of relations matters if we want to improve our practices. In this respect, relational psychoanalysts are also asking for fundamental changes in well-established ideas and practices in their discipline. According to S. Mitchell, 'the last several decades have witnessed a revolution in the history of psychoanalytic ideas' (1988, 1). The Freudian portrayal of human beings 'as a conglomeration of asocial, physical tensions represented in the mind by urgent sexual and aggressive wishes pushing for expression' (1988, 1)

is rejected in favor of a ‘relational model’ ‘which considers relations with others, not drives, as the basic stuff of mental life’ (1988, 2). The perception of oneself as an isolated self is replaced by one of an interdependent individual interacting in various fields. ‘Relational-model theories’ in psychoanalysis ‘differ from another in many significant respects’ (1988, 2), but they all view us

as being shaped by and inevitably embedded within a matrix of relationships with other people, struggling both to maintain our ties to others and to differentiate ourselves from them. In this vision the basic unit of study is not the individual as a separate entity whose desires clash with an external reality but an interactional field within which the individual arises and struggles to make contact and to articulate himself. *Desire* is experienced always *in the context of relatedness*, and it is that context which defines its meaning. Mind is composed of relational configurations. The person is comprehensible only within this tapestry of relationships, past and present. Analytic inquiry entails a participation in, and an observation, uncovering, and transformation of, these relationships and their internal representations. In this perspective the figure is always *in* the tapestry, and the threads of the tapestry (via identifications and introjections) are always in the figure. (Mitchell 1988, 3)

Once more, modernist dualisms are rejected in favor of processual and relational thinking and the related ideas of co-constitution and interdependency. For example, the mind does not exist independently of the body, and both are interdependent through interactions with other ‘entities’ present in their social contexts (seen as ‘interactional fields’ rather than external entities): ‘The body houses mental processes, which develop in a social context, which in turn defines the subjective meanings of body parts and processes, which further shape mental life’ (Mitchell 1988, 4). Each interdependent ‘entity’ is a process which co-produces larger processes by interacting with other interdependent ‘entities’ which are also processes. And through these interactions, the interactants co-produce each other. S. Mitchell uses the image *Drawing Hands* of the Dutch artist M.C. Escher—where ‘each hand is both the product and the creator of the other’ ‘through a cycle of mutual influence’ (1988, 4)—to illustrate these relations between interdependent co-producers or co-constituents.

In this logic, we end up with a distinction between one form of classical psychoanalysis based on a ‘monadic theory of the mind’ and ‘an interactive-relational theory of mind’ (Mitchell 1988, 5). These are ideal-typical representations of theories since ‘all psychoanalytic theories contain both monadic and dyadic features’, but they are useful ideal-types of theories nevertheless, since:

each theory necessarily breaks on one side of the other of this dichotomy in assigning the course of the structuralization of experience, the shaping of meaning, and this choice is fundamental. Either interaction is viewed in the context of the expression and shaped in the context of the establishment and maintenance of connections with others. Psychological meaning is either regarded as inherent and brought to the relational field, or as negotiated through interaction. (Mitchell 1988, 5)

Even if the so-called ‘objects’ of study (or better: the foci of the study) are different, this presentation of a fundamental dilemma for psychoanalysts echoes the same fundamental dilemma in sociology: should we see ‘inter-acting’ ‘substances’ or ‘essences’ or should we think in a processual trans-actional way?

Much more could be done, and other relational thinkers from other disciplines could be added—from economics, international relations, social work and so forth. However, this brief presentation allows us to see some key characteristics of the ideational core of relational thinking.

5 THE IDEATIONAL CORE OF RELATIONAL THINKING

The ideational core of relational thinking—and relational sociology—seems to be composed of at least five ideas or principles. Beyond the conceptual differences, a clear majority of relational thinkers share these general principles or ideas in one way or another. Some results are presented in the table 1 (see page 21) for many specialists or approaches linked directly or indirectly to relational thinking and sociology. As explained in a note below the table 1, these results come from my own readings, the authors themselves, and/or the interpretations of qualified readers of M. Emirbayer, C. Tilly, P. Bourdieu and so on. This table should be seen as a published draft used to start and facilitate deeper discussions. The answers in the table could also be discussed if it is judged to be useful.

5.1 *The Principle of Interdependency and the Rejection of ‘Substances’*

‘Entities’ are interdependent, meaning they are what they are and do what they do because they are interacting with each other within this or that social field, network, figuration, social world and so on. Their identities and actions emerge and evolve through interactions, and they cannot be properly understood as if they simply come from some pre-relational ‘essence’ (even if interactants have their own characteristics as distinct ‘entities’). For example, a patient is not a patient in itself, as a ‘thing’ or an ‘essence’ existing outside of specific relations. She is a patient and behaves as she does only through her interactions with the psychoanalyst. The same is true for the psychoanalyst. Furthermore, the outcomes of the therapy depend in big part on their interactions; and the dynamic of the therapy depends also on the past experiences, memories, knowledge, emotions and so on of the two interactants. The same general logic applies to any social process. To take another example of larger social processes, specialists have shown that social movements depend on: (1) internal interactions between interactants such as adherents, constituents and movement entrepreneurs; (2) external interactions through relational fields of contentious politics involving people from counter-movements, governments, media and political parties; and (3) the outcomes of the protest cycles depend partly on the knowledge, the emotions, the past experiences and so on of all these interactants and, of

course, their relations. In this respect, individuals have their own existence and characteristics (who would seriously deny it?); but they are what they are and do what they do, as interactants, because they are involved in specific social fields they co-produce (a social movement, a contentious process, a couple, a divorce ...). In this sense, sociologically speaking they cannot be defined outside their relations, as if they would self-act or inter-act as independent ‘substances’ or ‘essences’. They are interdependent parts of social processes without being determined by them since they co-produce them.

We can find similar or compatible empirical analyses (with different concepts) in the texts of other relational sociologists such as N. Crossley (on music) or sociologists at the periphery of relational sociology such as N. Elias (on civilizing and decivilizing processes; on relations between the established and the outsiders), B. Latour (on science-in-action), H. Becker (on social worlds) or even M. Foucault (on the history of madness or the birth of modern prisons), C. Tilly (on contentious politics), G. Deleuze (if I believe qualified readers of the French philosopher, such as P. Lenco and S. Tonkonoff, in this handbook), and many others to some extent (see the table 1 below). Certainly there are significant differences between those approaches, and I cannot deal with all the details and nuances in this chapter. But if we accept the focus on general and fundamental similarities, and if we do some work of relational adaptation when it is needed, we can see a common relational tendency. Other relational thinkers might disagree on the principles or major issues. This is where open discussions become relevant.

5.2 *Processual Thinking*

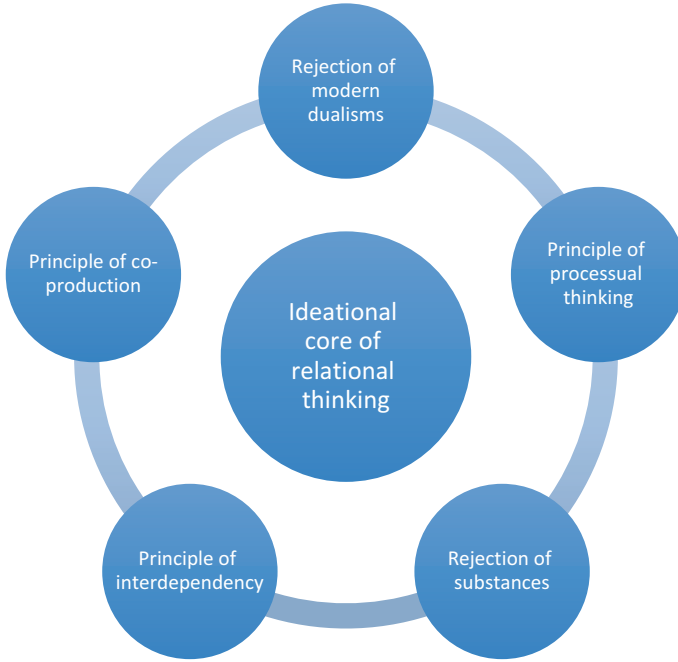
Seeing the universe as made by substances interacting with each other like billiard balls is misleading. The universe is dynamic and fluid because it is a vast process composed by sub-processes, sub-sub processes and so on, emerging and evolving through relations between interdependent ‘entities’ (which are themselves processes).

5.3 *Rejection of Dualisms*

Modernist dualisms such as body–mind, individuals–society and objectivity–subjectivity are rejected in favor of the study of interactions between various ‘entities’ interacting in specific fields.

5.4 *The Principle of Co-production*

Any natural or social phenomenon is constituted through interactions between various human and non-human interactants. The same principle is valid for the co-production of knowledge.



6 DISSONANCES

Relational sociology is also characterized by contentious issues, primarily those around the following themes.

6.1 *The Causal Powers of Social Structures*

I think the most important issue concerns the alleged ‘causal powers’ of social structures. It can be formulated into one or two questions: Once they have been created by their co-producers, do social fields (networks, figurations, social systems, etc.) have any causal powers on their co-producers? More precisely perhaps: Can social fields self-act or inter-act with their co-producers or should we see those fields as relational effects with no causal power on their co-producers? This is the great divide in relational sociology. The table 1 below suggests that more or less half of relational sociologists do not recognize any causal power in social structures. Typically, social structures (or other similar social phenomena such as languages and institutions) are seen as relational effects rather than causes of certain actions, desires, habitus and so forth. Other relational sociologists typically oppose social structures to individuals. In short, individuals have to internalize these pre-existing structures

through the processes of socialization. Critical realists insist that some actors in some moments can use their agency to change these pre-existing structures. This controversy might refer to the relevance, in sociology, of seeing the ‘world’ from the perspective of one Ego and explaining his actions, desires, habitus and so on. This might be the central issue to resolve in the near future.

As expected, relational sociologists who see social ‘substances’ also typically think that social structures have causal powers, whereas those who reject the causal powers of structures usually reject the idea of social ‘substance’.

6.2 *The Principle of Emergency*

Generally speaking, the idea here is that relational thinking can help us to prevent destructive processes in which we hurt each other and/or damage the ecological fields in which we live. There is a sense of emergency in this respect. Once again, relational sociologists are divided. This issue might refer to the role given to sociology in terms of praxis. On one side, we find relational sociologists who think that relational thinking can or should help human beings to do better as soon as possible. On the other side, we have relational sociologists who do not believe that relational thinking can or should play this role. Discussions on the role of relational sociology in society could be useful to define the goal(s) of this approach and to determine if we should try to find an audience outside of classrooms, congresses and other related small circles of intellectuals interested in social life. I think relational sociologists could contribute to improving the project of a ‘public’ sociology by insisting on the notion of interdependency and detachment. Ideas suggested by N. Elias (and others of course) could be very useful in this respect.

6.3 *The Non-human Interactants*

One issue is unfortunately absent from the table below: the importance of non-human interactants in relational sociology. Relational sociologists are also divided on this issue. I do not have the space to start this discussion in this chapter, but this is another crucial point for the near future of this approach—especially (but not only) if we believe that we cannot divide society and nature if we want to fully understand human social life and the many important challenges currently faced by humanity.

	<i>Principle of processual thinking</i>	<i>Rejection of social substances</i>	<i>Principle of interdependency</i>	<i>Principle of co-production</i>	<i>Reject modernist dualisms</i>	<i>Social structures/ cultures as forces</i>	<i>Principle of emergency</i>
Outside of sociology							
RPP	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
RA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	?	?
RGT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	?
RP	?	?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	?
RCT	?	?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
In sociology							
Tarde	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Dépelteau	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Selg	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	?
Burkitt	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Moderately
RMS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Not really
Larour	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Not really
Pyyhminen	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Piironen/Kivinen	Irrelevant ⁶	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Not really
Tilly	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Unclear ⁷	No ⁸	Not really
Tonkonoff	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Elias	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No ⁹	Yes
Luhmann	Yes	Yes	Yes ¹⁰	Unclear	Yes ¹¹	No ¹²	Unclear
White	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially	Unclear
Mauss	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Moderate	No
Vanderberghe	Yes	No ¹³	No ¹⁴	Some levels	Yes but... ¹⁵	Complicated ¹⁶	Sure but... ¹⁷
Emirbayer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Unclear	Yes	Moderately
Bourdieu	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Simmel	Yes	Yes	Yes	Moderate	No	Yes ¹⁸	Moderately
Mead	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

(continued)

(continued)

	<i>Principle of processual thinking</i>	<i>Rejection of social substances</i>	<i>Principle of interdependency</i>	<i>Principle of co-production</i>	<i>Reject modernist dualisms</i>	<i>Social structures/ cultures as forces</i>	<i>Principle of emergency</i>
Papilloud	Yes	Yes	Moderate	No	Yes	Yes	No
Erikson	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Not really
Crossley	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Moderately
Donati	Partially	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fuhse	Yes	No	Yes	No ¹⁹	Some ²⁰	Yes	Not really

Acronyms: *PPP* relational-processual philosophy, *RA* relational archeologies, *RGT* relational gestalt psychology, *RP* relational psychoanalysis, *RCT* relational-cultural psychology, *TS* transactional sociology, *RMS* relational micro-sociologies

Please note that I. Burkitt, N. Crossley, P. Donati, E. Erikson, J. Fuhse, C. Papilloud, T. Piironen and O. Kivinen confirmed or told me the ‘correct’ answers for their own relational approach. S. Liu and L. Liang helped me with M. Emirbayer. C. Demetrou and E. Alimi did the same for C. Tilly, as well as J.-S. Guy for N. Luhmann, J. Fontdevila for H. White, J.-F. Côté for Mead, and C. Papilloud for G. Simmel, P. Bourdieu and M. Mauss. I simply followed the suggestions of those competent readers. For all the others, the answers reflect my understanding of their views. When I did not know or was not sure about the answer, I put a ‘?’. I assume full responsibility for any mistake made in this table—which should also be seen as a work-in-progress

7 WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

As we saw, relational sociology is based on the shared idea that sociology is the study of social relations. Beyond the use of different concepts and secondary variations with definitions, there is also a quasi-consensus on the ideas and principles that social phenomena are social processes (in one form or another) and that they are co-produced by interdependent interactants (principles of interdependency and co-production). Those principles form the strong ideational core of the approach. In addition, a clear majority of relational sociologists reject modern dualisms and the idea that (some) social phenomena should be seen as social ‘substances’. However, the relational movement is also characterized by significant differences, notably on the question of whether or not social structures, once they have emerged, have causal powers on individuals. There is also no agreement on the urgent need of relational thinking in sociology to fix deep social problems, nor on the importance of non-human interactants.

The first disagreement is certainly the most dividing one and it is based on incompatible ontological views of social phenomena. In fact, this is a central issue in sociology overall. In this sense, relational sociology reflects the whole discipline and, for now, there is no sign that we, as a group and a movement, can find a way to move beyond this gap. Nevertheless, we can imagine different ideal-typical processes within the movement which could ‘fix’ this issue. I will try to identify some of them in the hope that we will be able to have real, productive discussions on what can or should be done.

7.1 *First Scenario: Absence of Real, Constructive Discussions*

Relational sociology will continue to develop for a while in a process where the co-producers do their own work by avoiding any real, constructive discussion. As I explained in the introduction, this is how we handle issues in a contemporary sociology characterized by the ‘hyper-differentiation’ of theories (Turner 2001). Basically, sociologists work as ‘lone wolves’ (the individualistic option) or ‘stay at home’ (the home being a theory or a ‘paradigm’ defended by a group of sociologists). In one way or another, they avoid any real discussion with colleagues who disagree with them, except for episodic moments when it becomes inevitable—in congresses, for example. In this logic, comparisons and critiques happen but they typically are designed to promote protect the ‘theory’. This process can be based on strategies such as creating ‘straw men’ to show the superiority of the promoted theory, consciously deforming the views of others to facilitate their refutation, multiplying ad hoc hypotheses to protect contested ideas, playing with words and producing obscure explanations, simply excluding others from publishing their views or acting as if the critiques do not exist.

In this dynamic, sociology is considered as some sort of intellectual battlefield where sociologists are invited or feel obliged to take a theory and defend it. People can make careers in this process, mobilize people and resources and

win battles. However, the contribution of each theory is lessened in this kind of dynamic. We move from one hegemony to another (as it happened to some degree with functionalism until the 1960s–1970s) or we get stuck in the process of hyper-differentiation, like we are now. As mentioned in the introduction, the Truth does not really matter in this logic, and non-sociologists barely care about this noise, *if* they hear the noise. As sociologists, we still learn by working in isolation or in small and close circles, but we could surely do much better through open, honest and respectful comparisons, tests and discussions. The relational movement could be an interesting experimentation in this regard, internally and externally speaking.

7.2 *Scenario Two: Real but Unsuccessful Discussions*

Real discussions would happen, but for one reason or another the co-producers would not be able to move beyond the state of fragmentation. The relational movement in sociology might even be weakened due to discussions leading to bigger fractures and divisions; and the outcome could be a greater and highly visible lack of coherence and clarity. In this process, multiple approaches or currents could become more and more independent, and/or after the failed experimentation, more colleagues could decide to work as ‘lone wolves’ and hope that their number of readers and citations will increase. In other words, we would take a different road by implementing real discussions, but we would end up at the same place as with the first process, with an added sense of failure.

It could also be less dramatic even after a failed attempt. We could proudly show this kind of experimentation can be done, and we could learn from our mistakes. This failed attempt could inspire new experimentations within or outside of the relational movement and in the future it could work better. In this regard, we would have made a significant contribution in the history of contemporary sociology.

7.3 *Scenario Three: Real and Productive Discussions*

Real discussions would happen and a significant majority of relational sociologists would reinforce the ideational core by agreeing on difficult issues, such as the problem of the causal powers of social structures. What seemed impossible became possible due to a new process of interaction.

In the best possible scenario, the controversies would not disappear. Some relational sociologists would still disagree and stay at the periphery by continuing to challenge this reinforced core (with success or not in the future). If we can dream a little bit, the future of relational sociology would depend mostly on its capacity to fulfill its promises at the empirical level, especially in the eyes of non-sociologists. Relational sociology would help us to improve our control over our social lives. It would help fix some social problems. It was the initial dream of the founders of sociology, after all.

Unfortunately, the worst scenario (the first one) might also be the most probable. Sadly, entire ‘schools’, ‘theories’, ‘paradigms’ or ‘traditions’ have been built and reproduced by avoiding real discussions. I obviously favor the third scenario even if I would not consider the second one as a failure. The fact is that we can make new social experimentations. Again, the emergence of this intellectual movement offers this opportunity.

In order to do so, the first step is to clarify the main approaches and issues in relational sociology. We already know about some fundamental agreements and disagreements. We should start from there. And as this handbook shows, we can see three major sub-currents within this intellectual movement. Each of them is coming from different and pre-existing broad ‘families’ of influences:

- Pragmatism, symbolic interactionism and/or the recent ‘assemblage’ theories. Once again, in this current relational sociologists are influenced by past or contemporary colleagues such as J. Dewey, W. James, G. Tarde, H. Blumer, G. Deleuze, M. Serres and/or B. Latour. There are many significant differences and variations within this broad current, but there are also broad similarities. For example, this type of (relational) sociology is probably the most allergic to the idea of ‘social things’ and any form of social determinism.²¹ Generally speaking, the social universe is seen as a complex space of fluid and dynamic relations. Relational colleagues in sociology (or close to sociology) such as F. Dépelteau (Forthcoming, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2017), S. Hillcoat-Nallétamby (2017), O. Pyyhtinen (2016, 2017a, 2017b in this handbook), T. Saarts and P. Selg (2017), P. Selg (2017, 2016a, b), S. Tonkonoff (2017a, b) and to some extent O. Kivinen and T. Piironen (2013, in this handbook) and T. Piironen (2014) can be linked to this group. The ‘relational manifesto’ of M. Emirbayer (1997) has also been associated with this sub-approach (Archer and Donati 2015), which is somehow true and misleading at the same time (especially after reading L. Liang and S. Liu’s interpretation of M. Emirbayer published in this handbook). But clearly, some ideas proposed by M. Emirbayer have inspired some of these relational sociologists.
- The Simmelian sociology of social forms (its ‘structuralist’ interpretation), system theories and/or network analysis. In this case, and besides G. Simmel, those relational sociologists are typically influenced by past or contemporary colleagues such as T. Parsons, N. Luhmann and H. White. The works of A. Mische (2009), P. Donati (2011, in this handbook), E. Erikson (2013, in this handbook), J. Fontdevila and H. White (2013, in this handbook) and J. Fuhse (2013, 2015, in this handbook) can be associated with this type of relational sociology. As E. Erikson (2013) has shown, network analysis is divided between what she calls ‘relationism’ (rejection of essentialism and a priori categories) and ‘formalism’ (based on a structuralist interpretation of Simmel).²² This divide recalls, once again, other similar divides we find elsewhere between processual and substantialist approaches. In spite of many questions potentially raised by the work of N. Luhmann, J.-S. Guy certainly shows in his chapter the relevance of the German sociologist for relational thinking.

- The study of power relations, inequalities and conflicts. This third current can also be divided into two groups. On the one hand, we find relational sociologists who are (also) influenced by sociologists such as N. Elias, M. Mann and C. Tilly. One good example of the influence of C. Tilly is the book of Alimi et al. (2015) on radicalization. To some extent, the ‘school of New York’ presented by A. Mische (2011) can be seen as one sub-group of this relational current. Like others, the Eliasians E. Dunning and J. Hughes (2012) recently insisted on the affinities between the approach of N. Elias and relational sociology. On the other hand, there are relational sociologists who are associated with critical thinkers and theories such as P. Bourdieu, (some types of) feminism and ecological thinking (see A. Doucet in this handbook) and post-colonialism (see J. Go in this handbook, 2013). C. Powell (2013) has also clarified some links between some critical or radical theories and relational thinking.
- In the Table of Contents of the handbook, I put critical realists within the third group because R. Bashkar offers a critical perspective, but they could—or should?—be considered as a fourth group. The influence of R. Bashkar is a distinct one and, ‘strategically’ speaking, critical realism is without any doubt the most organized and ambitious group one can find in relational sociology. They have connected themselves with relational sociology and therefore they are part of it, but in fact this is an intellectual movement of its own.

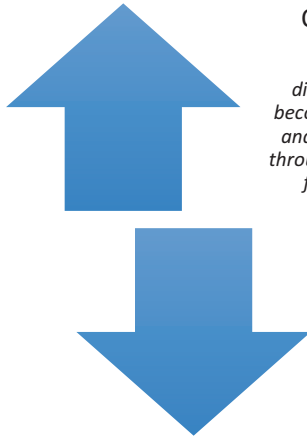
This map is like any other map: it highlights important features as much as it neglects or ignores others. There is no doubt it should be improved. And of course, these currents and sub-currents are not hermetic. For example, M. Emirbayer (1997) has been clearly influenced by many colleagues such as J. Dewey, P. Bourdieu, C. Tilly, N. Elias and many others who do not all fit in the same category. Another example: P. Donati has been influenced by T. Parsons and critical realism. And of course, the ‘members’ of one group do not agree on everything. Except maybe among the critical realists, where it might be stronger, the discipline of these sub-groups is weak or inexistent. This taxonomy simply means that despite their different views, theoretical influences, concepts and methods, these groups on paper can be associated with common influences, and this can be a decent starting point for real discussions based on significant similarities and differences.

8 CONCLUSION

In sum,

- Relational thinkers show some ‘paradigmatic’ tendencies—even if relational sociology cannot (or should not) be fully presented as a Kuhnian ‘paradigm’. They typically identify some significant problems in their respective discipline, which is seen as being ‘in crisis’; and they propose relational views, concepts and methods to fix these problems.

- A clear majority of relational sociologists agree on fundamental principles. More precisely, most of them—among those we cover, at least—see the human universe in a processual way and reject the idea that it is made by substances. They also define and analyze interactants (or whatever they call them) as interdependent ‘entities’. And they share the principle of co-production: the phenomena they study are made, re-made or destroyed by their co-producers. These ideas or views can be the main foundations of relational approaches in human and social sciences.
- Of course, the existence of a core implies the possible and typical presence of a periphery (comprising those who do not share these core ideas in one way or another). This does not mean that colleagues at the periphery are wrong. All we can say at this point is that views at the periphery might successfully challenge the core and eventually change it; or their views might go into the large and deep pool of marginalized and forgotten ideas. These views usually disappear forever or, in some cases, come to the surface again, as we have seen with the work of G. Tarde in recent decades.
- Our table also shows that major controversies turn around the issue of the causal powers of social structures. For example, critical realists and Bourdieusians defend the idea that social structures (and cultures) have causal powers once they have emerged from constitutive relations. Somehow, these social phenomena self-act on or inter-act with human beings. This idea is more or less clearly shared by other relational sociologists such as N. Crossley, J. Fuhse, M. Emirbayer (at least in some of his texts influenced by P. Bourdieu) and many other non-relationist sociologists. However, this idea is rejected by many other relational sociologists and associated influences. Once again, this is probably the main controversy today in (relational) sociology. Despite all the good work which has been done so far by relational sociologists, the future of this sociological approach and the content of its ideational core probably depend on the capacity of relational sociologists to have real and constructive discussions on this central problem. The relational movement could make a significant contribution to the (fragmented) discipline of sociology if this experimentation could be implemented, even if it did not reach any consensual solution. Discussions on the role of relational sociology in relation to non-sociologists and the importance of non-human interactants also could be very relevant.
- Relational sociology is part of a larger relational turn evolving in various disciplines, including philosophy, archeology, psychology and psychoanalysis. Developing or reinforcing productive connections with relational colleagues outside of sociology could be another major accomplishment.
- It is essential to find the right balance between controversy and discipline if we do not want to kill this intellectual movement due to an overdose of the former or the latter.



Overdose of controversy

Symptoms: Lack of productive discussions; the anomic movement becomes a label with no clear meaning and characteristics; it is imploding through a process of fragmentation; the field is an intellectual battlefield

Overdose of discipline

Symptoms: Lack of innovation; instauration of a central authority; over-production of ad hoc hypotheses to save the core ideas, concepts, methods, etc.; relevant questions and solutions are repressed or marginalized

As ‘scientific’ ones, intellectual movements die when there is too much or not enough controversy for too long. This is an important challenge—and a great opportunity—because, once again, the rise of relational thinking in various disciplines offers the chance for a needed dialogue on some fundamental ideas and practices we might have been taking for granted, even when they need to be discussed and reformulated:

Process-relational thought has enormous potential for integrating and unifying the richly different perspectives of people in the world today. Of course, the community of process thinkers include people with important differences of thought. What good would an intellectual vision be if it didn’t inspire creative challenge within a community? But it also brings people from very different backgrounds into that conversation. Our world is very much in need of an intellectual, scientific, and spiritual vision that can draw many different people into a unified conversation, while still stimulating further exploration and challenge. (Mesle 2008, 10)

Finally, colleagues might disagree with this representation of relational sociology. The best I can hope for is that they disagree in full disclosure and in constructive ways. If this happens, this chapter and their reactions could contribute to reinforce the kind of interactions we need to keep the movement alive, healthy, productive and relevant.

NOTES

1. Rather than ‘agents’, it is probably better to talk about ‘transactants’ (Dépelteau 2015) or ‘interactants’ (Burkitt 2016), by which I mean transacting or interacting ‘entities’ with ‘agency’, i.e. with the power or the capacity to make things happen (Latour 2005). We will see later that there is no consensus on what are the right ‘interactants’ one should find in relational explanations. For example, some relational sociologists include non-human ‘interactants’ while others reject them.

Another example: critical realists insist on the crucial role of social structures as forces self-acting on or interacting with individuals and groups, while other relational sociologists reject this idea. But once more, and in spite of these significant disagreements, the notion of ‘relations’ is a central one.

2. The same tendency—or need—has been affirmed in two recent publications announcing a ‘processual’ sociology (see Abbott 2016; Pyyhtinen 2016).
3. ‘The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world’s culture’ (Geertz 1984, 126).
4. J. Spiegel (1971) made similar proposals in his ‘transactional’ approach.
5. Once again, N. Elias (1978) made similar comments when he distinguished his figurational approach from sociological explanations based on the ‘egocentric perspective’.
6. When asked, Osmo and Tero told me it is ‘a metaphysical question that methodological relationalism has no standing on it’, and for them it is ‘irrelevant for sociological research’.
7. Comment shared by C. Demetriou on Tilly (by email): ‘He was unclear about the mind–world dualism, but there is an argument to be made that he leaned a little bit towards positions that could be thought as monist.’
8. Another comment shared by Chares (Demetriou): ‘I would also stress, along with Eitan (Alimi), that he took an anti-structural perspective in his later years. His idea of causal powers relates to mechanisms but not to structures.’
9. Some competent readers would argue that Elias gave some causal powers to figurations. The general answer is not so clear, if it exists. I still think it is a ‘No’, especially if we keep in mind the first pages of *What is Sociology?*
10. From Jean-Sebastien (Guy) on N. Luhmann: ‘There is interdependency between Ego and Alter as the psychic systems participating in the process of communication. There may be structural couplings between social systems, but each of them remains autopoietic and therefore autonomous.’
11. J.-S. Guy on Luhmann: ‘Luhmann rejects modernist dualisms like individual/society and yet he continues to talk about distinctions and the need to make distinctions as essential to observing as system operation.’
12. J.-S. Guy: ‘For Luhmann, social structures are structures of expectations arising in the course of communication. These structures are real and yet they do not rigorously constraint human beings. Human beings are constrained by themselves and by other human beings as they all attempt at coordinating themselves with each other. Communication is precisely to process of coordination.’
13. Frédéric’s (Vandenberghe) comment: ‘All substances can be dissolved into relations and processes, but that does not mean that substances do not exist.’
14. F. Vandenberghe commented: ‘At some level yes, but it is only part of the story.’
15. F. Vandenberghe commented: ‘Yes, but it depends on reality. If the dualisms are institutionalized, they have to be analyzed as such.’
16. F. Vandenberghe: ‘Social structures as forces—it’s not that simple. In the social universe, only actors have efficient causality. But structures have formal causality.’

17. F. Vandenberghe: ‘Principle of emergence—Sure! But this has nothing to with relational sociology, but rather with some proximity to critical theory.’
18. This answer would probably be contested by what E. Erikson (2013) called the ‘relationist’ readers of Simmel, or some of them at least (FD).
19. Jan’s (Fuhse) comment to complete his answer ‘No’: ‘I wouldn’t be able to say anything meaningful about these interactions.’
20. Jan Fuhse again, commenting on his answer ‘Some’: ‘I would reject some of them, but open up others—mainly because without conceptual distinctions (like communication/psychic processes) we cannot really do anything in theories.’
21. It can be argued that Mead produced some deterministic explanations, but I do not have the space to discuss this issue.
22. This distinction is also useful, to keep in mind that some of what E. Erikson calls the ‘relationists’ have been influenced by the reading of G. Simmel, and they contest the ‘formalist’ interpretation of Simmel (O. Pyhtinen is a good example).

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The Relation as Magical Operator: Overcoming the Divide Between Relational and Processual Sociology

Frédéric Vandenberghe

The time of grand synthetic theories is over. Instead of a comprehensive social theory with universal ambitions, we now have a variety of new sensitizing approaches, such as analytic sociology, pragmatic sociology, cultural sociology, moral sociology, public sociology and, of late, also relational sociology. The latter is discussed in this chapter. In comparison with the “new theoretical movement” of the 1980s (Alexander 1988), the newest new movements are more professional and also more modest. Unlike Luhmann or Bourdieu, for instance, the new theorists do not pretend they can conceptualize the whole world, self-reflexively including themselves and their opponents in their own theories. Unlike Habermas, they do not propose a grandiose panorama of the philosophical tradition and a metatheoretical synthesis of the existing social theories with diagnostic intent. Rather more modestly, they present a perspective, a paradigm, a way of federating competing approaches under a new approach, concept or theme. Typically, they conceive of themselves not as grand theories, but as a set of coordinated theories of the middle range that can

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throw a new light on a variety of themes and fuse them in a provisional but expandable framework. Singly, the theories may not be able to create a bandwagon, but together, through articulation of concepts, coordination of networks and publication of edited books and journals, they may eventually lead to the emergence of an academic movement. Following the new sociology of ideas and its transposition of the resource mobilization approach in social movements to scientific/intellectual/academic movements, I understand the latter as “collective efforts to pursue research programs or projects for thought in the face of resistance from others in the scientific or intellectual community” (Frickel and Gross 2005, 206).

Coming from different but complementary angles, the proponents of the new paradigm take hold of an idea (e.g. the relational approach), a concept (e.g. causal mechanism) or a theme (e.g. culture or morality) that interests various competitors in the field. While they propose their own specific take on the issue, they also invite their colleagues to join them, thereby opening up a cooperative-competitive subfield of research for exploration and exploitation. Aggressively pushed by academic entrepreneurs, usually from North America, they aim to saturate the attention, create a trend and establish a school with its accredited leaders and spokespersons, networks and citations, annual conferences, weekend symposia and publications of book series, books, special issues of journals and even whole new journals. This is what happened in the UK with analytical philosophy around 1920 and in the USA with logical positivism in the late 1930s. Fused, those movements ushered in analytical philosophy, which now largely dominates philosophy in the anglophone world. As we move back to the continent, it occurred in France with existentialism in the 1950s and structuralism in the 1960s. In the UK, we saw the emergence of cultural studies in the 1980s. Transposed to the USA, cultural studies transmuted into postmodernism in the 1980s and poststructuralism in the 1990s. Since Richard Rorty’s (1967) declaration of a “linguistic turn” in philosophy,¹ which precedes his own move from analytical to pragmatic philosophy, we have seen so many turns, twists and returns in the human sciences and the Studies that I may well have missed a few.² Now it is happening again, but on a lesser scale, in sociology.

In this chapter I will look more intently at relational sociology to find out if it is more than a loose confederation of metatheories and metamethodologies that sail under a single flag of convenience. The cluster of theories that make up relational sociology will be the object of my analysis—my field as it were. I will distinguish different approaches, map out the main divisions and systematize the relations between some of its core concepts. My central question is whether the concept of relation is a magical operator that can integrate the various approaches into a complex social theory. Currently, relational sociology is mainly a cluster of selective affinities. Multiple tensions, contradictions and complementarities traverse the field. Can they be overcome? Do we have to accept the co-existence of a variety of competing relational sociologies as a matter of fact? Are they united by more than an infatuation with the concept of relation (*terminus relationis*)?

Relational sociology will only emerge as a full-fledged approach with paradigmatic ambitions the day it succeeds in systematically integrating the various approaches and dimensions in a general social theory. To bring about such a theory that axiomatizes, systematizes and unifies the whole gamut of relational sociologies, we definitely need more theoretical synthesis and more conceptual articulation between the approaches. To avoid misunderstandings: A general relational social theory is not a universal theory. It is not a grand unified theory, such as Parsons's structural functionalism or Luhmann's functional structuralism, that proposes a unified framework that prescribes the lineaments of sociological conceptualization and empirical research. It is not "a theory to end all theories". More modestly, based on a metatheoretical mapping of the field of relational sociologies, it is an attempt to indicate the elementary building blocks that any relational social theory with synthetic pretensions has to incorporate in its construction. Depending on one's location in the field (whether one starts, say, from Bourdieu, network analysis or pragmatism), one will necessarily arrange the conceptual blocks (such as field, networks, interactions, for example, or relations and processes) in a different way. That is how it should be. The point of those constructions is not to close off theorizing, but exactly the opposite. Through systematic interarticulation of the elementary building blocks, the point is to develop different theories and bring them into dialogue and communication, opening up the field for theorizing at a higher level of abstraction and articulation.

The emergence of a general relational social theory is on the horizon. It is not yet within reach. More work has to be done. This chapter is a modest contribution to the common task. It is structured as follows: First, I will do some reconnaissance of relational sociology. I will sketch the contours of the field, map its main players and distinguish two poles: a structural-relational and a processual-interactionist one. Next, I will propose Karl Marx, Georg Simmel, Gabriel Tarde and Marcel Mauss as prime relational theorists. Together, they form a system. I will also distinguish four relational constellations and suggest that a relational social theory needs to systematically interweave structuralism, processualism, interactionism and symbolism. Finally, in the last part, I will make the case that a general relational sociology needs to be synthetic and propose a first articulation between structure, culture and practices.³ The synthesis I propose is highly tentative. I doubt it is a satisfactory one. The main message of my text is, therefore, transpersonal. The fragmentation of relational sociology can only be overcome in a general relational social theory. That is a huge task, and it is a collective one.

I THE RELATIONAL NETWORK

I am not sure relational sociology is a paradigm. Without a consensus on the ontological underpinnings, the epistemological premises or the proper methodological props, it looks more like a "turn" (one more turn after the linguistic, cultural, interpretative, narrative, reflexive, performative turns) than

a paradigmatic “shift” (Cantó-Milà 2016, 12). Like the other turns that preceded it, this one also has been theory-driven. Starting in sociology, it has the potential to spill over to the neighboring disciplines and to become multi-, inter- and perhaps even transdisciplinary.⁴ Like the other turns, the relational turn has succeeded in transforming a topic of research into a resource for theorizing. What was an object of investigation has shifted to become a general perspective on the world (things, persons and concepts). The object has become a project. In systemic terms, this shifting from the object of analysis into a general perspective corresponds to a transformation of a “first order” into a “second order” of observation (Fuchs 2001). The “what” (the relation) has been transmuted into a “how” (the relational perspective)—what was initially seen becomes a way of seeing. Substances dissolve into relations and processes. Wherever one looks, one sees relations, networks and interactions.⁵

Relational sociology has recast a relational manifesto (Emirbayer 1997) into a research program, and a research program into an academic movement within the social sciences. As a bandwagon that is pushed, promoted and coordinated by Canadian sociologists (Dépelteau and Powell 2013; Powell and Dépelteau 2013), relational sociology is not a theory nor a paradigm, but a diffuse cluster of theories with selective affinities that are inspired by the works of Harrison White (network analysis), Norbert Elias (figurational sociology), Pierre Bourdieu (critical sociology), John Dewey (pragmatism), Niklas Luhmann (systems theory) or Bruno Latour (actor-network theory). Anyone who has dabbled with relational sociology will have noticed that it fuses two different approaches, a relational and a processual one, into a single one, uniting them under a single flag of convenience. The turn—if that is what it is—is a hyphenated one. The unity of the label should not hide the polarity between its relational-structuralist pole and its processual-pragmatist pole.⁶ The violent clash between “relationalists” and “relational realists” (Donati and Archer 2015) is not just about the ontological status of emergence. It opposes radically different views of structure and process, structure and agency, modernity and subjectivity (Sawyer 2002). As one moves from one pole to the other, one passes from more realist to more constructivist proposals. Within the movement, different strands can be recognized. I will just mention them here, ordering them along a declining scale of realism.

At the structuralist pole, we find the New York School of network analysts who take their cues from Harrison White and Charles Tilly (Mische 2011).⁷ Within the network, we find theorists such as Mustafa Emirbayer, Margaret Somers, Sidney Tarrow, Peter Bearman and Barry Wellman. At times they team up with figurational sociologists and Bourdieusians. Among the theorists in this line we find Benjo Maso, Johan Heilbron, Bernard Lahire, Louis Pinto, Rogers Brubaker and Nick Crossley. Critical sociology can also shade off into critical realism. This is definitely the case with American realists such as Philip Gorski, Georg Steinmetz and Keith Sawyer, though Margaret Archer, Pier-Paulo Donati and Doug Porpora have strongly opposed the Bourdieusian legacy and created relational critical realism as a dissidence with the realist

movement. Pier Paolo Donati, who has been developing his own school of relational sociology in Bologna since the 1980s (Donati 1991), is strongly influenced by functionalism. He is a realist, whereas Luhmannians such as Günter Dux, Stephan Fuchs and Jan Fuchse draw on the second-order cybernetics to introduce a strong constructivist flexion within functionalism, pushing Parsons's structural functionalism in the direction of a radical constructivist complexity theory.

At the more processual-constructivist pole of the spectrum, we find a whole range of authors who have incorporated the pragmatist ductus and refuse to acknowledge the existence of social levels, the phenomenon of emergence and the dualism between agency and structure it entails.⁸ Sometimes they draw on a pragmatist reading of Elias (especially his *Was ist Soziologie?*) (Elias 1971) to propose a radically processual conception of society. François Dépelteau, Andreas Glaeser, Andrew Abbott, Peter Selg, Osmo Kivinen and Tero Piironen defend a pragmatist position, but in their radicalism they have already incorporated the neo-vitalist process ontology of Deleuze and Latour. With its focus on socio-technical associations between humans and non-humans, actor-network theory has a strong relational and processual flavor. Over and against all kinds of Durkheimianisms, from Bachelard to Levi-Strauss and Bourdieu, it proposes a “flat ontology” in which everything is in flux and eminently connectable. Paradoxically, with its insistence on flows, associations, relations and practices, it rejoins the anti-humanism of the structuralists, but now at a molecular level.

Relational sociology focuses on all kinds of possible relations and transforms this focus into a triple lens that refracts the ontological, epistemological and methodological level of analysis into a single *focus imaginarius*. At the ontological level, it assumes that relations essentially create social life. In the beginning was the relation and in the relation is the beginning.⁹ Over and against holistic and individualistic approaches, it affirms the primacy of relations. Neither the individual nor society exist by themselves—save by mutual co-implication. Not only do relations between people precede individuals; society itself is ultimately a relational complex that emerges from transactions between people who form networks, fields, figurations, structures, systems, institutions and other formations. At the epistemological level, relational sociology opposes categorical thinking of substantialist, subjectivist and essentialist approaches to the relational thinking of structuralist, processual and interactionist approaches. The challenge is always to transform any rival approach (rational choice, functionalism, cultural sociology) or concept (power, identity, function) and to reformulate their categories in relational, transactional and processual terms. It is more than a translation exercise, though; it is a conversion to another worldview and an invitation to view the world as a tissue of interactions, transactions and processes. At the methodological level, relational sociology substitutes the linear techniques of variable analysis for complex, purpose-built techniques that are able to catch and represent the multiple interrelations between people, groups and institutions. Instead of working with a general linear model that assumes “that the social world consists of fixed entities with variable attributes,

that those attributes have only one causal meaning at the time; that this causal meaning does not depend on other attributes, on the past sequence of attributes, or on the context of other entities” (Abbott 2001, 59; see also 187–188 and 285–288), relational methodologies emphasize the mutual interdependence of the variables and dissolve entities into processes.¹⁰ In this way, multiple regression and co-variation analyses give way to lattice matrices, graphs and correspondence analyses. Unlike the former, the latter are “phenomenotechnological” realizations of the relational worldview. Eventually, when the ontological, epistemological and methodological levels are systematically integrated into a single *focus imaginarius*, relational sociology will emerge as a unique perspective and, who knows?, possibly even as a fully articulated paradigm. For now this hasn’t happened, but I would like to suggest that this is what the intellectual movement is (un)consciously striving to accomplish.

As a concerted attempt to refocus the attention—away from bounded categories and groups to fields, networks and interactions—Mustafa’s Emirbayer’s relational-pragmatist “Manifesto for a Relational Sociology” (1997) can be taken as an important marker. Emirbayer himself did not invent anything new, but as manifestoes usually do, he drew on a variety of authors (Cassirer, Bourdieu, Dewey) and traditions (neo-Kantianism, pragmatism and network analysis) to launch a new integrative research program and build a new relational paradigm for sociology. In his elaboration of a new vanishing point on the social world, he hardly mentions any predecessors from philosophy. He could have invoked Heraclitus’s process ontology, the anti-Scholastic nominalism of the middle ages, Cusanus’s perspectivist theology, Leibniz’s relational conception of time and space, Kant’s concept of interaction and community, Hegel’s dialectics, Marx’s historical materialism, Nietzsche’s vitalism, Whitehead’s process philosophy ... Leaving the pleasure of pedantry and erudition aside, there is no need to go back that far. Not that these are not possible predecessors to today’s interest in sociological relationism, but the linkages are more proximate. There is no point in invoking a line of illustrious philosophers whom sociologists have not read. If I had to schematize the lineages and suggest a workable genealogy for social theorists, I tentatively would go for four names: Karl Marx, Georg Simmel, Gabriel Tarde and Marcel Mauss, and suggest that, one way or another, all of today’s theorizations could be reconstructed as so many variations, admixtures and permutations of the relational quartet.¹¹

2 THE RELATIONAL QUARTET

Karl Marx: Marx is obviously an important source for any theorist who wants to dissolve entities and substances into relations and processes. Is he not the one who asserted that “society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand” (Marx 1953, 176)? One could easily adduce similar passages from the *German Ideology* or from the 1859 introduction to the *Critique of Political Economy*. The one I would choose as an obligatory reference comes from *Das Kapital*

[*Capital*], Chap. 1, Sect. 4 on the “Fetishism of commodities and its secret” (Marx 1966, 85–98), incidentally one of the most speculative texts in Marx’s whole oeuvre. The central phrase, which Georg Lukács (1968) would later develop into a full-blown theory of reification, is the following: In capitalism, “a determinate relation APPEARS in the phantasmagoric form of a relation between things” (Marx 1966, 86).¹² A simple example, which I extract from Lucien Goldmann’s *Recherches dialectiques* and which helped me many years ago to decipher the hieroglyph of commodities as a dynamic holograph or hologram of social relations, will do to disclose the power of Marx’s dialectics. “This pair of shoes costs 5000 francs” (Goldmann 1959, 78). The phrase expresses the social relations between a farmer, a tanner, a shoemaker, a shopkeeper, their employees and consumers. None of those relations are visible to the eye, yet their work is materialized in the shoes and its value is expressed in the price. If you inject the class struggle into the picture, you can make the relations dynamic and insert them in a dialectical philosophy of history that pitches producers against property owners in an ongoing class struggle. This is exactly what a “defetishizing critique” (Benhabib 1986, 44–69) is supposed to do: it transforms social facts into social relations and replaces social relations within a dialectical sequence of processes that make the world move forward to its destiny—the communist society in which the relations between people will be direct, unmediated and transparent.

Georg Simmel: The second source any self-respecting relationist would have to refer to is Georg Simmel. The most systematic exposé of his relativist worldview is to be found at the end of the first chapter of his *Philosophie des Geldes* [*Philosophy of Money*] (Simmel 1989, 55–92). For Simmel, relativism is not a negative doctrine, but an eminently positive one. Any and every element in the world can be analyzed and unified in a symbolic form, such as science, religion, art or philosophy, to mention the main forms on which he has worked. Similarly, a symbolic form can gather and unify the totality of things in the world. Through a systematic multiplication of perspectives, the world can be analyzed from various angles, each angle allowing for a unification of the multiplicity of relations in a synthetic form. The integration of forms into a polyphony of forms is not relativist, but relationist. At the end of the day, like in Leibniz, the totality of perspectives on the world is supposedly identical to the world itself. As everything is interconnected and forms a unity, one can join any point in the world with any other point. Thinking is the operation that connects, relates and integrates the fragments of the world into a kosmos. The unity of the world is, therefore, not substantive, but structural, functional and processual.

In “The Problem of Sociology”, the opening chapter of his *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die formen der Vergesellschaftung* [*Sociology. Inquiries into the Construction of Social Forms*] (1992, 13–62), Simmel applies his relationist perspective to define sociology as a specialized science that analyzes not society as such, but rather the forms of association (*Vergesellschaftung*). While the notion of form is typically Kantian and refers to shared categories that configure interactions and make their coordination possible, the notion of association

is of vitalist origin and refers to a loose multitude of reciprocal actions (*Wechselwirkungen*) that are the living substrate of society. The important point to stress here is that individuals are consciously interconnected through symbolic forms that structure the processes of interaction from within. The notion of form is symbolic, while the concept of interaction is processual. Any interactionist sociology that dissolves social formations into sequences of concerted actions and focuses on interaction orders, be it with Goffman, Elias, the Chicago School or the New York School of network analysis, is indebted to Simmel's formal sociology.

Gabriel Tarde: Not unlike Simmel, Gabriel Tarde did not make it into the pantheon of founding fathers of sociology. Too speculative for the discipline, his universal sociology wanted to capture interactions, fluxes and waves at the molecular level. As prime competitor and adversary of Durkheim, Tarde inverts the first rule of sociological method. Instead of recommending that one treats social facts as things, he simply affirms in his monadological treaty of sociology: "Every thing is a society, every phenomenon is a social fact" (1999, 58). What appears as an individual entity is, in fact, a society, made up of interacting elements. Wherever one looks, one finds inter- and intra-relations between micro- or even nanosociological phenomena. At the infinitesimal level, everything is dissolved into a myriad of interacting and spiritualized atoms, each of which follows its own entelechy. Altogether, they form an association of sorts. The coordination of action in a whole does not come about through representation of the whole into each of the elements, but through imitation, sympathy and diffusion. There is no emergence at the collective level, but co-vibration of desire and beliefs. The collective exists on a single plane—the "plane of consistency or immanence", dear to Deleuzians, Negrians and Latourians. Complexity increases through further differentiation. Differentiation goes all the way down, not up. It diffracts through space and fills every crack in the universe. Wherever one looks, in the cells, in societies or in the stars, one only finds whirlwinds, expansions and diffractions of differences that resonate, communicate and interrelate through repetition, opposition and adaptation. Tarde had a big influence on Deleuze and via Latour's actor-network theory, it eventually came back to sociology as a science of heterogeneous associations that no longer needs the concept of society.¹³

Marcel Mauss: Mauss is at the helm of relational sociology. Durkheim always complained that his nephew never finished his books, but if he is now remembered as one of the founding figures of anthropology, it is because of his famous *Essai sur le don* [*Essay on the gift*] (Mauss 1950), which is a precursor of both Levi-Strauss's structuralist anthropology (Lévi-Strauss 1950) and of Alain Caillé's anti-utilitarian sociology (Caillé 2001). At the core of the essay is the discovery of reciprocity as the engine of society. In all societies, from the primitive to the hypermodern, society is understood and performed as a web of interpersonal and intergroupal solidarity and rivalry that is kept together by obligatory gift relations. The obligation to give, accept the gift and return is universal. What explains the cycle of giving is the spirit of the giver that adheres

to the object and circulates between subjects. Mauss inverts Marx and shows that the relations between things is always a relation between spirits and people. The relations between people, spirits and things can be analyzed either structurally, as an objective system of representations through which people (individuals and groups) are unconsciously interconnected to each other, or they can be understood phenomenologically, as an intersubjective system of cooperation and rivalry between people who are consciously engaged in a struggle for recognition. According to Mauss, reciprocity is the rock on which solidarity is built. This is not only true for traditional, but also for complex societies. Absent the rock, and societies contract into anonymous relations between functions that are driven by power and interest.

3 THE CONSTELLATIONAL QUADRANGLE

The classics offer many variations on a classical *topos*: Do not treat social facts as things. Do exactly the opposite. Treat things as social facts and social facts as relations, processes, practices.¹⁴ The variations on Durkheim's aphorism are multiple and they can be combined and recombined in different ways. Marx, Simmel, Tarde and Mauss are conceived of here not as standing figures, but as a standing reserve of relational motifs that can be assembled and aggregated in different relational sociologies. If we allow for infiltrations from philosophy, the variations are almost infinite, but with some goodwill they can be reduced to four major constellations: structuralism, processualism, interactionism and symbolism. Together, they constitute a constellational quadrangle that forms a system.

Structuralism: Through a combination of Marx, Simmel and Mauss, we arrive at the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu.¹⁵ The crucial figure and mediator here is Ernst Cassirer, a former student of Simmel, read and intensively studied by Mauss, Lévi-Strauss, Elias and Bourdieu. One of his early books, *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff* [*The Concepts of Substance and Function*] (Cassirer 1994), is a protostructuralist treatise of the Neo-Kantian School of Baden. In a masterful synthesis of developments in mathematics, the sciences and linguistics, he confirms Simmel's prognosis that, like modern arts, modern sciences are increasingly dissolving substances into functions and relations. They substitute the Aristotelian logic of categories and substances for a relational logic of functions and fields in which the substances are reconstructed as particular instances and concretions of mathematical functions. The precise nature of the elements is not determined by their substances or their essence, but overdetermined by their position in a field, configuration or system of relations. Within sociology, Bourdieu's conception of the field with its tightly integrated causal cascade of internal relations between objective positions, incorporated dispositions and public positionings is the most elaborated and best-known concretization of relational logics.

Processualism: Through a combination of Simmel, Tarde and Mauss, we move from a relational-structuralist to a dynamic, processual and wave-like

sociology of associations without emergence. Processual sociologists start from the premise that the social world is one of constant change. Everything flows. Stability is not given. The social order must therefore be explained. While the structuralist pole of relational sociology recognizes the phenomenon of emergence, its processual pole emphasizes “demergence”. Against every form of dualism, be it analytical or empirical, epistemological or ontological, it defends a radical process ontology and a concomitant praxeology. In this processual vision, there are no structures, no systems, no levels, no strata. Reality is not stratified (like in Bhaskar), but flat (like in Deleuze) and flowing (like in Dewey). Instead of dualism and discontinuity, we get synechism and continuity.¹⁶ Society and the individual are not different instances, but modulations within a single process of never-ending structuration. Reluctantly, the existence of temporary crystallizations is granted, but there are no alienations or reifications. At the bottom, there are only fluxes and processes of becoming, only inter- and intra-relations on a horizontal level, only continuous re- and destrutturations of society.

Interactionism: The combination of Simmel, Mead and Mauss brings back the interpersonal relation between I and Thou (Buber) or Ego and Alter (Parsons) to the center of sociology: “In the beginning was the relation.”¹⁷ While radical processualism veers off into an anti- and, possibly, post-humanist direction of a theory of anonymous practices without subject and without symbolism, interactionism conceives of sociology as a theory of conscious, intentional action at the individual and collective level. From an interactional perspective, society is not made up of relations. It does not “have relations”; as Donati (2015, 2) says, it “is relation”—a relation between people, mediated by culture. As a circle of sociability that extends all the way from the family and peers to the villages, the nations and the international community to the globe, society is a community with variable geometry. Extending Buber’s insistence on “the I” and “the Thou” to the whole gamut of personal pronouns, Norbert Elias suggests we conceive of society as “people in plural” (Elias 1971, 139) and analyze the web of interdependencies from the perspective of each of the personal pronouns. “We cannot imagine an ‘I’ without a ‘you’, a ‘he’ or a ‘she’, without a ‘we’, a ‘you’ or a ‘they’” (ibid., 136). The subject positions are systematically interrelated into a configuration. Through the systematic exchange of perspectives, society can be understood as the integral of all interrelated perspectives. Although Elias has a theory of symbols, the symbolic is somewhat missing in his account of interhuman figurations.¹⁸ Like in a dance, the people are interdependent and move together through time and space. They hold hands, but hardly talk to each other.

Symbolism: In anthropology, symbolism is a central topic. In sociology, we would rather speak of culture. Usually, we invoke the interpretative sociologies of Max Weber, Alfred Schütz and George Herbert Mead to defend the position of symbolic interactionism (broadly understood). As I think we can arrive at similar positions via an articulation of Simmel (his essays on *Verstehen* and the philosophy of history) and Mauss (his theory of symbolic representations as a

corrective to Durkheim's theory of social representations), I do not need to bring in extra personnel to show that the relation between individuals is not dyadic and direct. Relations between people are always mediated by a symbolic representation of their unity and difference. In old-fashioned language, one would say that the relation between souls occurs in and through the spirit. To think of the symbolic mediation by culture (Kant), language (Humboldt) or history (Dilthey), different ways are open. One way or another, they all converge in the synthetic position of "post-Hegelian neo-Kantianism". To the extent that it is a philosophy of symbolic forms and cultural formations, it is a neo-Kantian position, and to the extent that the symbolic forms evolve in a historical phenomenology of the spirit, it is Hegelian. As the absolute spirit collapses into the objective spirit, post-Hegelian neo-Kantianism coincides with a cultural sociology that underscores the role of the symbolic in the configuration of actions, the coordination of interactions and the constitution of society. It is thanks to the mediation of symbols that actors can exchange positions, take on each other's roles and coordinate their respective roles within the configuration they form together. The realm of the symbolic precedes, mediates and performs the interactions. By structuring from within the meanings that actors give to their actions, it integrates them into a societal community of shared meanings, norms and values. Thanks to communication, actors can act in common and form a collective subjectivity of sorts.

4 STRUCTURE-ACTION AS PROCESS

A general social theory of relations has to be able to interweave the various motifs one finds in Marx, Simmel, Tarde and Mauss into a coherent tapestry of the social world. To be plural and synthetic, it has to be at once fully structuralist, figurational, processual, interactionist and symbolic. One way or another, it needs to integrate ("relate") two orders of reality: the network of objective relations between positions (systemic integration) and the network of subjective relations between people (social integration).¹⁹ As the two orders of reality can only be integrated through the mediation of culture, the articulation between positions and people, structures and interactions, networks and communications presupposes a further articulation between culture and practices, in my opinion (Vandenberghe 2014, 39–57). At a metatheoretical level, it can be established that a general social theory needs to systematically parse and articulate concepts of social structure, culture and practice into a coherent framework (Kögler 1997). Absent one of the building blocks, and the relational construction becomes unstable. Without a solid concept of structure and social systems, social theory becomes idealistic and loses its critical edge (as is the case with structuration theory). Without an adequate conception of culture and symbolism, it becomes mechanistic and deterministic (as is the case with Althusser and network analysis). Without a convincing theory of practices, social and cultural structures are reified into anonymous processes without subjects (as is the case with actor-network theory and assemblage theory).

The symbolic order comes first. It is always already presupposed. It forms the background of the practices. It structures them from within, connects them virtually to all the other practices and, thereby, makes the constitution of society possible. Thanks to the mediation of culture, we can rethink the relation between agency and structure. Given its point of departure, a relational social theory cannot fall back on individualist or holist formulations. Both the individual and society are “demi-real” in their separation. Harrison White (1992, 5) has pointed out how they mirror each other and form a complex illusion: “This mirage of the person as atom breeds an obverse mirage of society as an entity.” Each is a relational complex in itself; through their mutual implication, and thanks to the mediation of culture, both are continuously co-produced and co-constituted in-and-as social processes and practices. Relational sociology needs to rework the issues that were at the center of the agency–structure debate and systematically reformulate them in cultural and relational terms. In cultural terms, because culture is what keeps the practices going. It is a source of both social order and social change. In relational terms means: without any of the conceptual reifications that have plagued substantivist and categorical approaches. And without transforming the relation into another substance. Whatever concepts one uses, those have to appear as temporary crystallizations of relations, interactions and processes.

Relational sociology does not deny the phenomenon of emergence. As Nietzsche knew, emergentism, relationism and processualism are compatible: “That a thing is dissolved in relations, does not prove anything against its reality” (*apud* Baum 2001, 601). Indeed, from the point of view of a relational theory of emergence, any attempt to eliminate the entities on the pretext that they are ultimately made up of relations between lower-level entities obscures the nature of emergence (Elder-Vass 2010, 13–39). For an entity to have emergent properties, it must first of all exist. Emergence occurs because of the structure of relationships that hold between the parts that make up a whole. Emergence is a compositional phenomenon. The parts themselves are usually made up of relations, but it is the structure of the synchronic relations between the relations that explains the emergent properties and causal powers of the entities concerned. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that there are various levels, strata or scales of existence and that it is not clear which levels sociologists could safely eliminate without eliminating themselves and their discipline. Reductionism is a slippery slope indeed.

The point I want to make, however, is not so much about the emergence of social structures, but about their reification, alienation and domination, which presuppose both the existence of social entities and their emergence. Relational sociology does not have to ignore the existence of alienated social structures that are out of control. Those are like “standing waves” (Abbott 2001, 263)—human-made, pseudo-natural, tsunami-like processes that will most probably engulf their producers if they remain unchecked. At the bottom, those crystallizations and reifications are human processes; yet they are also inhuman structures that follow their own laws and have their own dynamics. Precisely because

they are threatening and alienating, we need to be able to conceptualize them both as structure and as process. As structure, because if we deny their existence, we cannot properly investigate their inertia, their mechanisms, their operations, the threat they pose to human existence. And as process, because if we want to change their course, channel and redirect them, we need to continuously remind ourselves that they only persist to the extent that they are continuously reproduced or, to give a more activist slant, that we let them reproduce themselves and do not actively try to transform them.

A relational theory has to be able to acknowledge that society is a structural system of relations between social positions, roles and statuses. Such an acknowledgment presupposes emergence and dualism; but dualism and emergence do not necessarily presuppose reification and hypostasis of the system. The autonomy of the system is not absolute, but relative and relational. It presupposes and depends on practices, which depend, in turn, on culture for their coordination. That is where the processual and genetic moments come in. Structures are always the result of social practices. To analyze society, one has to make a perspectival switch and conceive of society in a dual (and perhaps even in a “non-dual”) fashion. What appears as a solid particle is also a wave. Similarly—and it is one of the things I have learned from pragmatism—structure is also process.

The distinction between structure and process is temporal: the past versus the present; the *longue durée* of institutional time and the *temps court* of interactions between people. That structure and process, system and event, Braudel and Goffman have to be integrated is clear. That was one of the central intuitions of Anthony Giddens’s structuration theory (Giddens 1984). If we do not want to remain stuck in a sterile debate between agency and structure, though, we need to reformulate his theory in relational terms. To zip structure to process, one needs the mediation between culture and practice. Structure is processes and process is practice (process-in-practice). Practices are structured, which means they are regulated by culture, and they reproduce and transform social structures. The reference to culture is essential, because thanks to culture, the relations between people become symbolic interactions. Through interactions, people form networks. Both interactions and networks are regulated by social and cultural structures that are made up by relations, which are themselves generated by situated actions and interactions. The actions and interactions take place in situation. They produce, reproduce or transform the structures. These can be more rigid or more fluid, but in either case, they are produced as fluidities or rigidities, system or process, through practices. Depending on the epistemic practices of the analyst, the ordinary practices of the actors are considered as productive or derivative of structures. We thus get the typical loops of structuration theory, with their multiple hermeneutics, but by acknowledging emergence and dualism, we also overcome some of its deficiencies. For political reasons, I would now argue that both structuralism and processualism are necessary and complementary. To change the world, we have to know what the structures are and how they function; and—sign of the times

(!)—in order not to be tempted by despair, we also need to be able to understand these self-same structures as processes that can be canalized, redirected and changed.

5 FROM ONTOLOGY TO COMPLEXITY

In the philosophical tradition (Eisler 1904), the relation has always been envisioned as a bond between related elements (the *relata* or *relativa*). The bond usually implies the activation of three operators: a subject that conceives of the unity between the elements (*subjectum relationis*), the ground that justifies the relation (*fundamentum relationis*) and the element to which the element is connected (*terminus relationis*). The question that has divided philosophers from the beginning is whether the relations are subjective and imaginary (*relationes rationis*) or objective and real (*relationes reales*). This traditional opposition between realists (who emphasize the extramental and cosmic existence of the relation) and nominalists (who think relations only exist in the mind of the beholder) finds its repercussions in the oppositions that have plagued sociology from the beginning (micro–macro, agency–structure, etc.). Now they reappear once again within relational sociology as a performance of contrapositions between realists and constructivists, structuralists and interactionists, emergentists and processualists. As such, this debate cannot be easily resolved. We can try to tinker a bit and play around with concepts—as I did in an attempt to articulate structure and process, as well as culture and agency, in a relational theory of “structure-action”. My sense, however, is that any recombination will, perforce, end up as a compromise formation. We are turning in circles and reinventing the wheel. Perhaps we need to dislocate the debate and introduce a modicum of complexity theory to produce some deviation—the *clinamen* that changes the course of the story.

Should one start with processes and practices to move up to structures and systems? Or should one rather try to dissolve the latter into the former? Should one assume that structures and systems are more real than practices? Or should one rather defend an ontology of practices and processes? In the literature, these options are typically presented as a zero sum game: either dualism (Archer) or duality (Giddens), emergence (Bhaskar) or demergence (Latour), realism or reification.²⁰ As a critical realist, I have defended analytical dualism against its detractors; as a structurationist, I see the point of an ontology of practices and the danger of reification; as a pragmatist, I see the attractions of a processual sociology. In order to avoid the facilities of eclecticism and the blackmail of anti-conflationism, let me introduce the epistemic relation between the subject and the object as a supplementary relation.

Against Giddens and Archer, but also against Bhaskar and Latour, I want to suggest that a general relational sociology needs to “interrelate” not two orders of relations (the relations between subjects and the relations between objects), but three (the relation between subject and object). The third relation is an epistemic one and concerns the liaison between analysis and reality or, to speak like Roy

Bhaskar (1978, 21–24), between the transitive and the intransitive dimensions of knowledge. Before I proceed to make my case, let me visualize the dimensions in spatial terms and suggest that a complex social theory needs to integrate three types of relations into a well-articulated triptych with moving parts: a horizontal relation between “people” interacting with each other (the lifeworld of the phenomenologists); a vertical relation between “parts” of systems, floating above the head of the actors, constructed by the analyst, conditioning the actors’ practices (the system of the functionalists); and a transversal relation that relates the constructs and concepts of the analyst to those of the actors themselves, and both to the reality they refer to (the reality of complexity theory).

The divide between structural-relationists and processual-interactionists is an epistemological one. It concerns the ontological status one ascribes to the entities in the world, and the way one conceives of them. Either the analyst maintains her ontology as invariable and considers that knowledge of reality has to be based on some kind of *fundamentum inconcussum* or, substituting the spectator view of knowledge for the actor’s perspective, one systematically varies the points of view, multiplies the ontologies and considers that one can fare without any a priori ontological commitments. Formulated thus, the divide corresponds more or less to an opposition between realists and constructivists, with the former claiming some privileged access to reality and the latter to the actors’ point of view. A closer look reveals, however, a subtle change in the debate. Indeed, it is remarkable, but it has only rarely been noticed: all parties are now fending for ontology but against realist sociology; we now have post-structuralist anthropologists (such as Latour, Mol and Viveiros de Castro) arguing for an ontological turn and philosophers calling for a return to speculation and metaphysics (Bryant et al. 2011).²¹

At this point, Roy Bhaskar’s (1978, 56) distinction between the ontological domains of the real, the actual and the empirical provides a useful ontological map. To transpose the register from the natural to the social sciences and to connect it to relational approaches in sociology, though, we will necessarily have to adapt it. The empirical domain is made up of patterns of events that are, directly or indirectly, experienced and observed in experimental situations. It corresponds to a “Tractatus-world” of contingently connected atomistic events, dear to positivists who conceive of causality as statistical relations between independent variables in an artificially closed system. The domain of the real is separated from the domain of the actual. Unlike empirical events, which are produced and observed by scientists in a lab, actual events take place in nature. Actual events can happen without anyone observing or experiencing them. They are the result of a variety of generative mechanisms that operate at different levels. The domain of the actual is, in turn, separated from the domain of the real. In this domain, the causes that produce the events are located. Bhaskar calls them generative mechanisms and conceives of them as structures with causal powers. They are the Holy Grail of critical realism, which basically offers a philosophical justification for the systematic quest for causal mechanisms in all possible sciences.

Although Bhaskar at times gives the impression that the empirical and the actual domains are not real, the three domains should be seen as hierarchically ordered and nested into the real (cf. Bhaskar 1978, 56, note to Table 1 and Elder-Vass 2007). The empirical is a subset of the real; the actual is real too, but not necessarily empirical; the real is obviously real, but not necessarily actual or empirical. The point of the ontological mapping is not to oppose the domains, in my opinion, but to integrate them and to explore articulations between real mechanisms, actual events and empirical experiences. While critical realism is undoubtedly strong on generative mechanisms, it is relatively weak in its explorations of the actual and the empirical. It has a tendency to write them off (the “actualist fallacy”, the “positivist illusion”), whereas if we grant that the empirical and the actual refer to different levels of reality within the same world, we can actually enlist them and use the different approaches to make critical realism stronger, not weaker. If we are more dialogical, we can even accept that phenomenology and pragmatism offer better approaches to actual experiences than does critical realism (Vandenberghe 2017). They are undoubtedly right to insist that in the social world the real is activated by social practices. The real depends on the actual and cannot exist without it—that structures presuppose practices does not mean, though, that they are always observed or experienced. Be that as it may, with their emphasis on the symbolical and interactions, “meanings” and “doings”, qualitative sociologies have a better grasp of the human interchange with the objects and subjects in their environment than does critical realism.

If we apply the ontological map to relational sociology, we can perhaps, tentatively, identify the molecular processes and practices below the level of consciousness with the domain of the empirical (“experiences”), the networks of interactions between persons and objects with the domain of the actual (“events”), and the fields of structural relations between positions with the domain of the real (“mechanisms”). Critical realism conceives of the relation between the real, the actual and the empirical as a kind of transcendental deduction. If we take pragmatism seriously, we can also invert the relation and analyze how interactive and transactive processes lead, both dia- and synchronically, to the crystallization of emergent structures. Dialectics allow for both movements, downwards and upwards. They actually refer to the same reality, but analyzed now as structure (realism) and then again as process (pragmatism).

Although I accept Bhaskar’s distinction between the transitive (ontological) and the intransitive (epistemic) dimensions of knowledge, I think that realism, both in its critical and speculative versions, typically absents the question of representation. Even if the ontological dimension cannot be collapsed into the epistemic one without committing the “epistemic fallacy” (Bhaskar 1978, 36–38), it is still the case that the extra-discursive, extra-epistemic reality has to be represented in language or discourse. To shift the debate still further, I want to transform the opposition between realist and constructivist ontologies into a continuum, and I want to do so by shifting from social constructivism to the epistemic constructivism of complexity theory (Fuchs 2001). From this

systemic point of view, realism obtains when one stays on the first level of observation. The world is what it is. Though it can be analyzed from a variety of perspectives, the latter do not constitute the world, but disclose different aspects of the same world. Arguing contrariwise is equivalent to committing the “epistemic fallacy”, collapsing ontology into epistemology, transforming epistemic points of view on the same world into different worlds. If, however, one introduces second-order observation into the picture, things change and realism appears as a metaperspective that maintains its stable ontology by eliminating the constitutive process of the practices of representation.

Once representation is accepted, one can indeed investigate the epistemic process and analyze both realism and processualism as results of epistemic practices: either one analyzes the constitution of the world from the perspective of an ontology of practices, or one analyzes it from the perspective of a relational epistemology of structures. It is not an either/or position, however. The fixity of the world depends not so much on the world itself, but on the extent to which one allows for a free interplay between epistemology and ontology. If the interplay is disallowed, one fixes the world as a presupposition (*terminus a quo*), but also as an end (*terminus ad quem*), with result that the world is both transcendental and empirical, presupposition and object, background and figure.²² If one allows for the interplay and does not eliminate the processual perspective as a threat, the fixity of the world becomes variable. The world is both structure and process—sometimes more of the former, sometimes more of the latter, depending on the epistemic practices one authorizes or de-authorizes. If the concepts of the analysts are privileged and their constitutive relation to the world that is analyzed is not explicitly included in the picture, realism obtains. If the epistemic privilege of the analyst is relaxed and the constitutive practices of the actors are brought to the foreground, a more processual reality ensues and the relation between structure and process, system and lifeworld can be investigated as a variable one.

6 CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A GENERAL RELATIONAL SOCIAL THEORY

In this chapter, I have constructed an honorable pedigree for a relational theory and suggested that any relational position can be systematically derived from four authors: Marx, Simmel, Tarde and Mauss. Historians of ideas and social theorists may want to indicate other predecessors. They may suggest, for example, that Mead, Elias or Luhmann brings something to the discussion that exceeds the quartet. I have also argued that a relational social theory has to integrate the motifs of structuralism, interactionism, processualism and symbolism into a complex relational theory. Depending on one’s starting point and the weight one wants to give to the respective motifs, the ensuing theory will be different. That is actually how it should be. The point is not to develop a single theory to which everyone has to subscribe, but to introduce some markers into the discussion and bring the whole debate to a higher level of theoretical abstraction and conceptual integration.

For me the question is how we can develop a realist relational theory that integrates social structures (Bourdieu + critical realism), cultural structures (hermeneutics and cultural sociology), networks (Elias and network analysis), interactions (Simmel, Goffman and Mauss) and intersubjectivity (phenomenology and Habermas) into a restructured ontology of practices, culture and social structure. At a lower level of abstraction, moving from social to sociological theory, the task is to develop a coherent theory of the social world that would be able to systematically integrate the concepts of the field (Bourdieu), networks (network analysis and actor network theory), interactions (pragmatism and symbolic interactionism) and a relational concept of self into a single framework. Coming from various traditions within the relational field, various authors, most notably Emirbayer, Crossley, Fuchs, Archer and Donati, are working on it. If I had more time and space, I would look at those endeavors and analyze how they have been brought to fruition in empirical investigations of interaction orders, racial relations, social movements, the third sector and reflexivity.

The text I have presented is nothing but propaedeutic work for the elaboration of a general relational social theory. Such a theory does not exist as yet, but it is what relational theorists are ultimately aspiring to. I realize I have done a lot of metatheoretical reconnaissance of the field of relational sociologies. It is only by mapping the various positions that one can actually move beyond each of them, integrating them dialogically and dialectically into a more encompassing framework. I have pointed to a fissure between relational-structuralist and interactionist-processual approaches, and indeed I think that to move forward relational sociology needs to overcome this opposition through dialogue. I am aware of the divisions within the field, but if we do not want to continue with the sterile opposition between agency and structure by other means for another decade, we need to find ways to integrate structure and process, system and interaction, micro and macro into a relational social theory. I do not deny that one can score points by opposing one position to another, arguing with realists against process ontologies, or vice versa, but I am afraid the field as such has nothing to gain from those academic skirmishes. We all know that, one way or another, relational sociologists need to take seriously the theories of Bourdieu and Luhmann, Archer and Latour, Dewey and Elias, to name but a few of the protagonists of this ongoing debate. We can always oppose one to another, but together, we need to move forward and explore alternative ways of overcoming the stalemate.

NOTES

1. The “linguistic turn” in philosophy is a multiple one. Depending on the tradition one comes from (Anglo-analytical philosophy, German idealism, French structuralism or American pragmatism), one can take it via Frege, Wittgenstein and Austin (UK), Humboldt, Heidegger and Habermas (Germany), Saussure, Levi-Strauss and Derrida (France) or Peirce, Mead and Dewey (USA). In Rorty,

there are two linguistic turns: the first one is properly analytic and corresponds to an almost positivist attempt to introduce semantic analysis into philosophy and transform it into a science. The second one amalgamates Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Dewey into an anti-foundationalist critique of epistemology and a nominalist critique of ontology. Retrospectively, we can see that the linguistic turn launched a format—a programmatic essay announcing with great fanfare a breakthrough, followed by a spate of articles that represent and perform the turn.

2. For a good overview of some of the turns in the human sciences, see Bachmann-Medick (2016) and Sussen (2015). By now, I reckon some 50 turns have occurred. Bachmann-Medick also missed a few, but the translation of her book from German to English has allowed her to significantly update the bibliography.
3. The metatheoretical synthesis between structure, culture and practices is only the scaffolding for a theoretical articulation of the concepts of fields, networks and interactions. Due to space constraints, I have not been able to move beyond metatheory.
4. We already have relational psychology (including object-relations psychoanalysis), relational archeology, relational anthropology and now also relational history. With the rise of “interconnected histories” and the cascade of related relational terms—“‘exchange’ and ‘intercourse’, ‘links’ and ‘entanglements’, ‘networks’ and ‘flows’” (Conrad 2016, 64)—global historians are pushing back: “Everything is not linked and connected to everything else” (ibid., 15). The question of interrelations is not just a theoretical one, but an empirical one, interconnectedness being variable.
5. At the limit, relationalism courts two risks. The first is logical and concerns the transformation of the relation into a subject and a substance. The reification of the relation collapses into its personification. The second is cosmological. When everything is related to everything else and everybody is connected to everyone else, sociology and anthropology shade off into a cosmology. “Relation is the ideal compromise, the word of the diplomat. The relation is between society, the individual, action. We see relations at every moment. It’s true. When I write those lines, I am in relation with a reader about whom I am thinking in the hope the he will follow my argument. I use a computer, a pen and paper. I see objects and trees around me. There are only relations!” (Piette 2014, 5–6). Inevitably, the question arises: What is not relational? What remains if one subtracts the relations? To get out of the fold, Albert Piette proposes an existential anthropology that would investigate not the relation, but an individual in his or her singularity, as s/he appears outside of the system, the structure or the network, separated from the others.
6. As a coordinator of the network of relational sociologists, François Dépelteau is inclusive and ecumenical. Whoever identifies with the relational project and wants to contribute to its expansion is in. But as an author (Dépelteau 2015, 2008), he is rather more divisive and develops his transactional sociology as a radical pragmatist-processual sociology without any concession to the more structuralist pole of relational sociology.
7. With its strong anti-categorical stand, Wellman’s (1988) reconstruction of the premises of structural sociology still offers the best introduction to the relational approach of network analysis.

8. For a concise summary statement of the ontological principles of processual sociology, see Abbott (2016, 1–2).
9. The latest issue of the *Revue du Mauss* (2016, 1), consecrated to relational sociology, comes with a catchy title: “In the beginning was the relation”—and a punching question: “But what comes afterwards?”
10. For a brilliant analysis of causal multi-determination, in which each of the variables works simultaneously through all the others, see Panica Pontes (2015).
11. For more philosophical introductions that foreground relational themes in the quartet, see Ollman (1993) on Marx, Vandenberghe (2002) on Simmel, Lazzarato (2002) on Tarde and Karsenti (1997) on Mauss. To please the Americans, I could have transformed the quartet into a quintet by adding Georg Herbert Mead. I have not done so because I think that the processualism, the interactionism and the symbolism that characterizes his pragmatism can be obtained through a fusion of Simmel and Mauss.
12. “Es ist nur das bestimmte gesellschaftliche Verhältnis der Menschen selbst, welches hier für sie die phantasmagorische Form eines Verhältnisses von Dingen annimmt.”
13. Via Deleuze, one can also return to Spinoza and take the affective turn to theorize and analyze the coordination of action at the pre-subjective and transindividual levels of existence (cf. Seigworth and Gregg 2010).
14. Melvin Pollner’s ethnomethodological take on Durkheim deserves special mention: Treat social facts not as things, but as acts—or, as he phrases it, as “-ings” (Pollner, quoted in Desmond 2014, 566), i.e. as concerted doings in concrete situations of action.
15. My own interest in relational sociology comes from the exploration of the intellectual genealogy that connects Simmel to Cassirer (Vandenberghe 2001) and Cassirer to Bourdieu (Vandenberghe 1999, reprinted in Vandenberghe 2014).
16. On Peirce’s synechism, the pragmatic doctrine that all that exists is continuous, cf. Haack (2013) (“Not Cynicism, but Synechism”).
17. “Im Anfang ist die Beziehung” (Buber 1962, 25). As the philosopher of dialogue, Buber was thinking above all of interpersonal relations, between I and Thou, the subject and the other/Other. He conceives of the relation in phenomenological terms, as an intentional relation of consciousness between I and You (in opposition to the depersonalizing I–It relation).
18. Just like George Herbert Mead, Norbert Elias is a classic of relational sociology. Depending on what one reads, his work can indeed be adduced to systematically defend structuralism (*The Established and the Outsiders*); processualism (*What is Sociology?*); emergentism (the 1968 postscript to the *Civilizing Process*); and symbolism (*The Symbol Theory*). What is needed, however, and what Elias does not offer, is a single relational theory in which all the elements are fully integrated.
19. In their discussion of the trope of the network in social theory and philosophy, Boltanski and Chiapello (1999, 208–230) distinguish two major strands: one that is more objective and structural, represented by structuralism, network analysis and actor-network theory, and another that is more intersubjective and communicative, ideally represented by Habermas. The two strands come together to constitute the *cité par projets* of contemporary capitalism. Here I want to integrate the objective and the intersubjective approaches into a relational social theory, and like Emirbayer, Mische, Goodwin, Fuhse and others, I think the trick is to do so via culture.

20. The debate between realists (Bhaskar, Archer, Mouzelis) and structurationists (Giddens, King, Plesants) has been going on for 30 years. It has spawned an academic cottage industry (see the four-volume boxed set edited by O'Donnell 2010), but I am not convinced that the positions have shifted very much. The resurgence of pragmatism and the introduction of processual ontologies into the debate (Kivinen and Piroinen 2006; Dépelteau 2015) has not led to a breakthrough. It has only reinforced the existing positions and led to a stalemate.
21. The shift from the sociology of science (STS) to an anthropology of worldviews has suddenly shifted the game—from culture to ontology and, from there, back to culture (see the debate in Venkatesan et al. 2010). This dislocation has reconfigured the debate as one that opposed the old-fashioned critical realism to a new-fashioned, media-savvy speculative realism that owes more to Badiou, Žizek, Deleuze and Latour than to Roy Bhaskar.
22. For a powerful demonstration of circularity that transposes Foucault's critique of the "transcendental-empirical double" to sociology, cf. Lacerda (2015).

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PART II

Approaches and Theories Associated
with Relational Sociology

SECTION A

Pragmatism, Interactions
and ‘Assemblages’

Sociology of Infinitesimal Difference. Gabriel Tarde's Heritage

Sergio Tonkonoff

Since the emergence of modern societal formations, the problem of the social sciences has been constantly reformulated. It so happens that accepting the hypothesis that there could be something such as social phenomena implies the necessity to know whether it is possible to apprehend them, and how to do so. And, since early modernity, the question about the social as a specific domain of research is the question about the objects, concepts and methodologies of social sciences in particular, as well as about science in general. Hence, thinking about the social in this context entails an inquiry of the relations of social sciences with other sciences, and with philosophy as well.

Tarde suggests a possible starting point to approach the problem in the following way:

Let us put ourselves before a large object, the starry sky, the sea, a forest, a crowd, a city. From every part of such objects impressions flow that lay siege to the savage man as well as the scientist. But, these multiple and incoherent sensations are understood by the latter as a pattern of logically connected notions, a bunch of explicative formulas. How are these sensations and notions slowly transformed into laws? How could knowledge become more and more scientific? (Tarde 1898: 15)

His answers were almost forgotten during the major part of the twentieth century, but before examining them let us revisit those remembered in that same period. This will be very useful in order to comprehend the reasons for that oblivion, as well as their current renaissance.

It is possible to affirm that modern reflections about the social were governed by mechanistic, organicist and dialectical approaches until the middle of

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the twentieth century. This was true at least in France, Germany and the places influenced by their thinking. A shared trait of the first two approaches, actually different in many other aspects, is their conviction that doing science (social or any other) involves finding identities, similarities and regularities behind the infinite variety of changing phenomena presented to observation. For them there is only science of what is repeated—this is the Aristotelian dictum that would rule both theories and practices of modern sciences in their development. We will see that Tarde accepts that, but tries to make science comprehend not only regularities but also events, differences, changes and conflicts. It can be thought that he is then close to dialectical approaches (especially to Marxism). Nonetheless, this is not accurate. The radical difference in where Tarde starts, and on which he bases the sociological approach that he aims to generalize to all scientific knowledge, is not opposite but rather infinitesimal. We will come back to this later. Let us put aside dialectical approaches for now, and for the sake of clarity concentrate on those holistic positions whose starting—and arrival—point is identity rather than difference (dialectical or any other). The basic idea here is that behind the varied multiplicity which our senses perceive (a crowd, a city ...), there are systems of structures and functions that operate without being seen, heard or felt, and that nonetheless give definite shape and regular rhythm to the world. Profound homogeneities hidden under the heterogeneity of chaotic daily life are then discovered, and anyone who claims to be singular is called conceited. The European nineteenth century produces vigorous holisms of this kind—Durkheim's in first place. Later, during the first half of the twentieth century, the systematic search of systems is generalized, and it becomes increasingly subtler and more pervasive. French structuralism is a clear example: society will no longer be understood just as a moral (or class) structure, but rather as a system of systems such as language, kinship, dressing, cookery and so forth. Here, the notion of difference is crucial since the systems in question are understood as systems of differences, and the identities they produce are considered as differential. However, they are differences taking place inside a system, and produced by it. They are, so to speak, differences among homogeneous elements, systemic differences. Once positioned here, the more totalizing, structural or systemic the explanation is, the more fascinating it seems. What is subjugating about this kind of explanation is that things which look very different from each other actually end up being analogous or isomorphic. And, moreover, they are explained by the same structural causes. The widow dresses in black because the bride gets married in white, according to Leach's (1976) classical example. The underlying structures behind that strange difference in colors are kinship ones, at least in the manner in which it has been operating in Western societies.

There are numerous reasons why many social theorists have been driven to reject this spell. The rediscovery of Gabriel Tarde is among them. In his sociology, there is an unexpected sensibility to the diverse and the nuanced, as well as to relations and not completely systematic connections among things.

It is unexpected because it is a sociology produced in France during the second half of the nineteenth century. That is to say, it was produced at the same time and in the same place where holistic social sciences would be configured and succeed. It is in the first place a surprising style, which would not be expected from someone who intends to found a science of the social. Tarde's writing moves forward like a climbing plant or a water current. His texts are as fluid as they are digressive, generous in details, concerned with trifles, singularities and picturesque facts. "Literary style", many commentators called it. A style in which, without solution of continuity, one thing conducts to another, connecting with it through different visible and invisible threads. It can be stated that his style is to plot networks. But, unlike the Structuralist *modus*, the networks woven in this manner do not close over themselves, they do not connect only homogeneous elements, and they do not fully succeed in ruling these elements. Instead, they are always inconclusive networks, partially successful in their associating vocation. It is a kind of association that advances through branching, producing new connections and new divergences, finding new regularities but also new singularities, and stopping only where its potency is exhausted. But this is Tarde's scientific style, not his literary one. And this is because, in his opinion, it responds to the manner in which reality is constituted. Reality in general, and social reality in particular, appears to his eyes as an infinite multiplicity of connective processes, a multi-color and moving entanglement of moving flows or currents. Therefore, unlike Durkheim and Levi-Strauss, there is a pre-eminence of time over space in Tarde's thinking. There is also a pre-eminence of difference over identity, of micro over macro, and of infinite over finite. For him, as for Bergson and Deleuze, the social is a manifold of multilinear, heterogeneous, infinitesimal and infinite processes. Then, if there were to exist something such as the society, this would be nothing but a contingent, temporary and incomplete form of integration of those processes which constitute, destitute and always exceed it. Hence, this allegedly literary style does nothing other than adapt the sociological writing to the ontology and epistemology of the infinitesimal difference which informs it.

In the case of Tarde, it is not likely to constitute a science of the social and its processes without having first decided the ontology that will support it. And this is because he considers that the form and validity of any discourse—whether it is scientific, political, ethic or aesthetic—about social reality depends on underlying basic assumptions which allow its articulation. Therefore, his sociology always implicitly or explicitly refers to the most important problems of Western philosophy, and his social theory can be read as an answer to many of those problems. The originality of that theory, the strangeness still caused by its reconstruction, is due to the fact that these questions were not formulated and responded to in terms of the metaphysical and epistemological tradition ruling social sciences until the latter part of the twentieth century, but rather in opposition to them.

The difficulty that such sociology presents can then be seen. We still lack the (scientific and non-scientific) common sense that enables us to comprehend it thoroughly. But, by the same token, the core of its currency resides in its

capacity to transform our common sense. It so happens that the concepts with which we usually think about society are spatial ones, or better yet geometrical—and, most of the time, from a Euclidean geometry. We are habituated to imagine social configurations by appealing to circles, squares and triangles (or spheres, cubes and pyramids at best). Those are the images of our social structures. Well, Tardean social life does not fit any of them—but not because it is only made of differences, singularities and chaos. Tarde certainly understands social life as an unformed magma, and he looks for a science able to give an account of this, having this assumption as a privileged starting point. He nevertheless also understands that social life structures itself by producing sets, regularities and more or less durable similarities. According to him, both directions of social life can, and must, be scientifically apprehended. He thus believes in social sciences. However, differences, singularities and chaos as well as sets, regularities and similarities arising from this understanding are necessarily different from the ones imagined by the ruling sociological common sense. That is, the common sense in rule from Marx, Weber and Durkheim to the emergence of post-structuralism: an event that occurs with Tarde's rediscovery on its heels. Let us see.

I FROM THE MICRO TO THE INFINITESIMAL (AND TO THE INFINITE)

In a first approximation, Tarde's sociology can be qualified as micro-sociology. However, this qualification should not automatically remit to the micro/macro polarity in the way it is usually utilized to classify social theories in social sciences and humanities. Although important differences regarding the precise sense given to these terms exist, it is possible to affirm that this classification is, in its more general and persistent forms, a differentiation of levels and scales. Narrow social spaces corresponding to individuals and their interactions in small groups are considered micro, while the space of the big groups and their structures is deemed macro. Thus, micro-sociologies' appropriate objects should be the actions of individuals, often understood as intentional units, as well as the local interaction networks woven among them. Accordingly, their suitable research methodology is a "descendent" one—that is to say, one that aims to reduce all that can appear as general, collective or supra-individual to inter-individual relations. Then, what we usually call institution would be nothing but the addition of certain individual inter-actions, and the individuals would be the building blocks of any social set. Hence, if there is a social whole, this is not larger than the sum of its parts. On the other hand, macro-sociologies follow the reverse track. When their starting point is individual behaviors, they describe them as the result of the action of institutions over them—these being supra-individual systems irreducible to their constitutive elements. Thus, their appropriate subjects of study are social systems, understood as well-defined totalities, and their analysis methodology is "ascendant". Societies and their institutions are not aggregates of people but rather systems and subsystems that are incomprehensible if decomposed into elements of

inferior level (individuals), because here the whole is larger than and different from the sum of the parts. In macro-sociological explanations, societies are the ones that tend to behave as unities (which are sometimes even treated as intentional). Here, the sociologically significant behaviors and interactions reach satisfactory explanation only in terms of their referral to supra-individual large units that would give an account of them. States, classes and nations would be those types of units.

The terms micro and macro understood in this manner have enabled a classification of social theories as such: Marx's, Durkheim's and Parsons's theories would be macro-sociological, while Simmel's, Homans and Goffman's would be micro. These terms also permit the evaluation of categories and concepts inside those theories. Therefore, this distinction has been used to qualify a complete theory according to its general manner of approaching social reality, and also to follow the different possible combinations inside one given theory. Finally, this polarity of the large and the small has enabled the guiding of diverse attempts at synthesis so as to produce new social theories (a significant portion of Giddens's and Bourdieu's efforts can be read in this sense).

From his side, Tarde wanted a science of the social orientated not just toward the small, but rather toward the infinitely small. Following Leibniz, he believed that "the key of the entire universe" could be found there (Tarde 1895a: 320). For this reason, he decided to promote within sociology the revolution that, in his opinion, monadology had produced in metaphysics and the infinitesimal calculus in mathematics. This revolution implies a series of both epistemological and ontological decisions which constitute real inversions in regard to the manner of thinking that has traditionally dominated philosophy and a large part of science. This radical change of perspective consist, among other key things, in trying to explain the big by the small, the static by the dynamic and the identity by the difference. It consist also in affirming the irreducible multiplicity of the real, as well as its varied, variant and infinite character. That is to say, in privileging the multiple over the One, and the becoming over the being.

The entrance through infinitesimal calculus may help us to see what is at play here. Formulated by Leibniz and Newton at the end of the seventeenth century, this mathematical tool has been subject to epistemological and metaphysical polemics since the very beginning. At that time, infinitesimal calculus had still an accentuated geometrical content from which it would release through an arithmetization process that took place during the following centuries—this process reaches its summit with the works of Bolzano, Cauchy, Dedekind, Weierstrass and Cantor in nineteenth century. With them, what was only a collection of techniques was turned into a well-substantiated theory of rigorous methodology: mathematical analysis. The resort to infinitesimals, considered as infinitely small quantities, is characteristic of calculus techniques. But the discussion about the statute of those quantities, which without being null are smaller than any imaginable quantity, persists until the present time. Some Newton followers considered them useful fictions, merely good for operative purposes. By following Leibniz, others understood them as the expression of infinitely small real entities, whose number was infinite (entities

which Leibniz called monads). In any case, calculus is, above all, the mathematics of movement and change.¹ And Leibniz, at least in his first formulations, leaned on both analytic geometry and arithmetic in order to capture them. The indication of something essential is found here, for geometry works, so to speak, on the field of the continuous, while arithmetic does so on the realm of the discrete. It can then be affirmed that calculus makes an articulation of the discrete and the continuous, which is the articulation of the finite and the infinite as well. Infinitesimals are precisely the link between both dimensions or registers.

Tarde found himself among those who maintained that, apart from being a suitable tool for resolving important mathematical problems and many practical issues, infinitesimal calculus entails a singular way of understanding reality. It is an understanding that, by proposing new ways of defining the relations between the finite and the infinite, enables the comprehension of reality itself as changing and infinite—this is a belief that Bergson and Deleuze would share later. Tarde, then, called for the orientation of all scientific (and philosophic) research toward the infinitely small and dynamic differences which calculus technically implies, and metaphysically suggests. Each science should then find its own infinitesimals so as to carry out its revolution. Thus, for instance, certain cellular and atomic theories, contemporary to him, were the beginning of a profound subversion in biology and in physics respectively. Nevertheless, which would be the sociological infinitesimal? The individual, it will be rapidly answered. Hence, we will make Tarde a methodological individualist, concluding that his micro-sociology responds to the polarity micro–macro described above. But by doing so we will miss the essential point. In this micro-sociology, the individual is a product of social life more than its producer. Nevertheless, this does not imply replenishing any of the macro-sociological alternatives, which are in fact opposite and complementary to the individual. According to Tarde, neither morals nor the economy, nor ideology nor the state is the producer of social life (they are rather its products as well). For him, social life is the streaming and the confluence of multiple flows of beliefs and desires, and a flow of this kind is nothing other than the repetition of a certain manner of doing, feeling and/or thinking from one individual to another. That is why he can say that “psychic relations from individual to individual are social life’s infinitesimal but continually integrated element itself” (Tarde 2000: 23).

Now we can start to see why this micro-sociology is, strictly speaking, a sociology of infinitesimal difference. Here, each individual is an intersection of two infinities, as Pascal (1904) wanted. But what in Pascal had a metaphysical (and tragic) sense, now acquires an (optimistic) historical and sociological dimension. The infinities in question are, on the one hand, the infinitesimal social streams which, from multiple origins, converge over each individual in the form of action, intellection and feeling models. On the other hand, each individual is the point of departure for new streams which can change her life and the other ones”.² Thus, each individual is a particular mode of integration of diverse and variable social currents stemming from diverse times and spaces,

and, in that sense, she is unique. Each one is an original set of heterogeneous elements, even when these elements are completely social, and even when, from afar, she is seen and sees herself as equal to any other member of her group. Nobody is Marxist, conservative or liberal in the same manner. But, moreover, nobody is merely Marxist, conservative or liberal. Every individual, even the most dogmatic, is a compound of different beliefs and desires concordant in diverse degrees. And these beliefs and desires live together with others which are indifferent to that concordance, and with still others which are directly opposed to them. That is why there can be Marxist people with macho customs that profess Catholicism, and also conservative homosexuals with some pagan habits mixed up with feminist inclinations (among many others inclinations). These combinations, habitually considered as odd anomalies, are here exemplary since social entities are always exceptional configurations for this infinitesimal sociology—and this is valid for every individual as well as for every social group. That is to say, there are no social “units” that have not been socio-historically produced as a particular and contingent integration of innumerable differences. Hence, it can perhaps be said that every individual is an event—as every institution and group is. Certainly, the elements that compose us are common (both ordinary and collective), but they are not the same for everyone. Likewise, the manner and the degree in which they are articulated in each of us are extremely variable. For that reason, although according to Tarde individuals are imitation products, he insists on the fact that there are no two equal imitations—even when they are copies of the same model. Imitation is always differential, and its difference assumes infinite degrees. Each individual is then original, although her variations with respect to the others are almost imperceptible. It can be said that they are differences of detail which are insignificant for that reason. But since essential differences do not exist, those of degree are the only ones that count: all difference resides there. For Tarde, as for Valery, the truth is in the nuances.

Now, stating that the individual is unique does not make him or her indivisible (nor immutable). If individuals are nothing other than the unstable and provisional integration of innumerable psycho-social fluxes, then they are far from being the solid, definite, autonomous and founding entities proposed by the micro-sociologies. But they are also far from the structurally (over)socialized agents proposed by the macro-reductionisms. In Tarde, the macro-structures about which different holisms speak are, in the best of cases, panoramic concepts—and, in the worst cases, revivals of medieval realism. Panoramic concepts are those that capture only massive, gross and non-precise similarities. They are homogenizing and static frameworks which hide more than they show. The concept of society is the first among them; but nation, class, state and ethnicity are panoramic concepts as well. If sociology is to make any advance, it must move from these macro-approaches toward the micro-world of the relations among individuals, and from there toward the infinitesimal processes of relations among relations—that is to say, toward the relations among trans- and infra-individual flows of beliefs and desires.³ What from far away are seen as

uniform and well-defined macro-entities are nothing but more or less regular manners of doing, feeling and thinking that repeat from one individual to another, associating and resembling them in certain aspects, and during a certain period of time. Though, as already mentioned, the real “level” at which this process occurs would not be that of the individuals, but of the infinitesimal streams that constitute and, as we shall see, also destitute them. The flows of national, ideological, moral, sexual and racial beliefs and desires are just some of these streams. As a result, it becomes really problematic to continue talking about levels here. It is also difficult to keep using the grammar of the being, to remain subjected to its substantialist load and its eleatic tendency. Here, one thing cannot be separated either from its relations or from its transformations: in the social realm everything is relational and processual or “moving”—to say it à la Bergson, the first grand heir to Tarde in France.

Therefore societies are not giant individuals, nor are individuals thumbnail replications of societal configurations. If it is a matter of going beyond this recurrent polarity in the sociological thinking, then it is paramount to rigorously follow a radical relational logic—that is, to follow a grammar of the infinitesimal difference which understands that real relations occur among relations (this is what is exemplary and revolutionary in infinitesimal calculus). In this grammar, the term micro comes to designate the logic and the dynamic that constitute any small, medium or large group, as well as any individual and any social artefact. On the other hand, the term macro comes to refer to a (false) panoramic perspective we must abandon. Following that direction, the micro is no longer a reduced replica of the macro, and the macro no longer exists. Hence, both terms are to be abandoned. Now nationality, class and ethnicity are not transcendent macro-structures any more; they instead become similarities produced by the repetition of a model in a certain number of individuals—on its part, similarity is transformed into a difference which tends to zero; it becomes an unattainable identity since repetition is always varied and variant. As we shall see, religion, economy, government, art, sciences and everything sociology knows as institutions, now become open and moving sets of (big and small) inventions which produce imitative flows of different intensities and scopes. Or to put it in the terms of *Social Laws*, each of them is an ensemble product of “an infinite number of infinitesimal and fruitful adaptations”, that in turn produces “elementary, innumerable and infinitesimal repetitions” (Tarde 1898: 122). Likewise, class struggle is no longer seen as a great conflict among large homogeneous blocks, but rather as a disseminated web of innumerable and infinitesimal oppositions, as localized as it is unstable.

2 ELEMENTAL SOCIAL RELATIONS: IMITATION, INVENTION AND OPPOSITION

A common misunderstanding of Tarde’s theoretical positions is to see in them a sociological mirror of common sense. The habitual, individualist and anthropomorphic thinking of everyday life drives us to describe imitation as the action

of a copycat individual. Even when it is eventually accepted that it can be unconscious, imitation still belongs to the imitator and involves her completely. This seems even more sure regarding invention and opposition. We often consider that nobody is more in full possession of herself than an inventor. The myth of the genius indicates that a creation is brilliant when it emerges without any relation with its context. The myth then indicates that real creations emanate entirely from their owner: the genius as the exception itself produced. In a way, something similar would occur with opposition. Contradicting would be the activity of an individual or collective subject that, in its opposition, sharply differentiates itself from other individuals and groups. In fact, the opponent also has her myth: one that understands rebellion as a pure essence, a quality completely alien to the matter of which established and conformist people are made. Here, the antagonist would be an external being, refractory to the forms and/or contents which it contradicts. For him or her, as well as for the inventor, an “all-or-nothing” law rules. Therefore, the mystified ones will be disappointed if those geniuses and rebels reveal filiations or influences shared with their social surroundings: these will no longer be so brilliant nor so rebellious, either.

The infinitesimal approach to social life is off-center in regards to this individualist anthropomorphism and its mystifications. Surely, for Tarde, the individual will always be an analytic operator and a major pathway to social dynamics and its configurations. From his perspective, the individual is a more suitable entrance to the social realm than structures, systems or any other macro-reductionism. However, as previously stated, the imitations, inventions and oppositions he talks about do not refer to terms but rather to relations. They are “inter-mental” or “inter-psychological” bonds that cannot occur among individuals understood as pre-existing totalities, since these relations are the ones which constitute them (and because, being constituted as such, individuals never exist as totalities). What passes or communicates through minds are beliefs and desires which are “previous” to individuals. That anteriority makes these beliefs and desires neither biological nor merely (intra)psychological entities: they are entirely social. They are ideas, images, feelings and even modes of perception which propagate as examples from one individual to another (from parents to their children, for example). Then, performing as guides for action, intellection and emotion, they are the engines of every psychogenesis. Thus, to be exact we should say that those models do not propagate from one individual to another, but instead from one body to another, producing in them individual and group “identities”—that is, making them socially similar to themselves and to others. They are the engines of every socio-genesis as well. Social desires and beliefs work as models which reach every body (specifically, every mind) as examples to be imitated. Their reiterated imitation configures habits, memory and judgments where there was only a pre-individual and non-formed psychosomatic singularity (i.e. a body) before. We can then say that an individual is configured by the affluence of moral, political, economic, religious, sexual, esthetical and scientific examples. But she is also configured by the influx of manners of speaking, walking, eating, sitting down, having fun and so on. Even

the tiniest details of her personal configuration derive from examples coming from different latitudes and times which reached her not only via face-to-face communication but also through the most diverse interfaces (books, newspapers, radio, television and so on).

Nonetheless, this does not imply that all individuals are the same because of their entirely social (poly)genesis. Stating that individuals (and groups) are made of examples coming from the social context does not necessarily imply an affirmation that social context assumes the form of an organism—or of any other system conceived as a closed and transcendent totality of structures and functions. It does not mean that limits between the social surround and individuals are clear and distinct either, since individuals are precisely differential social configurations. Hence, as was mentioned, each one is a multilinear set of social flows integrated in an original manner. But for the same reason, in each of us, being matches doing. Or, to say it with Bachelard (1970: 15): “the substance of the infinitely small is contemporary with the relation”. This makes the individual, conceived both as an intentional unity and as a building block of the social, a narcissistic chimera. Far from being a pre-social given entity, the individual can be thought of as an open set of blurred, moving and unstable contours produced in a somatic singularity by the mimetic playing out of social life. And this is why we can add that her identity is composed and decomposed innumerable times along her biological life, and that there is no pathology in this. According to the indomitably pluralistic clause of this infinitesimal sociology, one is born similar neither to others nor to oneself, but rather becomes similar by copying oneself and also others. For the same, individual states of equilibrium and “identity” radically depend on the mode and velocity in which that mimesis is produced. Individuals are then compromise solutions which are constantly challenged and put in communication by the impersonal social flows that fold and unfold them. And the same rules apply for social groups.

Tarde especially attends two of the ways in which the individual understood in this manner is challenged: when placed in states of multitude (whether in masses or in publics), and when placed in supra-social states at the (eventual) time of an invention. Let us pay attention to the latter since it is an elemental category of infinitesimal sociology. It can occur that two (or more) imitative flows that previously ignored or opposed each other, encounter one another in an individual and co-adapt among them. Whether she has worked tenaciously for this to happen, or it has happened in an unconscious or random manner, is irrelevant since the sociological result is the same: a new difference will take place and will be capable of disseminating and transforming, to a lesser or to a larger extent, the physiognomy of the existing world. This unprecedented event is called invention, and every individual in which this conjugation occurs is denominated inventor. The “impossible” aspect of all invention resides then in the co-adaptation in question. According to Tarde, what conjugates are pre-existing truisms whose particular linking manner is what sheds unexpected, often astonishing results: a stone and a club made the lever. It can also happen that those pre-existing “truisms” are very complex. The invention’s principle

is, however, always the same: the combination of Descartes's and Fermat's geometry with arithmetic in order to give birth to infinitesimal calculus. In any case, an invention is a happy encounter of pre-existing imitative vectors whose outcomes diversify social life by actualizing its "possibles"⁴—that is to say, by producing new desires and beliefs. Thus, this category is comprehended from Einstein's theory of relativity and Picasso's *Demaiselles d'avignon*, to Marx's *Capital* and the United States' constitution, passing through the steam engine and the tomograph, and reaching the fork, the pen, and the coffee with sugar. Many years before postmodern sensibility (another invention, or better yet, an ensemble of inventions) invaded us, Tarde disregarded what was considered "high" and "low" according to ethic, politic and aesthetic parameters of modernity. His infinitesimal sociology valued inventions just for their capacity to disseminate themselves and to change the context in which they are deployed. That is to say, he valued them just (micro)sociologically.⁵

Tarde understands that every invention—simple or complex, illustrious or unknown—entails a possible different world. This is so because he finds in every invention the aspiration to be repeated until all of its possibilities are effectively realized. Every invention would then have an infinite appetite. In any case, the sociological point is that each of them tends to propagate as fashion (rapid imitation) and then take root and reproduce as custom (relatively slow imitation). Thus, by repeating from one individual to another, in a rapid or slow manner, they weave social networks, giving certain coherence to the social field in which they are deployed. The universal tendency toward colonization and homogenization present in each invention fails in its effectuation because of the interferences it finds in its path. These interferences can assume the form of oppositions, or can give rise to new co-adaptations which in turn will prompt new propagations, new creative combinations or new struggles. All of this makes history multiple, contingent and endless from an infinitesimal perspective.

As mentioned, it can then happen that ways of doing, thinking and/or feeling implicated in a new religious or political dogma, scientific theory or technical artifact oppose others, instead of conjugating with (or ignoring) them. Tarde (1897) certainly characterizes opposition social phenomena as struggle, combat and destruction, but avoiding the trap of the opponent's myth, he shows that far from being a maximum of difference and exteriority, opposition can only occur among similarities. Differences, he explains, cannot oppose since they are different: extremes are always the same kind. Hence, for an opposition to exist there must be a common reference denied by one of the two poles and affirmed by the other. For this reason, every opposition process entails the production of counter-similarities, inverted repetitions or polar symmetries. Action and reaction, assertion and denial always respond to each other, turning the opponents increasingly (counter)similar. Therefore, every opposition involves a process of rising symmetries of forms and forces equilibrium during the time it lasts. To say it in other words, instead of entailing separation or distancing, all conflict, even the most violent and cruel one, is an (elemental) social relation. Moreover, it is a very strait social relation—something very well

expressed by the Mexican poet Rosario Castellanos when she said that we give our life to what we hate. Before causing the destruction of one of its two constituent poles, opposition is a very intense and close relation between them. These are the reasons which make Tarde retain the moment of reciprocal equilibrium and deny any creative force to opposition. According to him, the real anomaly or disruption in the multi-centered social communication process would not be opposition in its different variants—from transgression to dialectical contradiction. It is the invention what interrupts, for a moment, the game of re-productive repetitions and neutralizing or destructive counter-similarities, in order to give rise to a social difference which enriches the social life and produces new futures.

3 SOCIAL LIFE, ENSEMBLES AND SOMNAMBULISM

What is a society? Tarde faces this founding question, and attempts to answer it in accordance with his neo-monadological ontology, his epistemology of infinitesimal calculus and his elemental sociology—that is to say, in consonance with his understanding of the social as an open field of infinitesimal repetitive, conflictive and inventive relations. This makes his answer composed of two parts or steps, namely: social life is a kind of somnambulism and society is the organization of imitativeness. This foremost definition, formulated in *The Laws of Imitation*, will maintain its basic structure all along Tarde's works, but it will be specified, deepened and elaborated over time. That will occur especially when, in *The Social Logic*, he integrates the study of social organization to his elementary sociology (orientated toward the study of social life in its movement and proliferation). There, Tarde adds two branches to his sociology: the social logic, engaged in addressing the articulation of beliefs (or “social intelligence”), and the social teleology, which investigates the articulation of desires (or “social willingness”). It is worth pointing out that a social logic, to be such, must include the treatment of the illogical, and that a social teleology has to deal “not only with the accordance of means and aims, but also with the discrepancy of aims among them” (Tarde 1895b: 18).

The answer of this infinitesimal sociology to the question about society has, then, at least three fundamental components: social life, imitation or somnambulism, and organization (logical and teleological). First, let us resume the issue of imitations since they are the regular elemental forces of social life—while inventions would be its guiding ones. As we have seen, imitation here is an “action at a distance” from one brain to another, which consists in the transmission of a model or a cliché. Now we can add that the key to this transmission is the subjugating character of the models it promotes. This character makes all inventions/models propagate in the manner of a contagion—that is to say, in the manner of an involuntary communication process able to produce true epidemics. Therefore, Tarde could write: “what binds men together is dogma or power”. Here dogma refers to the kind of social relation established by the propagation of logical inventions (e.g. a religion or political ideology),

and power refers to the relations established by the propagation of teleological ones (e.g. a governmental or industrial technique). Both kinds of contagions are reunited by Tarde in the concept of imitative diffusion. This is why the whole quote reads “imitation is a social bond because what binds men together is dogma or power” (Tarde 1890: 11). From the most trivial face-to-face interactions to the establishment of a national government, and from there to the formation of large empires, passing through the influence of some cities over other ones, as well as in the formation of publics and multitudes, Tarde always finds command and obedience relations. Certainly, this is not the grand Marxist polarity where some dominant classes submit the block of subjugated ones by the yoke of economic exploitation, state military force and ideology’s counterfeit coin. We are not in front of the Hegelian master/slave dialectic, either. Because although in Hegel subjectivity formation entails a struggle among two for pure prestige—for desire of the other’s desire, as Kojève (1947) will say—this is a struggle for death. That is, the component of violence has a structural function as reinsurance, and even as operator of recognition. Finally, we are not facing the war model (Nietzsche/Foucault hypothesis), where the mnemotechniques that subjectify and subdue bodies are physically coercive. In Tarde, the imitative relation has an imperative character because it is a hypnotic relation. The magnetizer–magnetized nexus investigated in psychiatric cabinets of his time by physicians such as Charcot and Freud offers him the paradigm of socialization and the key to the elemental social bond. Hypnosis is here an asymmetric relationship in which the magnetized acts in accordance with her magnetizer’s designs, and she does so not because of interest, necessity or coercion but rather because of fascination—defined by Tarde (1890a: 87) as “real neurosis, kind of unconscious love and faith *polarization*”. The most significant difference between what occurs inside and outside these cabinets, is that outside them the hypnotic bond is reciprocal. Social life, in its associative and re-productive aspects, would be nothing other than the mirror interplay between fascinators and the fascinated, which in turn fascinate. That is to say, it is a dense synaptic fabric of asymmetric suggestions, as universal as it is reversible. Thus Tarde could affirm that the social state is analogous to somnambulism, and that social life is a network of mimetic suggestions.

Now, properly speaking, those contagious associative wefts are not organized. The courses of their flows, as well as their velocities, are multiple and non-convergent per se. On the other hand, as we saw, social life’s processual dimension not only concerns imitative propagations, but also implies innumerable oppositional interferences and inventive co-adaptations with neither global rhythm nor unified directions. (That is why, following this micro-socio-logic in a strict manner, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) will say that in a society everything escapes.) Nevertheless, that chaotic exuberance is somehow articulated, and this is why social sciences and humanities can talk about regularities, institutions and even social systems. But in the case of Tardean sociology, these notions acquire a very different sense from that attributed to them by both individualisms and holisms of any kind. Here institutions are not

operational rules chosen by individuals, nor closed systems which pre-exist and determine them. Instead, they are sets of propositions and projects or aims that co-adapt diverse social flows, giving a certain coherence to social life. Language, religion, science, industry, law, art, politics, the economic market, are nothing but sets of this kind. In them, different types of judgments and passions, arising from social field as inventions, co-adapt among themselves—that is, they are articulated in as specific as diverse manners. This means that language, religion, science and so on are nothing other than sets of action, intellection and affection models which are repeated from one individual to another, and that only exist in those repetitions.

This corpuscular language can, and must, be translated to an undulatory one: what we call institution is nothing but the provisional and unstable co-adaptation of chaotic and scattered social flows which, logically and teleologically integrating themselves, achieve a certain coherence, organization and regular speed. This relative systematization of the social field depends on the inventions' capacity to accumulate with others. Institutions are nothing but these accumulative integrations of inventions. Through the co-adaptation of inventions, they not only systematize disperse flows but also disarticulate antagonisms. That is why, according to Tarde, every political, moral, aesthetical, technical complex of inventions tends to create social harmonies.

The multiple co-adaptations of some of those logical and teleological sets enable this sociology to speak of societal groups. Tarde denominates group as “the community of a same type of civilization which supposes a set of economic, legal, moral, religious, scientific, political similarities combined with shared psychological characters and an air of national family” (Tarde 1899: 178). This means that there would be nothing such a *sui generis* and transcendent collective conscience in relation to individuals. We can talk about institutions as systems, and about societal groups as systems of systems, but only under the condition of considering that we are referring to the poorest, most stereotyped and least dynamic dimension of social life—but also under the condition of radically re-defining what is understood as system. As we have just seen, a societal system—whether local, regional, national or global—is an accumulation of co-adapted inventions which only exists in its reproduction from one individual to another. And this occurs in a manner that is not distinguishable from the interactive process it regulates. That is to say, every societal ordering is immanent to the trans-individual relations it organizes. One of the main traits of such a system is the contingency of both its specific configuration and its duration. It so happens that the event of its integration could have occurred or not, and it could have certainly occurred in a different manner with other results. And something similar can be said in regards to its duration: each societal system puts its existence at stake in each of the individuals through which it passes and re-produces itself, each time it does so. The miniscule is that crucial for Tarde. It is worth underlining also that these systems' systematicity is always partial. This is due to the fact that they are integration processes of elements which have both heterogeneous origins and dynamics,

and that they remain heterogeneous even when integrated. It is clear that this processual integration cannot happen without a certain homogenization of those elements—without a codification and territorialization of their differences, to say it as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) do. However, this does not turn differences into identities, but rather into repetitions—that is to say, into iterated propagations of a difference. Furthermore, all systems are unstable sets in motion since they co-adapt differential elements which are themselves in movement and transformation (i.e. fluxes). They are then open complexes of shifting relations that partially link open and changing relations (relations which are in turn always connected to others not comprised by the system in question). Finally, these systems can co-adapt, and also oppose or ignore each other. But even in the case of co-adaptations among them, none can determine all the others—not even ultimately. If there is something such as a society, it is then a whole much smaller than the sum of its parts.

As a result, sociology's habitual objects—from societies to individuals, passing through structures or systems of any scope—turn into particular configurations of infinitesimal psycho-social currents, always subjected to coherence, intensity and velocity variations. Thus, the systems usually called institutions ought to be described as slow and regular movement configurations—that is to say, as manners of doing, feeling and thinking which re-produce in each individual with relatively moderate rhythm and average intensity. This is what Tarde calls traditional imitation. Now, it occurs that the social field is also plowed by more rapid and intense flows able to destabilize these institutional systems, to put them “out of themselves”. These currents are named fashions by Tarde, and we can assert that the kind of association they produce no longer gives rise to individuals or to organized groups either, but rather to multitudes. Rapid flows of opinion, faith, love or hate are multitudinary and multitudinarizing flows—that is, modes of relation able to destitute institutions. But there is something more: they are also able to institute new ones, since a fashion can become tradition.

Because of all that, we should talk of ensembles rather than systems, as Tarde actually did, and instead of considering them as totalities, we should think about them as un-wholes. Moreover, we can denominate as social the multiple field of infinitesimal flows where these ensembles are made, transformed and unmade. These ensembles, on the other hand, can be qualified as societal to indicate social flows' composition and deceleration—something that Deleuze calls stratification. This social/societal differentiation, not done but enabled by Tarde, might be useful to point out that social life is just one, but that it assumes at least two kinds of dynamics and configurations. The relation between them can be thought of with the (infinitesimal) model of the relation between the finite and the infinite. Thus, while the social remits to the fluid and virtually unlimited field of infinitesimal currents which, with variable intensities and velocities, propagate, interfere and conjugate among each other, the societal remits to the (finite) series of those currents' partial articulations or ensembles.

Hence, for a (micro)analysis of social life two interrelated instruments are required: the differential sociology of its dynamics (elemental sociology) and the integral sociology of its logical and teleological compositions. “One shows how social tissues, rather than social bodies, are formed, how the social fabric, rather than the national clothing, is manufactured; the other one deals with the manner in which those tissues are organized, the way in which that fabric is cut and sewed, I mean, the manner in which it cuts and sews itself” (Tarde 1895a: 12). Then the science of social flows, their infinite variations and their infinitesimal dispersion, must also be the science of their integrations, co-adaptations or societal assemblages.

4 THE WAVE AND THE PARTICLE (AS A WAY OF CONCLUDING)

Macro-physical human sciences, if that can be said, have found regularities behind individual behaviors’ errancy and diversity, and they have wanted to formulate models and laws to describe and explain those regularities. But they have then reified their own generalizations by attributing the discovered regularities, whether to the interaction of individuals or to the social systems understood as transcendent or supra-individual entities. Tarde willingly accepts that there is no science of the singular, and that, consequently, sociological knowledge’s object is that which repeats. However, he does not conceive repetition as a form of identity, nor identity as the alpha and omega of everything existing and forthcoming, either. With difference as his starting (and arrival) point, the image of the world he proposed was not in accordance with that delineated altogether by Newtonian physics and by metaphysics from Descartes to Kant. His sociology of infinitesimal difference entails a subversion in the way of thinking of the social which depends on that ontological and epistemological complex. Therefore, for social sciences’ *mainstream* it is still difficult today to accept his basic assumptions and his radical corollaries. Nevertheless, it is necessary to add that when a subversion of similar characteristics occurred in the exact and natural sciences, these disciplines were far from turning their backs on it. Conversely, in the social sciences, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were prolonged until the late twentieth century. And it can perhaps be said that their practices are still imprisoned in paradigms preceding 1905—at least in respect of their comprehension of time and space, unities, sets and relations. On his part, Tarde was interested in those scientific references which would enable the emergence of “post-classical” physical and biological sciences. But his most secure supports and the most important sources of his sociological device were Leibniz’s monadology and the infinitesimal calculus. This is so because, among other fundamental things, both centrally involved the ideas of differentials or infinitesimals and of the actual infinite. Sociology’s main challenge would then be to work with these notions in order to make its own revolution. It is surely not a matter of directly and

unequivocally applying mathematical analysis to the social field, if that could be done. It is not a matter of using those methods just to measure empirical processes either. Instead, we ought to think as the infinitesimal calculus does, and transpose its double (differential and integral) method to the qualitative order of social theory. In doing so, we can expect to apprehend the finite in the infinite and the infinite in the finite at the level of social reality.

In the eyes of classical epistemologies, ruled by the principle of identity and equipped with static, clear and distinct concepts, all this turns out to be hardly acceptable. Here, the infinitesimal thinking is seen as confusing because, among other things, the notion of the infinite itself is considered a false concept. Renouvier (1875), a fundamental reference for Durkheim, will say, for example, that there is no such thing as the repetition of a myriad of the infinitely small. In this, he is doing nothing other than following a long tradition from Plato and Aristotle to Descartes. For those who follow this conviction, infinitesimal calculus is a foremost mathematical tool based on useful fictions but with no ontological or even epistemological value. Tarde, on his part, belongs to another lineage—one that, at least in respect to philosophy and social science, can be correctly called minoritarian. It is a lineage which associates him not only with Leibniz, but also with Giordano Brunos, De Causa and Spinoza as antecedents, with Cournot and Bergson as contemporaries, and with Deleuze and Latour as heirs. Regarding Foucault, we can still doubt to what extent he was in accordance with the ontology of infinitesimal difference, but what is clear is that, from the 1970s on, his sociology was Tardean in its more important traits.⁶

In my view, the logical starting point of this infinitesimal grammar is found in the concept of social life, which Tarde has supposed more than explicitly developed. It is social life understood as the stream, confluence and interference of infinitesimal currents of belief and desire in permanent becoming—in other words, as a multiform field of psycho-social forces woven by invention, imitation and opposition relations. The concept corresponding to the integration of those differential relations is that of ensemble—widely elaborated by Tarde. It is a concept which anticipates Foucauldian devices and Deleuze's assemblages since it is defined as the composition of heterogeneous elements that logically and teleologically co-function in a more or less concordant way. These ensembles, relations of relations, also relate among them, both to oppose and to compose in higher-grade ensembles (what in Tarde means of less vitality and less complexity). Not only groups and social systems, but also individuals are open and moving multilinear ensembles. All of them are integrations or co-adaptations of flows of diverse origins and directions, which in turn produce new flows. All of them are also constantly subject to infinitesimal variations caused by their iterated re-production and to decompositions produced by their multitudinarization in fashions, rumors, currents of fear or hope, crowds and publics. They are also subject to the transformations caused by the reception of new flows coming from new inventions. For this reason, Tarde will be able to say that social life is organized just to better disseminate.

Therefore, sociology must be, primarily, a science of undulations or infinitesimal flows, but also one of velocities and connections. It must study the trans-individual stream, by contact or at distance, of affirmations and denials, attractions and repulsions, obedience and resistance, that weave the weft of the social field. Here, it is a matter of going from the parts to the whole and of knowing that the whole is always an association in motion of parts that are in motion as well. We also ought to accept that no set (no whole) is able to close over itself and totalize the elements which compose it, and that the parts can take part in other sets as well. The fact that those parts are also sets or associations of elements, which are in turn associations, and so on and so forth, with no possibility of finding a simple and ultimate origin in any place or state, is also to be remembered. Where holism postulates organic or dialectic systems that are always more than the sum of their parts, and where individualism finds additions of unities, this sociology claims that parts always exceed the ensemble they compose, which is, however, immanent to them.

Hence, infinitesimal methodology works *in media res*. It has to start from the middle of things since things are bunches of assembled relations, and it is neither necessary nor possible to determine their absolute beginning. Instead, as we saw, an archaeology, cartography and cinematic—especially a dromology—of their flows is possible and necessary.⁷ If we are to give an account of a certain socio-political configuration, for instance, we can start with one individual. If we resume the case of one of the aforementioned individuals (the Marxist-Christian one), and we now find that she was born and lives in Nicaragua, we can follow her ethico-political beliefs. We can investigate their poly-genesis, map their diffusions, try to measure their intensities and velocities. They would re-conduct us to the history of nineteenth-century revolutionary movements, more precisely to Marx's and Engels's writings and militancy, and from there to the continuous variations that Marxist ideas, passions and practices have had until reaching her. They would also lead us to Jesus himself as the inventor of the other creed at stake, and to the history of its diffusion over nearly 2000 years. Regarding her tobacco use (because she smokes), this will remit us to the different routes and diverse uses it has had at least since European merchants took it from America to the Old Continent, and from there back to America, where J. Buchanan Duke would invent the industrial cigarette. In Latin America, Christianity and Marxism spread via different paths, each with its own logic and teleology, according to its own rhythms, until they co-adapted in the preaching and practices of individuals such as Rubem Alves and Gustavo Gutiérrez Merino, giving rise to what was called the theology of liberation. We could later try to identify and describe when, how and through which ways that invention spread from them in diverse imitative currents. These currents travelled both to the first individual mentioned (an engineer) and to other Nicaraguans (college students, householders, peasants), partially associating and resembling them, changing in certain aspects their interactions, confronting them with other groups, and transforming their forms

of government and statehood. That could be the history of Sandinista Nicaragua, at least in one of its seams. The same exercise could be done from an individual with neo-liberal (and neo-conservative) ideology, and we would be able to rebuild the socio-historical weft which gave rise to the invention of beliefs and desires she repeats in some of her practices, and which makes her a participant in the network that goes from the *Walter Lippman colloquium* realized in Paris in 1938 to Donald Trump's election as the United States President.

These examples help us to illustrate a method. The very same method that Foucault (1995, 1984) has developed with notable results, concentrating on the inventions themselves and generally disregarding the inventors—that is to say, being consistent with the method at stake. These examples are also useful to show that the individual and the society are neither the main categories nor the privileged objects of infinitesimal sociology. This sociological discourse claims that both individuals and societies should not be presupposed but rather explained. By doing so, the (panoramic) image we had of both of them radically changes.

NOTES

1. For this reason, Newton named his method fluxion calculus; in it changing quantities were called “fluent” and their changing velocities were called “fluxions”. Apparently, this denomination is partly due to his attempts to avoid infinitesimals. Regarding Leibniz, there is a discussion among specialists about his contradictory affirmations concerning the real or fictional character of infinitesimals. For a historical approach to calculus, see Boyer (1959), and for a philosophical one, see Brunschvicg (1912).
2. Reading this micro-sociology in an ethical key, Bergson (1959: 333) comments: “it gives us a strong responsibility sense by showing how any of our initiatives can prosper with incalculable consequences, how a simple individual action, falling in the social context as a stone in the water of a pond, completely shakes it through imitation waves which expand themselves”.
3. “Societies function by the gathering or concurrency of desires, of necessities. Beliefs, mainly religious and moral ones, but also legal, political and even linguistic ones ... are societies' plastic forces. Economic or aesthetical necessities [desires] are their functional forces” (Tarde 1890b: 158).
4. “Every successful invention actualizes one of the thousand possible, or rather, given certain conditions, necessary, inventions, which are carried in the womb of its parent invention, and by its appearance it annihilates the majority of those possibilities and makes possible a host of heretofore impossible inventions. These latter inventions will or will not come into existence according to the extent and direction of the radiation of its imitation through communities which are already illuminated by other lights” (Tarde 1890a: 46).
5. For myth's peace, Tarde understands that there can actually be, and in fact there are, brilliant inventors—that is to say, individuals who produce magnificent creations characterized not only by the outstanding originality of their combinations, but also by their complexity and richness. Nonetheless, he understands that

we must not see them as exceptional individuals for their miraculous capacity to create *ex nihilo*. What is exceptional is the number of accidental happenings that, so to speak, encountered in them by chance. They are individuals born with unusually powerful brains that must have counted on necessary cultural and social conditions, and on a rare vigor and tempering. Likewise, they must have also been located in a precise moment and place in order to constitute as the space of conjunction of pre-existing, not assembled, repetitions. A true miracle.

6. For an analysis of Tarde's micro-socio-logic grammar in Deleuze and Foucault, see Tonkonoff (2017).
7. Like Virilio (1977), Tarde is conscious of the importance of trying to somehow measure the velocity of social communication. For both of them, the "science" or "logic" of velocity must include an analysis of communication media in as broad a sense as possible (from postal mail, telegraph and roads to newspapers, radio, etc.), since these media largely determine the velocity of social life.

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Pluralism and Relationalism in Social Theory: Lessons from the Tarde–Durkheim Debate

David Toews

In this chapter, I present an original conception of relational analysis and aim to show how this conception can account for and further the theoretical and methodological pluralism that is already the norm in sociology without sacrificing, and indeed potentially increasing, the unity of the field. I highlight the “problems oriented” nature of the methodological framework I propose, and show how it can be applied to illuminate a variety of concepts and issues in sociology. From within this paradigm, I also seek to clarify the issues facing the problem of unity and to do so I critically discuss another recent attempt, by Caillé and Vandenberghe (2016), to unify sociology from a relational perspective. Caillé and Vandenberghe’s scheme employs the strategy of choosing one particular concept under which to locate all the forms of relational sociology, namely, Mauss’s concept of the gift. They then proceed to draw analogies between this overarching premise and all the other fundamental premises in other works of relational sociology.

While agreeing with their goal of greater unity in sociology, I aim to show how it is unnecessary as well as undesirable to adopt a strategy of conceptual and analogical unification when the option of having a robust form of relational analysis that focuses on social problems exists. Most would agree that the diversity of social problems serves, *de facto*, as a basis for methodological pluralism. Yet it is possible to affirm the unity of these diverse efforts at addressing diverse social problems by affirming the basic features of relational analysis. The test of a strategy of unification should not be merely the agreement of like-minded scholars but should rather be whether the framework is able to accommodate diverse approaches, particularly ones that are opposed to each

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other on issues of social ontology. To that end, I discuss the classical debate that took place between Emile Durkheim and Gabriel Tarde, opponents in the formulation of classical social ontology (Tarde and Durkheim 2010). I then look at the relevance of the notion of emergence, and how the latter can be re-thought as a common concern in relational analyses that can be extracted from works such as theirs. I thus show how a relational analysis oriented via emergence to social problems can accommodate both of their approaches to social ontology, and argue such a scheme represents the best hope for unifying a de facto pluralist field of social studies.

I RELATIONAL ANALYSIS

Relationality is primary in social affairs and in sociology. Relations are between things and things sometimes resist being defined by relations, but most things are contingent composites and present little difficulty, in principle, for analysis. A composite often needs analysis because it appears to be a simple thing when in reality it is made from a mixture of things. For example, the analysis of ideologies is the analysis of composites. The general challenge a composite presents is a pattern that requires analysis for the simple reason that it cannot be what it appears to be without there being simpler, sometimes hidden, elements from which it is made. This is why an analyst can know when she has arrived at a relatively objective “hard reality”: when the elements she identifies are no longer composites, that is, when the objects she is studying resist further analysis of the kind that she has been applying. As much rests on simple elements, they are worth examining further.

Simple real things that are involved in relations without being defined by or exclusively traced to them constitute a limit or constraint over relationality. This is in no way methodologically detrimental in a relationalist discipline such as sociology. Nor is the implication of a limit of relationality ontologically detrimental to sociology’s autonomy: it does not mean relationality is exhausted by analysis and thus ontologically secondary to the simple elements analysis reveals. We can be satisfied that these “hard simple realities” exist as long as we assure ourselves that our methods have been rigorous and, at the same time, we acknowledge that these objects we have declared simple realities are in fact internally complex on levels we will never know or will never have had to know. These two mindsets, the positive and the skeptical, logically imply each other and are perfectly compatible. They are compatible on the assumption that different methods of analysis will reveal more or less quantities and qualities of the details that can be known about an object. This is why theoretical and methodological pluralism is not only the norm but is a necessity in a discipline that accepts the fundamental relationality of things. It ought to be recognized as such, for a variety of reasons.

To begin with, we do not posit the objective reality of simple objects out of some desire for “elegance” or to keep explanations from being unnecessarily complex. To the contrary, as Harman argues, if we fail to posit the objective

reality of simple objects, we run the risk of oversimplifying relations (Latour et al. 2011, 36–37). It is necessary to posit that there are some objects that are simple not in the sense that they have only one or very few qualities, but rather to the contrary because they can be said to have their own unique and fathomless sets of qualities “that no other entity will ever unlock” (Latour et al. 2011, 36). They are *relational simples*, not absolute simples. A relational simple is an element discovered by analysis that is irreducible by further analysis that relies on the same assumptions and methods. By the same token, there is a certain necessity of composites. In *The Last Dinosaur Book* (Mitchell 1998), a cultural study of paleontology, W.J.T. Mitchell shows how “real things” like bones spur us, using scientific tools, to treat them as fossils, to creatively imagine composites such as dinosaurs and to become reliant upon our composite images. Considerable time and energy is invested in this process, which has broad consequences in our society and culture.

The example also illustrates the internal complexity of relational simples. In paleontology a “dinosaur” is a composite while a “bone” is a simple. While bones are simple objects that serve to objectively provide evidence of the previous existence of dinosaurs that no one should doubt, beyond paleontology bones are not just bones. They are relational too. They have their own unique and fathomless sets of qualities and, indeed, a distinct and significant history of relations with other neighboring objects. The presence of relational simples maintains the stability not just of the scientific study of objects but of other objects around them and herein their objective reality resides.

2 RELATIONAL SIMPLES IN SOCIOLOGY

Objective reality is expansive and epistemologically disjunctive, not reductive and universalizing, hence the constant new discoveries of science. The Kantian way of characterizing the simplicity of objects elides this distinction in its enthusiastic rush to call it a mystery, a mystery of noumena that stand off to one side and are in no way involved in what one can know about the phenomenal relations into which they enter. A relational way to see the simplicity of objects is as a knot or a condensation of issues or problems within a complex composition of elements. We agree they cannot be defined by their own properties or internal relations (which are fathomless). But we put forward that they can be restored to the web of relations that have gathered around them, that surround them and “imagine” them. This contingently transcendent social reality surrounding and giving shape to relational simples are what attracts the relationalist to attempt an explanation of “the nature of the group as a group, and not merely the nature of the individuals who compose them” (Mauss and Gane 2005, 5). I would prefer that relationalism not be thought of as a mere product of philosophical underlaboring that clarifies epistemological red lights and green lights and instead be elevated into something like a sociology of attractions or gravitations to these knots or problems.

Encountering and involving ourselves with relational simples is, as I have thought Marcel Mauss might have said, the goal of a *complete* relational analysis (cf. Mauss and Gane 2005, xviii). Mauss himself practiced sociology as such by analyzing the relational simple that classical sociologists term “obligation” (2011). An obligation, in a relationship between people, is an element that cannot be reduced further into simpler kinds of motives. As an explanation for the performance of an action such as “a man obeys a law”, an economic motive, a political motive, a religious motive, for example, are all each more complex explanations than a sense of legal obligation. Whereas the existence of an obligation can help to explain why other kinds of motives such as economic, political or religious become involved and get added to actors’ accounts of the action, none of these factors, even all taken together, can fully account for the originary sense of legal obligation. An obligation is a sociological relational simple. All the other factors, all the relevant actors and other related objects, not to mention thousands of sociologists, surround it because they are veritably attracted to the knot of issues that an obligation represents.

This object/knot of issues is fascinating for many reasons, intellectual as well as practical. The backbones of sociology, obligations, exist in themselves as objects. They have varying outward properties, have causal influence over behavior and cannot be reduced to any particular subjective state of mind. They are out there to be discovered and they are fathomlessly complex. Yet if we alter our method of analysis—a suggestion a sociologist should always be willing to accept, in the spirit of pluralism and discovery—we can open up *some* of this complexity. Mauss was able to open up some of the complexity of obligation by turning his focus to what he identified as “the gift” (2011). It is for the resulting expansion and complexification of the concept of social obligation that Mauss is rightly remembered as a key contributor to the development of sociology.

3 THE “GIFT PARADIGM” AS A GENERAL SOCIOLOGY?

Mauss himself in his own day recognized his achievement as a contribution to a shared project of bringing to vivid life the notion of “general sociology” (Mauss and Gane 2005). Durkheim, who for Mauss avowedly provided the theoretical framework within which he would work his whole life, had identified obligation as a key premise underpinning his *Rules of Sociological Method* (Durkheim 1982). Durkheim had furthermore, as a sidebar to his *Rules*, been the first of the two to reflect critically upon the term “general sociology” (1982, 243). Durkheim was moved to this reflection because he had sensed the presence and importance of relational simples in sociology: “how a society, which is however only a composite ... can nevertheless form an individuality endowed with a unity” (1982, 243). He speculated that the basis of such a general unified sociality could be derived from a re-examination of the “poorly analysed complex which is termed the civilisation appropriate to each ... society” (1982, 243). He suggested the starting point for this re-examination

could be “a kind of tonality *sui generis*” found in each civilization, involving the distinct “character of peoples” (1982, 244). This kicked off what would prove to be a very long-standing preoccupation with national character which, when taken up by others, eventually resolved itself into the notion in sociology that societies are manifestations of nation-states and are studied accordingly by geopolitical location.

In 1927, close to the time when he offered *The Gift*, in technical writings Mauss can be found reiterating Durkheim’s avowal of the importance of a general sociology (Mauss and Gane 2005). At that time Mauss merely repeated Durkheim’s assumption that the focus of a public or general sociology would be nation-states. He did not, for example, problematize the national versus international perspectives in sociology, or discuss why, epistemologically, nationality as a category would unify sociological analysis. Later he began to reflect on and disaggregate these questions. In 1934, as Mauss gravitated increasingly to a more concrete anthropological conception of general sociology, he began to make the notion of analyzing the anthropological life course of national types of people—what he termed their birth, life, ageing and death—an explicit priority (Mauss and Gane 2005). His idea was to map out sociological analysis as “triple” involving pure sociology (i.e. analysis of the formal dimensions of structures), social psychology and social biology (Mauss and Gane 2005, xviii). It was to examine national societies, international groups of societies, individual psychology and biological aspects of societies, with the unity of these analyses conceived as firmly rooted in their application to empirical cases of nation-states. Thus, the notion of anthropology and sociology being rooted in the study of national cultures continued, although it was now hedged round with epistemological conditions.

The unity of sociological analysis—its remaining true to itself as a unique discipline—was always of overriding importance to both Durkheim and Mauss. Thus, while Mauss discovered a key quality of sociological analysis in the objective of expanding upon our knowledge of relational simples, his method of applying anthropology to this task in line with Durkheim’s conception of the discipline led Mauss to steer sociology toward the study of closed, well-established systems. By associating sociology primarily with the study of relatively closed systems, Mauss and Durkheim sought to establish the nature of sociology.

Today, the sociology of Mauss is being revisited by scholars whose aim is to once again plumb the basis for unity in the discipline by employing positive anthropology. Frederic Vandenberghe and Alain Caillé, in particular, have argued that sociology is excessively fragmented (2016). This is partly because external actors in cultural studies and philosophy have appropriated the social field for their analyses and partly because there is a lack of internal unity in sociology. Their idea is to construct a theoretical framework that can unify cultural studies, philosophy and sociology without collapsing them into one methodological framework. The new overall theoretical framework would be a “cosmopolitan public sociology” (Caillé and Vandenberghe 2016, 15). They explicitly see this as a relational framework. Moreover, they identify Mauss’s

concept of the gift as “a general social theory” that all of these three areas of study have prioritized (Caillé and Vandenberghe 2016, 2). This requires stretching Mauss’s gift concept into a “gift paradigm” (Caillé and Vandenberghe 2016, 2) that includes such themes as recognition and care. The gift paradigm becomes a universal problematique of the dynamics of social reciprocity. Purporting to echo the program of Durkheim and Mauss, they hold up social reciprocity as a centrally humanly important reality needing a special form of study because it transcends the utilitarianism, instrumental rationalism and rational choice that would otherwise tend to dominate the social sciences (Caillé and Vandenberghe 2016, 8).

While the spirit of this project can be taken by sociologists as salutary in its intentions to take up once again the establishment of the sociological project, how does it compare and contrast with Mauss’s vision of general sociology? To begin with, it is cosmopolitan, recognizing the realities of globalization. This is probably a necessary departure from Mauss despite the fact that letting go the focus on national life could probably be said to sacrifice some of the clarity of the object of study. But it may be argued that Mauss’s expectation was for sociology to address itself to relatively closed systems which are not necessarily national cultures. Again, however, globalization has been closely associated with fluidity and openness by many scholars, making the shared object of study somewhat unclear.

An even greater divergence from Mauss potentially lies in their approach to the question of the unity of sociological inquiry. The development of the framework of general sociology was originally developed over time. It started as a relative abstraction in Durkheim’s truncated musings. It then gained greater concreteness in Mauss’s more extended critical reorganization of sociology. The unity of these studies was always rooted by both scholars in the definition of the social fact as external to individual consciousness and constraining over individuals. As we have noted, Durkheim discovered the relational simple of obligation that formed the philosophical backstop for this scheme of social facts. As we have further noted, Mauss developed and expanded the relational simple of obligation by theorizing the gift. The gift concept was a significant advance because it captured a more complex reciprocal model of the social bond. Vandenberghe and Caillé are, thus, of course not wrong in claiming for the “gift paradigm” the role of anchor for sociology as it has been influenced by the Durkheimian school and practiced as such. However, by the same token, the way Mauss’s work on the gift develops and complexifies Durkheim’s premise of obligation shows how the conceptual anchoring point for sociology need not remain static. In addition to reformulating the basis for general sociology, Mauss at the same time demonstrated its fundamental relativity, its nature of being a relational simple, not an absolute simple.

Perhaps the greatest discovery of Mauss’s work is less his framework for a Durkheimian general sociology and more his idea that sociology must push toward troubling the relational simples it relies upon to do its work. Perhaps one could say that Mauss showed that it is necessary to earn, as it were, the right to conceptualize a theoretical framework for general sociology by virtue

of having donated significant energy to precisely this kind of problematization of sociology's fundamental premises, as indeed did Durkheim and Mauss and others all those years ago. Thus we can turn to the current movement with some critical questions. Is it a significant problematization of the gift concept to extend it to forms of reciprocity such as recognition, for example, in order to make an ecumenical gesture to political philosophy, or care, to fit with cultural studies? Could one not say, with some justification, that this tactic might rather work in the opposite direction, potentially entrenching and ossifying the notion of the gift to the point where it will eventually become false to, and have to be more and more stretched to fit with, real social experience? At what point does acutely invested conceptual translation, at this basic level, have a cost of potentially stultifying the kind of theoretical innovation in sociology that can capture new historical realities?

One can ask such questions while at the same time recognizing a noble effort to call upon sociologists to clarify their work and build bridges with other disciplines. The concept of reciprocity in the essay by Vanderberghe and Caillé contains multiple facets: care, recognition, the gift—dialogue is also mentioned—and others could be added. The variety of scholarly approaches to these concepts are treated as “constellations within the firmament” that can be connected in various creative ways (Caillé and Vandenberghe 2016, 12). However, because their approach has an ecumenical purpose as its overriding theme, Vanderberghe and Caillé tend to—perhaps must—treat these facets of sociality as analogues of each other. The latter purportedly all arise from an insistence on the interdependence of human beings. They all “bask in a certain atmosphere of benevolence” and “concentrate on primary sociability” (2016, 12). None of them are “monadic” (2016, 12). But this last point could be misleading. None of them evoke a monadic individual as the focus of sociology. But the objects—forms of social bonds—that correspond with these concepts are based on objects that are in a certain sense monadic, because there is an aspect of relational simples that presents itself as monadic, that is, as simples. There are of course no absolutely monadic objects as Leibniz conceived them. But relational simples not only exist but are the key clues to the relational study of sociology.

4 LESSONS FROM THE DURKHEIM–TARDE DEBATE

I would like to suggest that rather than seeking to view a constellation of scholarly activities through the one universal lens of the concept of reciprocity, perhaps a more compelling and potentially more lasting initiative would be to turn the lens back down to earth to examine the social objects that serve as focal points for social relations. Reciprocity is a composite phenomenon that must be explained rather than assumed.

At this point it will be useful to recall the debates that took place between Emile Durkheim and, this time not a sympathetic junior colleague but rather his most vocal critic, namely, his senior contemporary sociological colleague

Gabriel Tarde. Raised in Sarlat, France in the 1840s and 1850s, Tarde became Director of Criminal Statistics for France. His publication *Penal Philosophy* (2010) advanced the first social psychological theory of the individual. Durkheim, a junior colleague, came to Tarde for help in compiling statistics on suicide. Durkheim's project was to combat a perceived psychologism in then current sociology. To make a long story short, in *Suicide* (Durkheim 1997) he went on to construct out of Tarde's position a straw man that he attacked. This provoked a heated response from Tarde and a vigorous debate between the two sociologists. Though Tarde's defense of his own thought has been forgotten until recently, the Durkheim–Tarde debate has been recovered and rethought by current Tarde scholars (Candea 2010). In particular, the debate which took place between Durkheim and Tarde at the *École des hautes études sociales* in 1903 concerns the nature of sociology. A script of the debate has been recently rediscovered and translated by a circle of Tardian scholars (Candea 2010). It was also enhanced and filled in by the interjection of quotes and paraphrases taken from Tarde's published works by Bruno Latour representing Tarde and Bruno Karsenti representing Durkheim. This process has filled out the debate, enriching it without distorting its essential gist.

Here is a summary of the debate (Tarde and Durkheim 2010).¹ Durkheim presents his view of sociology as in contrast to individualism, again painting Tarde as a representative of the latter. Tarde puts forward that Durkheim's society versus individual distinction is superficial and at times unhelpful. Durkheim is forced to admit the misleading quality of this dichotomy and to develop his thoughts about the nature of the relationship of the individual and society. Durkheim puts forward his criteria of external coerciveness of social facts and the idea that society is *sui generis*. Tarde does not disagree with the notion of society being *sui generis* but rather argues that Durkheim wants to lend an overly strong interpretation of what is *sui generis*, as he puts it, "some sort of theory of emanation" (2010, 31) akin to "scholasticism", the "realism of the Middle Ages" (2010, 34). Seeking to quickly add to this broadside, Tarde attacks the charge with which he felt Durkheim and his followers had slandered him, namely, that he doesn't believe in the reality of society. Tarde goes so far as to state, for the record, that "I am far from challenging the concept of certain social realities" which "once formed, impose themselves upon the individual" (2010, 35).

It seems, in moments in their debate such as these, that Durkheim and Tarde are talking about the same thing—social reality—but simply looking at it from different points of view. There is indeed considerable convergence at times in their thought (for an in-depth discussion of similarities see Toews 2010). On the other hand, there are moments in the debate that evoke real differences between them. The differences tend to be methodological, relating frequently to the conception of science itself. For example, Durkheim asks why Tarde cannot accept that the "combination" of "new phenomena" produces a reality "situated, not in the elements, but in the whole formed by their union" (2010, 35). Analysis must begin from these wholes, not try to break them

down into elements. Tarde replies that the universal scientific method is such that phenomena are broken down into smaller and smaller elements in order to produce more and more refined and useful analyses. Furthermore, he adds that in human “sociology we have a rare privilege, intimate knowledge both of the element, which is our individual consciousness, and of the compound, which is the [assemblage] of consciousnesses” (2010, 36). Why should we imagine the compound or composite is a “creation *ex nihilo* of something that previously did not exist” (2010, 37)? Moreover, it is perfectly possible to uphold the reality of the composite alongside the reality of the element, Tarde holds. After all, from the perspective of another science, such as physics, the reality of the human being is by no means said to reside in our individuality but rather in smaller, simpler elements. As individuals we are socially real, but physically our reality is chemical and atomic. A physicist would not be able to accept the “mysticism” that would assert that because a collection of physical elements are housed in one body, this “individual” is suddenly, *in terms of relevance to physics*, “a new being ... superior to the others” (2010, 37).

Durkheim then appeals to obligation as a social fact that proves that individuals could never have invented society. Tarde accepts that obligation is an important element of social relations, but says that obligation means nothing if it is not an obligation that relates to a situational context of interaction between individuals. Social forces such as obligation are real, but so are individuals. Obligation is a real social force but (as I term it above) a relational simple, not an absolute simple, in the analysis of society. Relational simples must never be posited as *sui generis* facts that are beyond falsification, replacement or at the very least problematization and further attempts at differentiation. At this juncture, however, Tarde does not offer to prove this point by going on to explain obligation sociologically with simpler elements, as Mauss will do. The debate ends in an impasse.

Tarde’s apparent “failure” to take up the challenge of Durkheimian sociology as Mauss did, however, is rooted in a starker divide between Durkheim and Tarde than what can be located in the debate itself. From his *Monadology and Sociology* (2012) and elsewhere we know that Tarde’s concerns with sociology have to do with constructing a metaphysics that can clarify and legitimize the scientific method in general. Sociology, with its interest in associations, is not a branch of science but rather represents growth in the main trunk: it is a key example of a new and clarified understanding of modern science. Tarde’s view is that sociology is indeed a unique discipline, not in the sense of a closed or autonomous institution but rather in terms of having evolved a new and unique understanding of statistics that focuses on difference and repetition in a manner that all the sciences can and must adopt (for further discussion see Toews 2003, 2010, 2013).

Tarde’s social ontology is rooted in his concept of difference (Toews 2013). Long before Deleuze, he was the first to problematize difference in the context of repetition (Toews 2002). He argues that difference can be said to be involved in repetition. Difference need not be conceived as somehow abstract, which

would mean it has unnecessarily been conceptually divorced from repetitions. He does assert that ultimate reality is difference and that difference precedes the forms of repetition (Tarde 2012). But this is an analytical precedence. To be sure, repetitions are what the sciences seek out. Repetitions exist. However, they should be recognized and re-thought not as signs of underlying realities but rather as mechanisms for producing and diffusing, further and further, more and more refined differences in the universe (2012). Scientific analysis, pursuing repetitions wherever it can, producing methods that pulverize things precisely in order to discover repetitions, not only produces knowledge but also actively furthers this natural process (2012). Tarde thus holds that as scientists we need to identify and categorize repetitions. However, sometimes in the course of science our reliance on our concepts of them appear to make repetitions precede differences when in reality they do not. This is the true nub of his dispute with Durkheim. Tarde charges that it is illegitimate, and unnecessary, to isolate a form of repetition (such as obligation) and posit it as originary, because that tends to make one unable to examine differences that are incompatible with the form of repetition that has been posited. It is unscientific.

While Tarde, turning to sociology, does not choose to follow Durkheim, as Mauss did, in problematizing obligation, Tarde rather chooses to prove his point by analyzing a form of repetition that works on a trajectory that distinctly overflows the bounds of obligation, namely imitation. Tarde starts from the composite of social interaction and proposes an analysis of this composite. Various kinds of motivations for interacting with each other appear to arise because actors desire certain repeated results but at the same time cannot achieve a regular social order on their own. This was one of Durkheim's points, but Tarde gives it an explanation rather than merely assuming it. The reason actors cannot simply "invent their society" in some preconceived manner is because they are under the sway of the specifics of the social environment, in particular the presence and necessity of others whose styles and preoccupations influence them as models of behavior. Imitation, Tarde argues, is thus a simpler and better explanation of the compelling fundamental dynamics of social life than the notion found in the naïve public that people merely want or need to associate with one another.

Is Tarde's theory, in addition, a simpler and better explanation than the Durkheimian and Maussian sociology of obligation? For Tarde, imitation does not mean an abstract sense of mimesis but rather refers to the situational appropriation of aspects of personality and other properties of other individuals. Imitation is selective. Because it is selective, imitation is actually, consciously or unconsciously, a form of innovation. Each individual necessarily imitates a certain set of the qualities of a certain set of others, and these sets are unique in each case, leading to uniqueness of personality. Imitations also infuse social life with difference and vitality. Individuality is thus by no means the locus of Tarde's ontology, as Durkheim and Mauss himself would go on to constantly repeat. Rather, Tarde's sociology establishes imitation as a relational simple in its analysis of human social interaction, and this forms a rival concept to

Durkheim's (and Mauss's more problematized) notion of obligation. Tarde's theory is not better or worse than, but merely different from, the Durkheimian paradigm. Indeed, I have put forward the opinion that much more should be done to show the compatibilities between their sociologies (Toews 2010).

5 A RELATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF EMERGENCE IN SOCIOLOGY

There is another way to view the Tarde–Durkheim debate and that is through the more recent debates among critical realists and their critics about the ontological status of the social. Critical realism replaced a dogmatic adherence to positivist tenets with an image of human beings as scientific observers, discoverers and classifiers of “emergent” realities (Bhaskar et al. 1998). Here, instead of the composite and the simple, the most significant theoretical axis is the whole and the part, though one wonders if that ought to be the case. Emergent realities are wholes in contrast to their parts. In relational language, one can term these wholes emergent relations. The category of society would be one such emergent relation. The critical realists generally hold the Durkheimian position that sociology ought to be concerned with social wholes, such as society, because there is more reality in wholes than in their parts, such as individuals. There is also a subtle but distinctly different temporality implied here than that which obtains in the composite–simple distinction. Emergent relations, the critical realists hold, are more than newly identified relations. Parts are thought to precede wholes, and wholes to emerge, irreversibly, out of a group of parts. The problem is that here the status of parts is always indeterminate, as to whether they once constituted wholes, and as to whether in the future they will have constituted wholes. Their causal efficacy is called into question.

Margaret Archer's (Archer 1995; Bhaskar et al. 1998) critique of critical realism is intended to deal with this shortcoming. Archer locates the problem in an error of social science reasoning she terms conflationism (Archer 1995). Conflationism is a common error in social science that, in a sense, consists in forgetting that wholes and parts are meant to do different things. She interprets wholes and parts in causal terms and particularly in terms of the relationship of structure and agency. Conflationism in social science is the collapsing of structure and agency into each other in various directions. In singling out structure and agency, and in her argument to maintain the autonomy of these two elements as distinct levels of analysis, Archer puts forward two rationales. Firstly, she is concerned with maintaining the ability to identify items on one level as the cause of items on the other (in either direction), and hence maintaining a strong sense of traditional disciplinarity in social science. Secondly, she wants to maintain the ability to avow the reality of emergent relations (e.g. “society”) as the effects of social causes. Thus, you can have analyses of interactions that are compatible with, while not being reduced to, analyses of macro social forces, and vice versa.

This heals part of Tarde's allergy to the Durkheimian mode of analysis: that very little, if any, reality is attributed to basic elements of things as objects in their own right. These parts that make up wholes are essentially treated in Durkheimianism as unreal, combinations of which are supposed to result, as if *ex nihilo*, in a whole that is real. Archer's critique of critical realism shows that social objects can be treated as real and as having distinct causal relationships among each other. Moreover, her second criterion, that the reality of wholes also be accepted, is, as we have seen, indeed acceptable to Tarde. The only difference between Tarde and Archer, here, is that for Tarde the conflation whereby the analysis of social parts is too often subordinated to the explanation of wholes and the rest of their reality ignored can and must be rectified by much more than merely the admission of the efficacy of causal analysis. Even if causal analysis is one's main priority, one must still prepare for causal analysis by pushing the analysis of the subject matter until one discovers relational simples. After all, causal analyses that jump too quickly into positing causal relations among composites are often spurious.

The larger problem that Archer fails to recognize, though, is that from a relational perspective the term "whole" is ambiguous. It can refer to a composite or a simple. Composite wholes have a certain pragmatic necessity in social life but in social science they cannot remain unanalyzed. Arrival at simple explanatory wholes is the goal of social scientific explanation. In a post-critical realist, relational social science, this goal is a temporary one and only exists in order to serve as fodder for another discipline, or methodological paradigm, or even just a further effort from within the same discipline, to try to open up the discovered relational simple to further analysis from a different perspective, as for example Mauss (as we have seen above) developed Durkheim's notion of obligation. As such, "parts" or simples with a new and innovative form of analysis can newly be treated as micro composites, as it were, in terms of their own reality, vis-à-vis their relations with each other and internally. As described above, this expansive, pluralistic view of the social sciences in no way sacrifices objectivity. In today's sociology that has identified such phenomena as immaterial labor, for example, one does not gain in objectivity by attempting to subordinate all the myriad aspects of social life to aspects that can be said to cause observable phenomena. Causal relations are only one form of relations.

Emergence should not be treated as the emergence of *composite* wholes, this is certain, because that would end up valorizing pragmatic everyday necessity, ignoring the drive in sociology to understand "what ought to be" as equally as important as "what is". When it comes to wholes, emergence should be applied to wholes that are relational simples. An action performed out of a sense of obligation is not merely performed, it emerges as an obligation, from the elements that go to make up the social life circumstances of the actor and cannot be reduced backwards to those elements. Here the obligation that emerges is a concrete, complete, accomplished reality: an emergent. However—and this is a key point I want to highlight—emergence need not be treated as purely the emergence of wholes. The same action considered from another point of

view can constitute a completely different kind of emergent. Given that as an emergent its reality consists in being repeated, one can, for example, analyze what makes the action attractive to actors, motivating them to repeat it. As we know, duties are often ignored, thus its obligatory character becomes less relevant. The action can be treated instead, for example, as the emergence of what Tarde termed a “ray of imitation” (Tarde 1903). The ray of imitation is a concept of a link or tie in a social network (Tarde 2000). It is, in this sense, a part of something rather than a whole, self-sustaining action. What an act of imitation has here in common with an act of obligation is not wholeness but rather that they are both simples in the terms of the analyses that reveal them. Thus, emergence is a concept that most fruitfully ought to be applied to simples, specifically to what we have termed relational simples. It is not wholeness that calls for the concept of emergence as much as the simplicity of the presence of certain social objects that we gradually realize, with the aid of sociology, serve to prompt our belief in the reality of social life.

Emergence thus needs to be loosened from the grip of the debates surrounding critical realism and its critics. It should be recognized as the key theme of sociology, not for the reason that it establishes social wholes, but rather primarily because it captures the simple realities that sociological analysis ever works to tease out from the complex composites that confusingly press all around us in social life. Relational analysis thus pares narrowly down to what in social life has emerged, expanding it. This is the same as to say that sociological analysis ought to conceive its primary work as the investigation and problematization of relational simples. Such a conception of sociology would ask sociologists to consider, above all, why actors gravitate to certain social problems as if they are knots to untie. Herein the sociologist and the actor share a common public—indeed cosmopolitan—interest. The discovery of historically and geographically contingent relational simples can be informed by, and in fact is, the discovery of these seemingly irreducible knots of social relations, such as obligations and imitations. These knots are not to be done away with. Far from it: they represent the expansion and development of social awareness. The problematization of such knots or situational social problems would thus consist in engagement with communities on these questions, which are *their* questions.

6 CONCLUSION

Thus it is not the assertion of social reciprocity that is of primary importance in the renewal and updating of sociology. Rather, one penetrates the composites, the institutions, that seem to hark to social reciprocity, searching for the simple baselines that people have become knotted around. Care, recognition, dialogue, the gift, obligation, need not be treated as analogues of each other under the heading of reciprocity. They can be treated as concrete, situated expansions of social awareness, as simple relational elements that have been identified by means of relational analyses of sociality. The list is in fact open.

I have demonstrated that Tarde's concept of imitation belongs to the list, even though the latter concept, while the fruit of analysis of social interaction, nevertheless relies on an opposing premise, that is, differentiation rather than reciprocity.

All would surely agree that none of these concepts should be allowed to ossify and continue to be transmitted from generation to generation as empty reifications. Using relational methods, sociologists can—indeed must—analyze all of these relational simples further, by employing new perspectives as factors such as history, geography, viewpoints and empirical circumstances change. I have argued that it is unnecessarily restrictive to place reciprocity as the heading of all of what can be accomplished in this way. Instead, sociology can be guided by the idea of an unbridled relational pluralism wherein each form of relational sociological analysis attunes itself to a different kind of social problem, using the method of analyzing composites into relational simples as a guide to teasing out the irreducible knots of concerns that human beings have in their relations with one another.

NOTE

1. For the sake of economy and relevance to my argument here I have reconstructed the debate selectively and in a different order than what took place in their dialogue.

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David Toews was involved with efforts to revive the thought of Gabriel Tarde at the University of Warwick, where he completed his Ph.D. in Philosophy on the sources of Deleuze's thought in Durkheim, Tarde and Bergson in 2001. An award-winning teacher and major grant recipient in the area of Sociology, he has been a faculty member in several universities in the United States and Canada, and his work has been translated into French by scholars at the University of Caen. His first monograph book, applying Tarde's relational sociology, is *Social Life and Political Life in the Era of Digital Media: Higher Diversities* (Routledge, 2018).

G.H. Mead and Relational Sociology: The Case of Concepts

Jean-François Côté

George Herbert Mead's social psychology, celebrated and mostly known for its conceptualization of the "Self," has until recently only been a point of entrance into his wider pragmatist philosophy. Although Mead has had a good deal of influence in the development of symbolic interactionism in twentieth-century sociology, mostly through Herbert Blumer's interpretation of his social psychology, it is only in the last three decades that a new perspective has opened up on the wider and deeper sociological views, insights, and implications derived from Mead's philosophical thought (Joas 1985; Cook 1993; Huebner 2014; Côté 2015a; Joas and Huebner 2016). To a certain extent, however, this rediscovery of Mead has coincided with the development of relational sociology—leading some even to argue that this revival is tantamount to the "grounding" of one specific (and disputable) theoretical perspective (Donati and Archer 2015, 7). Yet it remains to be seen fully how and to what extent this coincidence can lead to the inclusion of Mead's original thought in relational sociology itself—and the reinvigoration of both.

In his 1997 "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology," Mustafa Emirbayer already suggested that Dewey's and Mead's reconstructivist views coincided with one of the major tenets of relational sociology, emphasizing that their conception of intelligence at work in social life and scientific inquiry could easily meet the requirements of the relational and transactional positions Emirbayer wanted to promote. Quoting Mead on the transformative nature of social action that generates both "new objects" and "new selves," Emirbayer (1997, 310) highlights that this conception of the dynamic and continually reconstructive nature of social life agrees with his own vision of a relational

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sociology that actively participates in resolving normative issues that sociological analyses encounter when engaging in ethical and political debates. Instead of considering social life in its reified and substantialist dimensions, Emirbayer insists rather that values are formed and transformed in transactions, and that Dewey and Mead were among the earliest promoters of such a view. While I certainly agree with this general statement, is pragmatism, and Mead's in particular, entirely compatible with relational sociology—especially in its version defined by Emirbayer? I argue here that one should have at least a few reservations, if not serious doubts, about the possibility of applying specific aspects of Mead's ideas with respect to relational sociology, primarily regarding the definitions of the *concepts* that are developed and used in this context. In what follows, I will start by giving an account of recent developments surrounding Mead's pragmatist philosophy, drawing attention to the relational content of his main concepts. This is followed by an assessment of its compatibility with the definition(s) given to relational sociology, in order to move, in the conclusion, to wider questions concerning the implications of this encounter.

1 MEAD AND RELATIONAL CONCEPTS IN SOCIOLOGY

In a recent work about Mead's concept of Society, I argued that his views can best be considered as a "relational set of relations" (Côté 2015a), but in doing so my argument does not connect Mead directly to relational sociology itself, and instead uses "relational" and "relations" in a broader (and perhaps looser) sense. With no reference to the debates surrounding relational sociology, I only meant that the concepts Mead developed put things in relation with one another, which relations were themselves in relation with each other. Indeed, Mead's fundamental concern was first about the understanding of both the ontogenetic and phylogenetic processes that constitute human life, and that these dimensions have to be taken into consideration simultaneously for the multiple aspects of all the "things" that they each involve, as seen in the definitions of the concepts that he proposed. The main concepts Mead developed aimed precisely at defining these processes linking "things" to one another: on the ontogenetic side, the relations between "I," "Me," and "Self," and on the phylogenetic side, between "Individuals," the "Generalized Other," "Institutions," and "Society" (including its Past, Present, and Future states).¹ The complex set of relations established among these terms, drawing on dialectical oppositions that lead to mediations, constitutes Mead's encompassing concept of Society—a concept, I argue, that has found no equivalent in sociological theory so far. But something does have to be added to justify the idea of a "relational set of relations" that the Meadian concept of Society represents: each of the terms is a product of a dialectical mediation and involved in a relation, or set of relations. That is to say, for example, that the "I" referring to the body of the individual stands as the relation between this body and the individual using the symbol "I" that points to his or her own body. In other words, the body is understood as symbolically mediated by language, and only an

individual can refer to his or her own body by using “I” to point at it. Again, this same individual does so with respect to “Me,” which in Mead is constituted by the relation of the individual to other individual selves, and the dialectical opposition of the “Me” to the “I” of the body is mediated by the “Self” in its relation to “Society.” The same can be said about “Society,” which is divided between an internal opposition between “Individuals” and “Institutions,” and an external opposition between its own “Past” and “Future,” which are themselves mediated by society’s own “Present” state.

In this spatio-temporal dynamic, everything is in flux, in movement. That is, the reality being represented in this way is in movement, but the concepts are not: they are, or become, fixed entities (we will return to this in the next section, in the discussion about relational sociology). That is to say, the concept of the Self, as it applies to social reality, can designate any kind of reality that is part of individual experiences, and these experiences always vary between two distinct individuals; nevertheless, these two distinct individuals are both “Selves,” at least to the extent that they manifest a degree of self-consciousness that can take into account the internal, dynamic opposition between their respective “I” and “Me” (Côté 2015b). Moreover, it is only a specific type of Society (our own) that requires every individual to develop a Self in the sense defined by Mead: as a typical mode of recognition for its autonomous participation in the extensive political order of mass democracy, where everyone and anyone has a “say” (at least formally, and with respect to institutions) in the equally autonomous development of the social order at a variety of levels. This is apparent in voting rights and other associated social and political rights, including education, health care, and so on, and even more so in the identification of the *person* as a fundamental legal category of this social order. Conversely, “Society” is never a static entity that hovers over individual selves, but on the contrary is an integral part of their own “Self,” mediated by institutions, together with Society in its Past, Future, and Present states, and open to transformation through political reform (Mead 1936, 360–385). This does not mean, on the other hand, that such a “Self” does not possess autonomy, since, as has been said, the autonomous “Self” stands as the very requirement of such a Society—and even constitutes the *sine qua non* of the possibility of consciously reforming or transforming such a Society.

The sociological views defended by Mead thus offer a quite dynamic perspective on social life. Political reformism stands as its tenet, and as such both Dewey’s and Mead’s pragmatism provide an essential normative claim that remains in touch with the possibility of mass democracy—at least as they experienced it in the early twentieth century (Shalin 2011; Diggins 1994; Livingston 1994; Feffer 1993). Mead’s intellectual life, in particular, was deeply fueled by his political activism in Chicago, at many levels, to the point that his writings may have even suffered from it (Huebner 2014)—let us remember that he never published a single book of his own during his lifetime, while publishing several tens of articles dispersed across various journals. Such political engagement with their time and place offered both Mead’s and Dewey’s pragmatism

a unique occasion for developing theoretical views that helped, in a reflexive manner, to guide political reforms using “science” (and its “intelligent method”) to face the challenges of a society undergoing profound changes. Laissez-faire liberal capitalism was condemned for creating social problems of all kinds, and social movements from different areas of society had been asking since the late nineteenth century for political transformations to solve them. For Mead and Dewey, this socio-historical situation was an opportunity for the then nascent social sciences to play a more productive role in society; the concepts they developed became for them the *instruments* that would accompany, if not orient, social change in this context—and beyond, as demonstrated by the renewed interest in their thought over recent decades.

For Mead especially, this encompassing vision was geared to an evolutionary naturalism (taken from Darwin), coupled with a dialectical component (taken from Hegel), that defines societal forms as self-transformable. As opposed to “traditional” societies that would usually envision social change negatively, and most of the time would only engage in it “unconsciously,” modern societies had on the contrary developed a mechanism to engage “consciously” in social transformation (Mead 1936, 153–168). This political mechanism was integrated into written constitutional texts that allowed for the possibility of transforming their laws (and even amending their constitutions). In other words, it allowed for the possibility of conscious self-transformations that represented the reflexive ideals that individuals, institutions, and society alike should conform to, engage in, and promote as their goal. Mead characterized this as the internalization of revolution in the social order, his definition of political reformism. This means that even though movement, dynamic social change, and flux define social life, all these things had to be understood within the range of political reformism—given that, for Mead, the political institution allows society to orient its own conscious evolution. Societies produce individuals that respond to the forms of their social life; that is, individuals not only reproduce societal forms, but they can also actively engage in their transformation—and thus transform themselves in the process, as would become apparent in the political reforms giving birth to the Welfare State in the mid-twentieth century. Forms of social life are expressed symbolically, and this is why “responding” to these symbols becomes the core of a dialogical and dialectical process constantly at stake between individuals, institutions, and society (as the latter is always caught between its reproducible past, foreseeable future, and present inhabited by all kind of possibilities). The situation was complex because at that time those symbols serving to orient individual selves in society were themselves undergoing highly significant transformations: society had already become international in its form, and selves had become reflexively different from their “modern” counterpart. In fact, at the apex of the symbolic transformations affecting social life, “Reason” was yielding to “Communication” as a leading concept to understand, explain, and interpret social life—as Dewey clearly expressed several times regarding education, politics, science,

and “human nature” itself (Dewey 1907, 1925, 1927). Mead followed Dewey in most—although not all, as we will see below—of these developments, adding to the picture concepts that would become the hallmarks of his own contribution to sociology.

Yet Mead’s contribution to sociology was not often given due acknowledgment. Particularly, and paradoxically, in Chicago, where he helped develop the Department of Sociology, his legacy somehow remained obscured to a certain extent, through two of the most influential figures from the very same department. Herbert Blumer, for one, while advocating for Mead’s legacy, developed his own brand of symbolic interactionism from the late 1930s on, but retained only some of the conceptual contributions from the Meadian perspective. Reducing Mead to strict empirical data relating to individuals, Blumer favored a naturalistic and positivist position that did not enable him to deepen the path opened up by Mead on larger issues of societal transformations (on this, see Côté 2015a, 102–138). On the other hand, Robert E. Park, who would later pay tribute to Mead (Park 1955, 323), nevertheless simply chose to ignore his major contributions to sociological theory, while also adopting a more naturalistic and positivist attitude in his own brand of pragmatism. This trickled down through the many students in the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago through an “ecological” model that almost entirely neglected the political aspects of social life, as well as the possibility of the active political transformation of society as a whole (Park 1921).

While it is true that Blumer, rather than Park, was the one sociologist through whom Mead’s ideas became known and popularized from the 1940s to the 1960s (and beyond), his interpretation of Mead through his own theorization of symbolic interactionism fell short on many levels—as figures such as Anselm Strauss (1956) pointed out already in the 1950s. And while the debates that fueled the development of symbolic interactionism in the 1970s and early 1980s somewhat reactivated a reading of Mead’s works, it was primarily the work of Hans Joas that finally offered a much more comprehensive view of Meadian sociological theory and practice (Joas 1985). Before moving on to the intersections of Mead’s works with relational sociology in order to see how they can be compared with one another—if not fused, as some believe—we still have to add a few more details on how Mead’s ideas and works contribute to the sociological enterprise, particularly in a socio-historical context quite different from the one he himself faced in early twentieth-century America. It is important to take into account the historicity of Mead’s thought, since any kind of reflexive endeavor in sociology should be able to acknowledge the transformations that affect us, individuals, institutions, and societies alike, in order to present a sound analysis of both our current disciplinary and social developments with respect to the historical distance from which we benefit. This is a key goal for Axel Honneth, for instance, in his re-reading of Mead for the development of a critical theory in conversation with the present state of things, as well as for Margaret Archer, who, in her critical interpretation of Mead, proposes the development of a morphogenetic approach in dialogue

with critical realism and relational sociology. A quick word on these two authors will prepare the ground for the following discussion in the next section.

Axel Honneth first encountered Mead's ideas through Jürgen Habermas's attempt to renew critical theory in the 1960s and 1970s, and later through the felicitous efforts of Hans Joas in his "return to Mead" proposed in the 1980s. For Honneth, though, the use of Mead aimed at a very specific purpose in combining his predecessors' works: to come to terms with a re-evaluation of Hegelian philosophy with respect to the inflection given to it by Mead. Honneth saw, correctly, how much Hegel influenced Dewey's and Mead's pragmatism, but even more, how the latter gave lively social content to Hegel's views on the formation of self-consciousness. This was—and still is—his stance vis-à-vis Mead: to replace the ontogenetic process of self-consciousness described phenomenologically (through its logical steps) by Hegel, with a pattern of self-recognition that includes, at the earliest stages of the development of a self within the individual, the possibility of seeing how the social world—the world of "others"—is involved in such a process in a more "naturalized" fashion (Honneth 1995, 71–91). This interpretation establishes self-recognition as a communicative, and not only logical, process. For Honneth, this also means the possibility of involving stages of ethical development, such as love, rights, and solidarity, alongside the acknowledgment of Mead's Hegelian perspective in the active reformation or transformation of critical theory (Honneth 1995, 92–130).

The position taken by Margaret Archer towards Mead's ideas is both similar to and different from Honneth's, but it also involves a substantial amount of ambivalence: at the same time that Archer praises Mead's theoretical views about the self to some extent, she is also ready to radically criticize their shortcomings, particularly as they involve too strong a bias towards "social development" (or "over-socialization," as she calls it) within the ontological structure of the self. For her, indeed, there is something prior to language that remains unattainable by means other than what she calls the "sense of the self," which escapes Mead's attention: the pre-linguistic presence of the self to his/her own body, which serves in her view as the grounding of self-consciousness (Archer 2015, 95–96). Archer criticizes Mead for developing a concept of the self that is entirely determined by society (through the Generalized Other), leaving no room for the "internal conversation" the self must have with itself in order to cultivate a real form of reflexivity (Archer 2003, 78–92). In the next section we will return to her critique of Mead, which is partially anchored—somewhat paradoxically—in her reading of Peirce, but for now I merely want to underline that this point is crucial for Archer, since it touches upon the definition of agency, in its capability to "mediate socio-cultural objectivity" (Archer 2003, 52). According to her, in no way can Mead help us understand and interpret the *relational realist* position that she advocates, because his concept of the self is fundamentally flawed. But must Mead then be considered within the realm of relational sociology at all, and if so, to what extent—and how?

These are the questions I would like to raise in the next section, but first let me summarize the argument developed so far by pointing out that it is only at the level of *concepts* that we can deal adequately with this issue. Mead proposed some concepts that aimed at responding to his own socio-historical and theoretical (as well as epistemological and ontological) context, in order to promote political reforms that could help to reconfigure the reality of laissez-faire capitalism. My contention is that he did this very well, and moreover, his concepts still allow us to consider our own socio-historical context; his views went theoretically much further than the strict limitations set by his own context, particularly if we want to turn towards our own society and engage in a critique of neoliberalism, for example. Simply put, this is how theory works when it fulfills its task adequately.

2 RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY AND MEAD'S CONCEPTS: A MATTER OF DEFINITION(S)?

To provide a correct assessment of the compatibility of Mead's main sociological concepts with relational sociology first requires determining what definition(s) are given to the latter. This task is not exactly easy, since there is a good deal of difference among the ways in which relational sociology has been apprehended by various authors, such as Archer, Crossley, Dépelteau, Donati, Emirbayer, and others over the last two decades. Furthermore, and perhaps paradoxically, the incorporation of Mead into relational sociology has often been assumed since the start of the "movement," and shows no sign of stopping, as we can see in Emirbayer (1997), Donati (2011), Crossley (2011), Archer (2012), Dépelteau (2008, 2013), Tsekeris (2013), Powel (2013), and Donati and Archer (2015). This situation should not surprise those who, like Emirbayer, consider relational sociology central to almost any sociological project (from Simmel to Parsons, from Weber to Durkheim and Cassirer). However, this connection is considered with a bit more apprehension by those who, like Dépelteau, would like to avoid relational sociology being considered a mere "fashionable label with no generic and consistent meaning" (Dépelteau 2015, 165), or those like Archer, who want to amend Mead's theoretical views in order to consider their inclusion into the analytical project of one form or another of relational sociology (Archer 2003, 2012). That being said, considering the three main "types" of relational sociology identified by Dépelteau, it seems clear that Mead most likely belongs to the "co-deterministic" (as opposed to the "deterministic" and "deep") form of relational sociology (Dépelteau 2013). This means that Mead fully acknowledges the capacity of both *selves* and *society* to actively form social life in a process of mutuality and reciprocity—given, however, that we are ready to acknowledge the dialectical content of the symbolically mediated realities that these two concepts represent. Indeed, the idea of "determinism" (as in "co-determinism") is somehow misleading here, as it may seem to point to ultimate "realities," whereas we should rather talk about the *dialectical* content of the relations unifying

individuals and society, which form each other reciprocally through their relations constituted by meaningful symbols. Put differently, there cannot be an opposition between “agency” and “structure,” because both self and society are to be considered co-extensively as dialectically mediated positions, and thus constituted symbolically in the reciprocal relations that determine each other.

Importantly, this mechanism in Mead’s thought possesses an ontological status, but one that is only fully realized in and through Communication,² a pervasive concept at work in Mead’s sociology. Its development starts with the relation between an organism and its natural environment, and then spreads to the formation of the self through internal dialogue, as it defines the relations between the individual and social environment, culminating in society, through international relations and the development of a universal scientific discourse; in short, Communication equals Mind, in its contemporary definition as it takes shape, for example, in scientific discourse (Mead 2016, 253–260).³ That involves a complex set of relations—or a relational set of relations, as I expressed it schematically in another context (Côté 2015a, 87). From there, that is, from the point of view of this complexity in communication which can never be reduced to its interactional aspect, even though the latter is part of the former, the problem of integrating Mead into relational sociology comes from the partial attempts that have been made to do so, as much as it derives from the different versions of relational sociology. For instance, when Mead’s views are only narrowly associated with Blumer’s definition of symbolic interactionism, where the individual stands in relation to another individual as the most basic level of a “joint action” (Blumer 2004, 23; Blumer 1969, 170–177), this both obfuscates the deeper view of what constitutes the individual as a “self”—that is to say, self-consciousness in its dialogical content—and occludes the larger context of social environment (i.e. institutions, symbolic structures, society). The same can be said about “transaction,” in the sense Dewey and Bentley used this term, as the most basic form of a radical or “deep” relational sociology (Dépelteau 2013, 177–183).⁴ The reason to insist that such interpretations do not fully do justice to Mead’s ideas is that for him, the self possesses the capacity of reflection, enabling potential opposition to the entire community to which an individual belongs, in order to criticize it and envision a larger and reformed community—just as society has the power, through its institutions, to form individual selves with the requirement of autonomy. The self, a product of symbols used in a specific socio-historical context, is not entirely limited by this context, and it can count on itself to overcome these limitations through its individual opposition to them; conversely, according to such views, society is a self-transformable entity open to reform through a political process involving self-conscious individuals.

In her close reading of Mead, Margaret Archer has commented extensively on this issue, criticizing, however, on the one hand, the “over-socialization” of the internal conversation of the self, and on the other hand, the entrapment of the self within the inescapable reach of society, making the “loss of subjectivity”

the central aspect of Mead's thought (2003, 78–92). This is an awkward statement. While it is certainly true that Mead's definition of the self makes it a product of its social milieu or environment, this does not preclude its capacity to react to and even transform it. Archer's second point, that the transformed society would be an ultimate limitation on the capacity of the self's own reflection and action, is also at odds with Mead's idea that "great reformists" would lose their subjective identity while transforming the social order—as well as with Peirce's idea of semiosis in the community (both scientific and lay) on which she partially bases her argument. Considering Mead's ontogenetic view of the self, it is quite certain that it depends on its social environment; as a newborn and a child, the individual is surrounded by a social environment that will nurture his or her subjectivity until he or she develops adequate autonomy—that is, until "self-consciousness" appears, putting the individual within the normative ideal of an autonomous self (duly regulated, accepted, stimulated, and supported by a system of legal rights). Such self-consciousness is not given at birth, and even though the early sensori-motor phases of movement coordination are crucial in developing a primary "sense of the self" through the body, this sense is not removed from its relation to the external world. Rather, it is the product of their relation (Mead 1897) and cannot be considered coincident with self-consciousness, as Archer thinks it is (2015, 96), since self-consciousness only arises later in the ontogenetic process, when first language and then relations with others through play come to form this capacity of self-projection into the symbolic world of objects (self-consciousness requires the presence of others for the "me," taken as an object, to develop as a counterpart to the "I" within the "self"). The same kind of relation will develop throughout the experience of the social world by the self, where he or she will be put in contact with other individual selves, institutions, organizations, and society—up to the international limit that it has reached today. At each and every stage of this development, the self can contribute—through its own self-development, either through cooperation or competition—by adapting or reforming those social relations established through their symbolic consistency. At the highest level of such a contribution, that is, at the scientific level that has acquired the status of an objective and universally valid discourse (always to be hypothetically tested), this perspective equally stands: it opens up on the capacity of the individual self, as a scientist, to contribute to a scientific domain, which is constituted by a community to which subjective expression (called theory or concept, or hypothesis) is addressed for validation, with respect to the object that is then represented. In this, Mead coincides with Peirce's (as well as Dewey's) views on science, and pragmatism's definition of the hypothetical nature of knowledge that rests on finding confirmation in the scientific community, and the human community at large (Peirce 1868, 1877, 1896, 1955; Dewey 1916).

When concentrating on symbols (scientific or lay), we do not constrain Mead's sociological perspective, but rather apply it to social life as he defined it, as a realm where any and all relations are mediated by "significant symbols" (Mead 1922). The emphasis is placed on the dialectical content of symbolic

relations, together with their capacity to develop according to formations and transformations that affect both subjects and objects. Even when considered from the evolutionary perspective that Mead adopted, every stage of these symbolic (trans)formations is to be understood in its socio-historical context (involving both ontogenetic and phylogenetic processes). It is there that these stages come to fulfill their significance in terms of specifying the meaning and content of the relations, which symbols can do with simple but critical efficiency. In parallel with Mead but with more insistence on the consequences, Vigotsky—following Piaget while also criticizing some of his conclusions—showed how the simple relational notion of “brotherhood” helps us understand the cognitive development of a young child; when questioned about his brother (whom he fully acknowledged to be such), he was later asked if his own brother had a brother and could not fully arrive at the result that he, himself, was one—showing that he had not yet understood the full reciprocal meaning of the concept of “brotherhood,” and that this concept could be applied in reverse to himself, but from his own brother’s point of view (Vigotsky 1997, 368–373). This eloquent example shows that symbolic relations have to be understood in their very specific content, which is never simply “given” in a relation, but have to be qualified symbolically through meaning, and that doing so makes it possible to affect a more thorough cognitive integration into social life (including its attendant affective and normative dimensions). Here, the role and place of school in the development of the socialization of children illustrates the point further, in showing how the gradual mastering of language is part of the constitution of the self and of self-consciousness in using language adequately in its relation to the more complete development of social life.

Mead’s interest in education (which he shared with John Dewey, first and foremost at the experimental school they created at the University of Chicago) was focused on understanding how it could be reformed in such a way as to take into account the social content of any kind of material taught to children. Furthermore, he wanted to deepen their understanding of the multiple, interacting aspects of social life and society, in order to ensure their more informed capacity to act, as individuals, within this context—that is, as self-conscious individuals fully aware of the composition, dynamics, structures, and possibilities of their own society, not merely to understand and participate in it, but to transform it if need be. Matching symbols with social life, from a pragmatist point of view, consists as much in showing the socio-historical content of concepts as in understanding how social life is always mediated by them; this is done in order to consider that their instrumental dimension is also educational, since such matching informs us about the meanings of symbolically reflected social relations.

Any symbol thus contains this kind of meaningful relation, and symbols that have conceptual content express a complex set of relations, as we saw above with “brotherhood.” The same could be said about concepts such as “fatherhood,” which in many North American aboriginal societies involved the brother of a woman—not her “husband”—in relation to her children, according to the

matrilinear ties structuring parenthood and siblings in many pre-Columbian societies. The impressive variety of qualifying social relations exemplified in anthropological and historical examples demonstrates the high plasticity of family relations, together with the way societies regulate the circulation of individuals through complex symbolic institutional systems—thus structuring their inter-individual relations.

To add another example with even wider implications, taken from linguistics, we can point to the use of pronouns such as “I,” “you,” or “we,” which demands an understanding of a deep and highly complex set of symbolic structures formed in the core of European modernity. The emphasis placed on individuality in modern bourgeois society, with its correlative symbols of “property” and “contract,” together with a strong emphasis on *personal responsibility*, came to represent the prominent feature of this era (on this, see the brilliant essay by Genard (2000), together with Hegel (2008)). So it is impossible to deny that each social and historical social configuration develops its own range of symbolic relations according to its general conceptions of social life, and that in each one the individual takes on a different symbolic significance. This is contrary to the view of a constant and universal “sense of the self” posited by Archer (2015, 92), or any other simplification of the relational perspective that flattens the significance of relations to their strict physical or empirical dimension. For example, how can we deny today that the place of individual men has been put at the center of social life under a patriarchal order, according them overwhelming prominence and importance through the concepts of “manhood” and “masculinity”? Or how can we forget that Western society has given a place to “individuals” (and individualism) like no other society in the world—as reflected in the very specific meaning attached to “person” in this context (with such a profound institutional position that we tend to believe it to be “universal,” if not “natural”)? Even if one is ready to acknowledge the relational character of social life, this does not preclude analyzing the issues of power, asymmetrical positionings, and differential dynamics within relations (competition vs. cooperation, open or closed to variations by traditional or other kinds of cultural conceptions, etc.) that constitute them within their symbolically meaningful content (Migueluez 2001). The overall consideration here is about *concepts*, and specifically the way they are embodied in both institutional and individual realities within a societal context. Concepts represent lasting figures of social relations, and although not immutable, they stand as clear and imposing signposts of social life, where they appear to mark the socio-historical development of selves and societies because they are embedded in them, comprising their content and form.

In this respect, Mead comes as close as he can to the thought developed by Ernst Cassirer in his philosophy of symbolic forms—although neither of them knew of each other’s works—mainly through the late nineteenth-century dialogues and debates between neo-Kantianism and Hegelianism. In Cassirer, we also find the idea that concepts are expressions of social life, and that their meanings vary only according to the socio-historical context of their development and

possible transformations (Cassirer 1977, 1991). Although Cassirer is mentioned from time to time in association with the development of relational sociology (Powell and Dépelteau 2013, 1; Emirbayer 1997, 4, 8), he too developed a theory of concepts that shares Mead's pragmatist views by avoiding the dualistic opposition between subject and object, and by emphasizing the mediation established between them by symbolic forms; this, he maintained, was valid both on ontogenetic and phylogenetic levels (Cassirer 1991, 1933). Again, as with Mead, the relational aspect of Cassirer's theory is better understood by taking into consideration the idea that concepts establish, at the most general and generic level, a symbolic relation between subject and object through the mediation of their opposition. And here, even if there is a fundamental distinction between the natural and the cultural sciences—since the latter deal primarily with objects that are already mediated by meaningful expressions and not “immediate reality” like the former (Cassirer 1991)—for Cassirer (1977) the *functional* (not the *substantial*) character of this relation has to be emphasized. We can remark that Mead developed an ambivalent position on this issue, acknowledging the functional correspondence of concepts and social life, but also trying to integrate this view within a “naturalistic” perspective that would avoid the strict division between the natural and cultural sciences. Yet this problem resurfaced in the distinction that Mead maintained between an “unconscious communication” that existed in the natural world and a “conscious communication” that characterized the human/cultural world, and he eventually formulated substantial definitions of the ontologically distinct realities of animals and humans, and not merely the functional character of the respective communication processes that define them (Mead 2016, 253–255). At the onto-epistemological level, this signals a profound change with respect to the philosophical development of modernity, from Descartes to Kant, in which the individual subject was thematized—together with its dualistic relation to the object—in such a way as to become the prominent symbol of an era. Indicating how pragmatism engaged with such a problematic by replacing the (modern) Reason with Communication only helps to point out its originality in a socio-historical context to which we still belong.

In the same onto-epistemological vein, arguing that relational sociology is anti-dualistic, and as such breaks with modern epistemology (Crossley 2011), does not prevent one from considering that relations envisioned in such a perspective produce both positions and oppositions; in fact, this points to a vast and profound problematic that has inhabited sociology since its inception. Indeed, this has been the main concern of post-Kantian philosophy, first elaborated in its complete form by Hegel, who challenged the Kantian opposition between subject and object by using *logic* as a prerequisite for both—and hence, as well, their common basis and fundamental requirement. In the full system of the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel puts *Logic* (that is, the *Science of Logic*) before the *Philosophy of Nature* and the *Philosophy of Spirit*, showing how dialectic drives the logical, mutual development of all categories of thought (Hegel 1990). The pragmatists, and Dewey and Mead in particular, insisted instead

that it should be Communication that explains this development, first in its unconscious form in nature, and then in its conscious forms in human societies—whereas relatedly, Peirce considered that semiosis should take the place of logic in its Hegelian sense. Communication, considered as the fundamental concept at work in both nature and society (albeit in the different forms given to it in each realm), means that we have a process (communication) that produces both positions (natural and human) and their oppositions (unconscious vs. conscious). This, it seems to me, is congruent with Donati’s idea of defining relational sociology as the passage from Spinoza’s “*omni determinatio est negatio*” to “*omni determinatio est relatio*” (Donati 2013, 19), given, however, that we have in both formulas the implication that any relation involves negation *and its sublation*, according to the dialectical content of symbolic mediation. Only with this condition of recognizing the dialectical content of any symbolic mediation constituting social relations, so it seems to me, can we reconcile Mead with relational sociology.

3 CONCLUSION

If relational sociology is to employ a Meadian perspective, it should use it according to a proper understanding of the *concepts* developed by Mead. That is to say, the possibility of including Mead in the paradigm of relational sociology has to be considered with caution, at least with respect to the definition of his concepts, or else, more radically, relational sociology must be anchored within a Meadian perspective that allows for the recognition of social relations understood according to the dialectical content of the symbolic mediation they involve. It is only with respect to the relational set of relations defining self and society, together with mind and communication, that the contribution of Mead to sociology can adequately be considered. As mentioned, the perspective opened up by Mead can still teach us many things about sociological analysis, from the onto-epistemological position he developed, to the theoretical concepts he proposed, as well as the concrete analysis of social life that we conduct in our own socio-historical context. As some of these issues are taken from different dimensions of social life, they can be treated separately—keeping in mind that they each contribute to the understanding and interpretation of Mead’s thought along the lines of its own historicity.

The recent interest in Mead might have something to do with the ideological context of neoliberalism that has fueled the political horizon of Western societies since the early 1980s; to the extent that Mead was part of the wider progressive movement that challenged laissez-faire capitalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, similar concerns have returned in the wake of contemporary neoliberal politics, which has stalled the development of the Welfare State and opened up unlimited free trade on an international scale. On the level of the concrete analysis of social life, there is much to be said today for bringing back the notion of “society” as a general concern that goes beyond “individuals” and “individualism”—if ever those were really the terms at the

center of the neoliberal agenda. Considering that this context has privileged and benefited only the economic “1%,” there seem to be good reasons for sociological analysis to re-establish an interest in a vast and deep political reformist movement addressing the value of democratic institutions that promote equality, equity, and social justice in the world. This was the pragmatist political position of Dewey and Mead.

The concepts developed by Mead still provide rich theoretical tools to shift in this direction, helping to foster a deeper and wider historical reading of social evolution marked by political transformations. Bearing in mind that his perspective was part of a vast political revolution that paved the way for the development of mass democracy, already from the 1830s on there is a highly significant social evolution that showed the extent of the possibilities that such a political regime offered to societies—for better or for worse. Ignoring for a moment the worst experiences of totalitarianism (to be discussed in another context), consider instead the development of feminist movements that gradually changed the political world, such as the Suffragette movement in the nineteenth century (and, before that, the figure of Mary Wollstonecraft in the late eighteenth century), which led the way towards institutional and constitutional reforms that eventually gave full citizenship to women. As this political revolution deeply altered modern bourgeois democracy through the idea of giving access to open political participation to everyone (not only to white male property-owners), it transformed not only the self-identity of women, but also that of society as a whole. Here, the “subject” (women) and the “object” (political institution) were thus both directly affected in their transformed self-definitions. And while there are still many battles to be fought on the level of equality between men and women today, there is now a more solid ground than ever to do so. Among other things, it is primarily through education on equality, which was already at the core of Mead’s and Dewey’s pragmatism, that this can be done. Showing the myriad possibilities of the “self” to form and transform society in a democratic fashion still appears to be a fertile way of doing sociology—and concepts are still effective tools for helping us to do so.

This theoretical stance rests on a profound onto-epistemological position, as mentioned at the beginning. Considering the philosophical perspective adopted by Mead, in his critique and reconstruction of Hegel on the one hand, and his attempts to formulate concepts deeply in touch with the evolution of his own times on the other, tells us something about the dialectical endeavor involved in (social) science—and sociology in particular. By seriously engaging with the symbolic mediations that structure social life, and working out their possible transformation and reconstruction, we can contribute to the process of interpretation through which we can understand ourselves, and act accordingly in a self-conscious manner. If we really are in an overall context where communication has replaced reason, there is great responsibility at stake; only by paying attention to communication as a symbolic and dialectical mediation can we align reflection with action in contemporary society.

NOTES

1. I am using capital letters here, in this paragraph and the next one, to indicate the main concepts that structure the topological view reconstructed in Mead's concept of Society, in their reciprocal and dialectical positions and oppositions that compose their relations—see Côté (2015a, Chs. 2 and 3). I also include the Generalized Other on the side of the phylogenetic process, even though we can recognize its participation in the ontogenetic process, particularly as a point of junction between Other(s) Individual(s) and Institutions.
2. I am using here a capital letter to indicate that Communication has to be understood not only in its usual sense—although it includes the latter—but as a fundamental concept that determines the entire symbolic process at work—both in society and in nature (more on this below).
3. The use of the term “environment” to refer to both natural and human (or social) realities can be somehow confusing in Mead's works; this is due to the ambiguity of his epistemological standpoint, which claims to be rooted in some form of “naturalism.” In adopting such a position, Mead wanted to avoid the classical modern dualism between nature and human culture, or between body and mind, and he seemed to equate those terms when referring to environment in its natural or social destinations. However, the introduction of a distinction between unconscious communication in nature and conscious communication in human societies that we also find in his works clarifies the possible confusion of these two different horizons.
4. Even though Mead and Dewey shared for a good deal of their respective and mutual conceptions (particularly between 1891, when they met at the University of Michigan, through their common passage and collaborative work at the University of Chicago—which Dewey left in 1906—and up until Mead's death in 1931), they also had their oppositions, particularly in the field of social psychology (on this, see Mead's previously unpublished critical review of Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922) in Cook (1994)). On this basis, it is unlikely that the definition of “transaction,” a late development in Dewey's thought of the 1940s, would have met Mead's own perspective, because of the former's restricted views on the symbolic dimension of interactions.

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Pragmatist Methodological Relationalism in Sociological Understanding of Evolving Human Culture

Osmo Kivinen and Tero Piiroinen

Relationalist theories have become a popular topic in the social sciences over the past 20 years (e.g. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Archer 1995; Emirbayer 1997; Fuchs 2001; Tilly 2001; Kivinen and Piiroinen 2006; Dépelteau and Powell 2013). Obviously, there are considerable differences between relationalist approaches. A fundamental difference can be articulated in terms of two opposing attitudes that an inquirer could take toward the relationship between philosophical metaphysics—that is, ‘questions about reality that are beyond or behind those capable of being tackled by the methods of science’ (see *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Blackburn 1996, 240) on the one hand, and social scientific research practice on the other. The two attitudes we have dubbed ‘philosophizing sociology’ and ‘sociologizing philosophy’ (Kivinen and Piiroinen 2006). The difference between them is that those with an attitude of philosophizing sociology—such as, for instance, John Searle (1995, 2010)—think that social inquiries must be based on some prior ontological commitments explicable in terms of philosophical metaphysics; whereas those of us with an attitude of sociologizing philosophy draw on the fact that inquiry in science, and in philosophy, is social action and thus understandable in the light of sociological analyses, without any metaphysics.

There are also relationalists who subscribe to the realist doctrine that science needs to ‘rest on plausible ontologies’ (Tilly 1995, 1594). Relationalists of this type offer relational ontologies where relations are at least as real as other

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things, and many of them seem to believe in the representationalist dogma that relationalist theories are superior to other theories because they represent reality more accurately than others (e.g. Somers 1998, 743–5 and note 16). These realist relationalists claim to offer the correct kind of answers to the presumably ontological questions of just what it really is that sociologists study. François Dépelteau (2008, 2015), for instance, has recently developed an interesting position along such lines. He argues for a relational (and thereby processual, fluid, and dynamic) ontology that would differ from most other ontologies—for example, critical realist ones (e.g. Bhaskar 1979; Archer 1995; see also Hodgson 2004)—by virtue of its non-stratified conception of the social universe as ‘flat’ (as opposed to consisting of levels or layers). Dépelteau (2015) calls this distinctive position of his ‘Deep Relational Sociology’.

We have ourselves also written about the barrenness of stratified ontologies for quite some time now (e.g. Kivinen and Piironen 2004), and in this respect agree with Dépelteau. However, our opposition to stratified ontologies is not based on any competing ontology, flat or otherwise. Rather, our long-standing conviction has been that vertical metaphors offer only useless if not downright counterproductive methodological guidelines for knowledge-acquisition, and are to be replaced with horizontal ones, already because the very logic of language dictates that knowledge grows only through finding new connections, building new combinations from symbolic presentations and linguistic descriptions—by no means through revealing deeper and deeper truths (Kivinen and Piironen 2004, 2006, 2007). Which brings us to the second distinctive feature of Dépelteau’s relationalism—its supposedly ‘deep’ relational character; we cannot but ask: in what useful sense could relationalism be deep, especially given the fact that the ontology of the social universe that Dépelteau proposes is said to be flat? Perhaps it is just an unfortunate terminological choice and could be dropped along with ontological unnecessaryities? In any case, the contrast to our methodological relationalism is stark: as pragmatists, we think that it is quite sufficient for a relationalist to try and provide a set of instrumentally useful conceptual tools for describing social action and operationalizing its pressing problems into specific research questions answerable through research actions. And for this, we need no metaphysical language game or ontology (Kivinen and Piironen 2004, 2006, 2007, 2013).

The present chapter argues for this view, re-examining some old insights and introducing a few new ones into methodological relationalism, sharpening some of its central notions and concepts. In particular, we wish to highlight the Darwinian backdrop of John Dewey’s (1859–1952) transactional pragmatism and methodological relationalism. We will argue that Dewey’s interpretation of Darwinian thinking resonates with some promising recent theories and research on human evolutionary history and can offer fruitful methodological guidance for relationalist research into today’s social life and human consciousness.

I DEWEY'S EVOLUTIONARY PHILOSOPHY ANTICIPATING NICHE CONSTRUCTIONISM

Having been almost forgotten in the middle of the twentieth century, over the past couple of decades Deweyan ideas have come back, also in social theory; Dewey's legacy lives strong again. The pragmatist notion of 'habit', in particular, which Dewey (esp. [1922] 1983) elaborated, has been found useful by a number of otherwise rather different thinkers (see e.g. Joas 1996; Kilpinen 2000; Hodgson 2004; Kivinen and Piironen 2004, 2007; Joas and Kilpinen 2006; Fleetwood 2008; also Lahire 2011, 72–4; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 122–3 and note 77); and lately also his 'transactionalist' view of individual–society relations, or more fundamentally of the mind–world or subject–object relationship (see Dewey 1983, 1988b, 1991a, 1991b), has inspired many relationalists (e.g. Emirbayer 1997; Kivinen and Piironen 2006, 2013; Dépelteau 2008; Piironen 2014; see also Dépelteau and Powell 2013).

An interesting development in social theory recently has been that evolution-theoretical ideas are beginning to be taken seriously again (see e.g. Hodgson 2004, 2013; Machalek and Martin 2004; Hodgson and Knudsen 2010; Bowles and Gintis 2011; Kivinen and Piironen 2012, 2013; Meloni 2013). Perhaps social scientists are finally getting over the traumatic past of evolutionary social theory—the shadows cast by Spencerian 'Social Darwinism', the eugenics-motivating doctrines of the survival of the fittest people and societies (Rose 2013)—and have found plausible alternatives to the biological determinism of Wilson's (1975) 'sociobiology' and to the narrowest mind-first versions of 'evolutionary psychology' (e.g. Tooby and Cosmides 1992).

While both Deweyan relationalism and evolutionary theory have been on the rise in social theory, the two are rarely presented as interconnected matters; there has actually been very little discussion about the connections between the two. Yet Dewey was arguably an evolutionary philosopher through and through: his transactionalist views of mind, knowledge, growth, learning by doing, inquiry and science, as well as of community and social life, culture and democracy, all make sense in a Darwinian context; it is all too easy to misunderstand Dewey's philosophy if one does not appreciate its specifically Darwinian backdrop—and quite a few people, even benevolent interpreters, have not (Popp 2007, 81 ff.). All classical American pragmatists were impressed by Darwinian ideas and advanced evolution-theoretical philosophies of mind, inquiry, and knowledge (e.g. Goudge 1973; Menand 2001; Brandom 2004; see also Hodgson 2004); and Dewey became the *primus inter pares* in this respect, as he was the one to publish most extensively and to apply his Darwinian pragmatism systematically to a variety of topics of human interest. There are indeed good reasons to call Dewey 'evolution's first philosopher' (Popp 2007). In this chapter, we argue for a Deweyan methodological relationalism of social sciences that rests on a Darwinian base.

Now Dewey's conception of evolution, correctly understood, is crucially different from how evolutionary theory was mainly conceived from around the

middle of the twentieth century until early this century—the orthodoxy that has been revolving around the notion of gene, as perhaps best epitomized by Richard Dawkins’s book *The Selfish Gene* [1976] (2006). This is important in social sciences, because most attempts in social theory or in the human sciences to place genes center stage have been prone to overstress the biological, innate human nature—native brain/mind modules and other psychological hardwiring that allegedly stem from genetic selection in the Pleistocene era (e.g. Tooby and Cosmides 1992; Pinker 2002). These explanations have been found unsatisfactory, and not just in the social sciences but even as accounts of human nature and consciousness—apt criticisms of such overly genetic, nativity-emphasizing, ‘inside-out’ theories have been presented by Buller (2005), Deacon (1997), Donald (2001), and Sterelny (2012a), for instance (also Kivinen and Piironen 2007, 2012).¹ In any case, genetics-based, inside-out explanations of humanity and social life are unsatisfactory with respect to relationalist approaches to social scientific research, because more emphasis on genes and individuals’ supposedly innate brain/mind modules means less attention to individual–environment relations and almost no attention at all to social and cultural relations. Thus insofar as we social scientists want to find noteworthy lessons from theories and research on evolution, those must be something other than primarily innate, genetic affairs.

Deweyan philosophy does provide such an alternative account of evolution. His transactional and relational thinking anticipated what would later become known as ‘co-evolutionary’ or ‘niche-constructionist’ interpretations of evolution (see Kivinen and Piironen 2012, 2013). Dewey’s (1985) naturalism starts with the notion that every living organism and every species (or population) must cope with its environment, because when it cannot cope with it anymore it perishes—it ‘loses its identity as a living thing’. Any given organism will die sooner or later, and whole species go extinct every now and then, but as long as life on this planet goes on, there will be new ‘forms better adapted to utilize the obstacles against which ... [the ones who perished] struggled in vain ...’ (pp. 4–5). So organic life is, most crucially, activity adapted to its environment (Dewey 1988a, 128). It ‘is a process of activity that involves an environment’, Dewey (1991a, 32) stressed, ‘a transaction extending beyond the spatial limits of the organism’. And he would also point out an often overlooked implication of this: that, on the one hand, the very active nature of adaptations entails that all organisms must transform, change (even if only slightly) some of the elements of their environment; and that, on the other hand, precisely because activity is an adaptation to the environment, any changes in the environment will tend to call for changes in the future activity, and accordingly in the organism itself (Dewey 1988a, 128–9).

The organism acts in accordance with its own structure, simple or complex, upon its surroundings. As a consequence the changes produced in the environment react upon the organism and its activities. The living creature undergoes, suffers, the consequences of its own behavior. (Dewey 1988a, 129)

Now, this is very close to what much later became known as a niche-constructionist view of evolution: the idea that all organisms are in constant transactions with their environment, changing the environment so that it will then affect the organisms differently, creating perhaps new kinds of evolutionary selection pressures towards them (see Odling-Smee et al. 2003). Niche-constructionist views have only started to become properly appreciated in mainline evolutionary theory over the past couple of decades, although they were anticipated by a few early theorists, such as James Mark Baldwin, already in Dewey's days,² theorists who emphasized the role of learning in evolution—how learned forms of behavior may alter the selection environment of a population in such ways that it affects the genetic evolution of that population (e.g. Baldwin 1896; Morgan 1896). (Later, this sort of development became known as the 'Baldwin effect'—with some injustice to those others who came up with roughly the same idea around the same time if not earlier than Baldwin, theorists such as Conwy Lloyd Morgan.) But it was not until in the late 1980s that the Baldwin effect finally started to become broadly accepted as a (still rather controversial) part of the mainline modern synthesis of evolutionary theory. (See Weber and Depew 2003; also Richards 1987, 480–93; Dennett 1995, 77–80.)

The Baldwin effect has been easier to accept in the fields of human sciences, let us remark; the idea of ecological, particularly socio-cultural, niches and how they affect human evolution in (gene–culture) 'co-evolutionary' cycles has become a commonplace in these fields (e.g. Durham 1991; Dennett 1995; Deacon 1997; Odling-Smee et al. 2003; Richerson and Boyd 2005; Bickerton 2009; Pagel 2012; Sterelny 2012a). That human scientists should appreciate the idea is certainly understandable: as a distinctly cultural affair, the niches that humans construct have clearly changed their selection environment and thoroughly affected human consciousness. Dewey already underlined that the construction and transformation of the environment, the niche or the 'medium', is a particularly noteworthy and consequential phenomenon especially in the human case: 'The higher' (that is to say, the more neurologically complex and phenotypically flexible) 'the form of life', he stated, 'the more important is the active reconstruction of the medium' (Dewey 1988a, 128); and thus, '[o]f human organisms it is especially true that activities carried on for satisfying needs so change the environment that new needs arise which demand still further change in the activities of the organism by which they are satisfied; and so on in potentially endless chain' (Dewey [1938] 1991a, 35). For Dewey (e.g. 1983, 1984, 235–372, 1991a, Ch. 3), there never was any doubt that humans are social beings whose habits and thus minds are formed in social life and in a cultural context of language and customs, in some given communities and in the framework of institutions.

Meanwhile, human communities exist only due to social action, division of labor, cooperation, and communication (of the community's habits of action and thought, its beliefs and norms of social life). If the community fails to initiate enough of its new members into its customs, its characteristic way

of life, it will cease to exist (at least, as the kind of community that it was). Thus defined, it is a trivial fact that communities can also outlive their individual members; but to keep themselves going (in a sense: ‘alive’), they need to arrange sufficient re-creation of their beliefs and knowledge, hopes and expectations, ideals and practices, which in modern times has been achieved by means of educating new members to appreciate the community’s beliefs, ideas, and conventions. Dewey 1985, 5–7; see also 1983, 43–5.) The transferring of habits and customs is never perfect, of course, and there are also innovations from time to time—even quite revolutionizing technological inventions, for instance, tested in their local environment—and thus it makes sense that the lifeways, ecological and socio-cultural niches, and therefore also the human consciousness, all evolve incrementally, in co-evolutionary transactional cycles.

This all needs to be understood relationally. Indeed, as we have said before: niche-constructionist theories of evolution are necessarily relationalist, if only because they conceive organisms in relation to certain aspects of their environment and some of the more relevant parts of the environment in relation to those organisms; and it is also hard to imagine a relationalist social theorist who would not be at least tacitly appreciative of the notion of niche construction (Kivinen and Piironen 2013, 88–90).³ Relationalism works well in tandem with niche-constructionist analyses of human cultural evolution.

2 RELATIONAL STANDPOINTS ON HUMAN EVOLUTION IN SOCIO-CULTURAL NICHES

Kim Sterelny’s *The Evolved Apprentice* (2012a) is one example of recent niche-constructionist and, by the same token, relationalist analyses of human evolution, concentrating specifically on the evolution of human ‘behavioral modernity’ (the cluster of behaviors shared by all modern humans and distinguishing them from other known species, including other hominins and even early *Homo sapiens* that were physically indistinguishable from modern humans) during the Pleistocene era. Sterelny opposes all genetic-nativist explanations and conceives behavioral modernity as an incrementally evolved, social and cultural affair, most crucially explained by peculiarly apprentice-like mechanisms of social and cultural learning, which depend on the collective’s capacity to engineer appropriate kinds of learning environments for the young to learn from the more experienced members of the group.⁴ This is emphatically a ‘collective achievement and a collective legacy’ whereby ‘we stand on the shoulders not of a few giants but of myriad of ordinary agents who have made and passed on intact the informational resources on which human lives depend’. It is very much a matter of niche construction, of course, of earlier generations having constructed a cognitive niche for the later ones, a niche nested in a broader ecological and socio-cultural niche, a community’s way of life (Sterelny 2012a, xi–xiv).

Another notable theorist of the evolution of human mind, Merlin Donald, would in a similarly relationalist and niche-constructionist vein emphasize the kinds of communications that were involved in the early hominin and human

cultures, because it was communication that underpinned the human capacity to share knowledge with others in cultural networks and thereby accelerated also the pace of biological evolution in our species (in particular the remarkably fast growth of hominin brains that made it more and more a cultural organ) (Donald 2001, 259–60; see also Deacon 1997; Bickerton 2009). Donald distinguishes as particularly important phases the emergence of the first ‘mimetic’ cultures of physical signs and mimes (this happened already in earlier hominins, ca. two million years ago); the transition into the ‘mythic’ culture of relatively fluent oral language (beginning around 500,000 years ago, perhaps), and finally the transition into ‘theoretic’ culture along with writing as a method for externalizing symbol systems and thus knowledge. Each phase would give rise to new kinds of cognition and consciousness (Donald 2001, 259 ff.).

One thing that Sterelny (2012a) and Donald (2001) (and some of the most interesting theorists of language evolution, such as Terrence Deacon (1997) and Derek Bickerton (2009)) have in common is the understanding that the evolution of human consciousness is to be explained more ‘outside-in’ than ‘inside-out’: that the engines of this evolution are to be found in the social organization and cultural developments that played a crucial part in the ecological niches where also the hominin brains and other physical characteristics incrementally evolved the way that they did.

A good example of this is the construction of the ecological niche that enabled the emergence of written language and thus what Donald dubs theoretic culture and theoretic parts of human consciousness. The most essential causal chains explaining these developments go back to the invention of agriculture and to the pervasive social, cultural, and technological changes it brought about (in certain favorable conditions—of course, not all agricultural communities invented writing).

Incidentally, one thing that the agricultural revolution can help us highlight is this basic lesson of evolutionary, as opposed to teleological, thinking: that evolutionary developments are only locally and temporarily adaptive, not universally progressive. Evolution may occasionally produce progress toward increasing complexity, for instance, but that is not a universally beneficial development: if the local conditions change, it may sometimes be better to be simple. A small group of hunter-gatherers will fare better than a post-industrial knowledge society if some disaster brings down the electrical grid and all the ICT networks; and relatively simple cockroaches would be much more likely than the human kind to survive an all-out nuclear war on this planet. Evolution is a matter of populations of organisms changing incrementally as they develop new ways to cope with the selection pressures of their environment. Populations and species change in this process, and their evolving ways of coping also transform the environment, thereby creating new kinds of needs and threats, problems and goals, new coping challenges, as Dewey (e.g. 1988a, 128–9, 1991a, 35) already observed. There is no guarantee that this increases happiness or reduces suffering, and no reason to believe that it leads to forms of life that are better or universally fitter in every way. Some of our cultural-evolutionary

developments may of course produce some things that seem to be pretty universal improvements, because we humans plan for tomorrow and invent stuff to intentionally improve our condition, but even these tend to bring about unforeseen negative consequences. This is indeed nicely demonstrated by the shift to agriculture: archaeological and paleoanthropological evidence shows that early farmers lived on average shorter and more infirm, sickly lives than most hunter-gatherers, suffering more from illnesses, from malnutrition caused by their less varied diets, and from harder work ill-suited to the body adapted to the hunter-gathering lifestyle over a couple of million years (see the popular historians Diamond (1987) and Harari (2015, Ch. 5) on this, as well as e.g. Pagel 2012, 23–4).⁵

It is natural for people to think of the transition from hunter-gatherer lifestyles to agriculture as a positive thing—a ‘victory over nature’—that paved the way for urbanization and organized society, literacy and cumulating knowledge, growing economic surplus and civilization, high culture and philosophy. It did give rise to all that; but there are also standpoints from which it seems like a trap into which *Homo sapiens* fell! And it is instructive to see why it would have been well-nigh impossible for farming communities to get out of that trap, to withdraw from the agricultural niche and go back to hunter-gathering. For one thing, domesticated plants soon became a necessary food source for the farming communities, precisely because they had enabled the farmers to have more children and thereby allowed the size of the population to grow so big it could no longer be fed by means of hunter-gathering (Harari 2015, Ch. 5; also Diamond 1987). But even more fundamentally, retracting from a niche and finding a new one is always a slow, incremental process; niches are not something that a population can easily change. Examples of species getting stuck in their niches and becoming so dependent on some of the elements of those niches that they will almost certainly go extinct if the niche collapses for some reason are plentiful in nature, and not even we humans, with our enormously faster cultural evolution and the capacity to plan ahead, can reconstruct or revise the fundamentals of our niches overnight.

Transactional co-evolutionary cycles of people striving to develop new tools for coping and thereby changing the environment and unintentionally presenting themselves with ever new challenges have been going on since the Stone Age. Today they have brought us to a completely unprecedented situation in the history of this planet, what Erle C. Ellis (2015) calls ‘anthropogenic biosphere’.⁶ We are facing tremendous new problems such as pollution, climate change, and mass extinction of species. And yet, as the logic of evolution would have it, the only way is forward: trying to cope with ever new problems by keeping on constructing the niche, utilizing the resources available in the niche.

In order to have better chances of managing the future, we need to learn from history, too: the history of how we got here holds important lessons about how we might improve our situation, avoid some mistakes that earlier generations made, and perhaps correct some of their damage. A few of the

most notable socio-cultural conditions and developments that we might learn from would certainly include the intertwined societal, cultural, technological, and economic changes that mark the end of what historians call the (late) medieval period and what they call the beginning of the (early) modern age in Europe. Arguably one of the most important factors involved in this change was the invention of the printing press. The speed of the press obviously allowed ideas and arguments and new knowledge to spread faster throughout the society and made books more and more a popular commodity, thereby creating a new kind of egalitarianism with respect to learning and wisdom. Meanwhile, the very form of presentation that the early pioneering publishers invented for printed books also influenced how people thought and carried out inquiries; so the ‘communications revolution’ that the printing press brought about would have played an important part in the momentous socio-cultural developments that unfolded in those days: the renaissance, the beginnings of modern science, the reformation of the Christian church, capitalism and the rise of the bourgeoisie and the middle class, the very notions of nationality and nation-state, and that of democratic government (see Eisenstein 1979).

These developments and changes marking the transition from the middle ages to the modern age were interlinked in many ways, practically interdependent, or at least fueling one another (see also e.g. Dewey 1988a, 101 ff.). Thus they need to be understood as a thoroughly relational issue, with relationalist conceptual tools. They may also be conceived of as constituting new kinds of ecological niches for people, human groups and populations, to try and survive—a niche of capitalist economy, that of modern science, or of exploration and mapping of unknown territories. Later, in the eighteenth century, they culminated into the Enlightenment and the industrial revolution.

One noteworthy cultural feature that comes along with liberalism is individualism—the notion that each person (or, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries still, each free man, at least) is an intrinsically valuable, certain human rights possessing, free agent morally responsible for their own decisions and actions. This sort of individualism was written into the niche of modernity’s culture early on. Dewey, too, observed that it is modernity’s creation (e.g. 1988b, 136–7, 1984, 288 ff., see also 1988a, 104–9), and so that might unfortunately blind us to the fact that, actually, individuals (their minds and personal selves) take form and become what they are only in communities of people (1988a, 190 ff., 1983, 1984, 353–7). It was also a creation that gave rise to the highly detrimental philosophical problematic of Subject and Object, or the mind–world dualism, because philosophers failed to appreciate how much the mind actually depended on language, which in turn was a product of social life (1988b, 137, see also 1985, 301–2, 1991b, e.g. 287–90). On the other hand, it was also due to modernity’s emphasis on the individual that each human being could now in principle be seen as an intrinsically valuable and dignified person—one who, furthermore, had the right and freedom of opinion to judge matters for themselves and to question received wisdom when necessary, to observe and experiment and draw novel conclusions; so it was linked to the rise

of modern, empirical science and naturalism too (1988a, 105 ff., also 1985, 303 ff.). According to Dewey, correctly understood individualism legitimizes the notion that people deserve education (to guarantee the equality of opportunity. It also implies that their individual needs and standpoints should be taken into consideration in education. Individual differences should be embraced, and will be embraced by a truly progressive society—which in turn will strengthen democracy and thus also our communities, Dewey believed (see 1985, e.g. 311–5).

A characteristic feature of our own day and age is the speed at which new technology, knowledge, and innovations are networking, diversifying, and feeding each other. Social scientists have come up with a variety of explanations for this, but it is interesting that some fundamental aspects of it seem quite adequately described in terms of Sterelny's niche-constructionist model of the Pleistocene origins of behavioral modernity. According to Sterelny, the size of the community (community here meaning all the bands of people that are in regular, friendly interactions) matters a great deal, because it allows more specialization, diversity, and eloquence of skills and technologies, thereby tending to increase the rate of innovations in the population (Sterelny 2016, 180). And today we have a world community (loosely conceived) of seven billion people where everyone with access to the internet can see dozens or hundreds of skills, ideas, and innovations every day; where skills and innovations, knowledge and technology spread fast and can be combined with other skills and innovations, knowledge and technology; and where there is more specialization of knowledge, skills, and technology than ever before. This has cumulated into automatization, robots and software that today allow for the production of quite unprecedented economic growth, but at the same time it is reducing the need for labor, much of it traditional industrial society's working-class or lower-middle-class labor; so inequality is now soaring in many countries, even alongside growing GNPs.

How big a share of present-day jobs will be replaced by robots and computer programs and other forms of automatization within the next decade or two; and what new jobs will be created by the same processes of technological advancement? How can we best prepare people, educate them, so that they will be able to navigate in this swiftly changing environment, adapt to their niche, change occupations and fields when old ones disappear or become oversaturated or uninteresting and new, more interesting and booming fields emerge? What will the possibly growing masses of unemployed or only sporadically or part-time employed people do with their lives? How, in general, should post-industrial societies be organized; how should they distribute wealth and well-being in particular? And, more importantly for the present purposes: how is all this best studied through social scientific inquiries? We argue that the said kind of niche-constructionist conceptualizations imply a relational methodology of social scientific inquiry. Meanwhile they are, strictly speaking, incompatible with the idea of ontological foundations (relational or otherwise) of social sciences.

3 DARWINIAN AND OTHER GOOD REASONS FOR METHODOLOGICAL RELATIONALISM

To be sure, not every brand of Darwinian thinking entails rejection of foundationalist ontologies of social sciences. The philosopher John Searle (2010), for example, is an avid spokesman for both Darwinian biology and a kind of ‘Philosophy of Society’ whose explicit aim is to lay the proper ontological foundations for the social sciences. And Searle claims to have found the ‘exactly one’ ‘unifying principle’ of social ontology (Status Function Declarations) that human society is based on, the one principle that should be of equally fundamental importance to the social sciences as the notion of tectonic plates is to geology, the chemical bond is to chemistry, or the DNA molecule is to genetics (pp. 6–7).⁷ But the apparent compatibility of social ontology and Darwinian evolution follows only from Searle’s interpretation of evolution—the indication of which can be seen already in his previous example of the DNA molecule being the one fundamental entity upon which the science of genetics is based. Like all his philosophy, Searle’s notion of Darwinian evolution comes down to only the most commonsensical, rough-and-ready version, to the mere non-teleological vein of explanation insisting that ‘evolution occurs by way of blind, brute, natural forces’ whereby the environment selects the features of the species from among random (genetic) variation (Searle 1995, 16).

Searle’s view of evolution leads him to embrace what has been dubbed the ‘inside-out’ direction of explanation: he starts with biology and explains intentional minds basically with complex enough brains—presuming that there must first have been hominins much like us who were already capable of ‘the full range of perception, memory, belief, desire, prior intentions, and intentions-in-action’, but did not yet have language (Searle 2010, 65); he then explains the emergence of language ‘as an extension of [those] biologically basic, pre-linguistic forms of intentionality’; and, finally, explains the social world of institutions with our language-use (Status Function Declarations). That is, the way Searle sees it, ‘the human [sociocultural] reality is a natural outgrowth of more fundamental—physical, chemical, and biological—phenomena’, and the explanation of these proceeds ‘from intentionality to language and then from language to social institutions’.

That is just about the opposite of the niche-constructionist approach, which implies more an ‘outside-in’ direction of explanation—using the early (incrementally constructed) socio-cultural niche to explain the emergence of language and thereby also human consciousness.⁸ (The niche also explains the growth of the hominin brain, let us remark—for that needs to be explained by some especially weighty evolutionary reasons, bigger brains having been an indispensable asset in the niche of more and more complex social life and early culture.) (See e.g. Deacon 1997; Donald 2001; Bickerton 2009; Sterelny 2011, 2012b, 2016; Kivinen and Piironen 2012.)

This proposal to understand consciousness and the whole of humanity more outside-in—in the relational network of social action and language-using

communities—than inside-out (as emerging from the brain), is a methodological point, not a metaphysical position. We are suggesting that the more appropriate way for social scientists to investigate consciousness is to study it as manifested in its exercise, to operationalize it into actions and behavior—especially symbolically communicable, socio-cultural actions and behavior that can be described with mental vocabulary (Kivinen and Piironen 2007, 2012, 2013). It is an important methodological point to make, let us emphasize, because it opens the mind up to empirical, social scientific inquiries.

There is indeed a fundamental difference between this sociologizing, strictly methodological standpoint and any ontologically philosophizing approach: only the former is compatible with and supported by the niche-constructionist evolutionary theory described above, which—especially in our Deweyan interpretation of it—implies a thoroughly transactionalist view of the subject(ive) and object(ive), of the mind–world relationship, the view that both consciousness and the experienced environment are what they are only in active transactions, are never completely ‘made in the brain or by the brain’ alone, that is, but involve the whole (socio-cultural, meanings-creating) organism–environment history of transactions (Noë 2009, 164; see also Dewey 1988b, Ch. 7).⁹ So, for a transactionalist, it makes no sense to try and discuss the ontological nature of the world as if outside all transactions.

It is only in organism–environment transactional problem-fields that we pick out causes and effects, for instance. As Hilary Putnam (1926–2016) pointed out, to distinguish ‘the cause’ from a mere ‘background condition’ always depends on picking out something from among other things—‘an act of selection, which depends on what we know and can use in prediction; and this is not written into the physical system itself’ (Putnam 1990, 86). Or, as Dewey (1991a, 456–7) put it: causation should not be thought of as a substantial, ontological notion at all, but as a logical category which guides inquiry toward solving problematic situations. It is a conceptual tool that we use from our inquirer’s actor’s point of view. This is in line with the observation, made already by William James, about the fundamental nature of the mind: that awareness, if it is to be at all useful, has to narrow its focus by ‘*picking out* what to attend to....’ (‘Just so an astronomer, in dealing with the tidal movements of the ocean, takes no account of the waves made by the wind ... Just so the marksman, in sighting his rifle, allows for the motion of the wind, but not for the ... motion of the earth and solar system.’) (James 1979, 165–6). It is much the same with any social scientific research, too: the inquirer’s mind will have to try and pick out and focus on the causes most relevant for the purposes of the particular inquiry at hand (Kivinen and Piironen 2004, 233 ff., 2006, 320 ff., 2007, 99).

There are an infinite number of ways to describe objects, and they should not be compared in terms of their ontological correctness, correspondence to the one Reality; they are just more or less useful for some given purposes (Kivinen and Piironen 2004, see also 2006). The superiority of some descriptions over others is a matter of them providing better tools for solving

problems (Rorty 1999, 47–71; Kivinen and Piironen 2006). Meanwhile, the very linguistic meaningfulness of descriptions ties them to other descriptions, often across various situations and purposes, precisely because the peculiarity of language as a symbol system is that the meanings derive from the system more than from any particular referent (e.g. Deacon 1997, Ch. 3; see Davidson 1991). That is to say, the meanings of conceptual tools and descriptions depend on their relations to other meaningful concepts and descriptions, too, as well as on their relations to observations, to other data, and to the problems we want to solve and other goals we might have. Generally, their meanings depend on their relations to the various practices where language is used, where goals and problems emerge, and where observations are made and data considered relevant or not. Meanings and hence the intelligibility of anything come from their interrelations in the shared practices where they are created and maintained—a point appreciated by both Wittgenstein and Dewey (see e.g. Medina 2004).

To understand this is of vital importance to science, we argue. Scientific inquiry is a socio-cultural affair, and ‘every cultural group possesses a set of meanings which are so deeply embedded in its customs, occupations, traditions and ways of interpreting its physical environment and group-life, that they form the basic categories of the language-system by which details are interpreted’ (Dewey 1991a, 68).¹⁰ And to appreciate this is to become a methodological relationalist. As Dewey put it: ‘In science, since meanings are determined on the ground of their relation as meanings to one another, relations become the objects of inquiry’ (1991a, 119). Thus social scientific research, too, cannot but be relational—what we investigate and debate about is rooted in networks of meaning, in communities of practice, and as such is understandable only through their relations (Kivinen and Piironen 2006, 2007; also e.g. Fuchs 2001, 2–3, 12–23).

What is special to scientific inquiry, as opposed to other forms of knowledge-acquisition, is that, in science, theories and hypotheses, their key propositions, and all the central notions used, are expected to be most systematically operationalized into research actions whereby they can be measured by their consequences. This was appreciated by the classics of pragmatism already, understanding as they did that beliefs can be seen as habits of action, inquiry as a method for solving the problems that would otherwise stop habitual action, and the knowledge gathered through inquiries as ultimately a tool of action (see Peirce [1877] 1974, 5.358–387; James [1907–1909] 1981; Dewey [1925] 1988c, [1938] 1991a).

For a pragmatist, then, there should no question that the words used to formulate knowledge and to define and specify research problems are always related to action. This means, among other things, that the appropriateness of descriptions is always measured in action; they may be found inappropriate for describing some of the causal pressures that people face in their environment, but there is no reason to assume that there is some ultimate, metaphysically correct description to be found—causal pressures can be described in many

different ways for different purposes (Rorty 1998, 1999, e.g. 32–3). The world does not divide itself into ‘facts’: it is only us, with our language, in our actions, who divide the world into facts (Rorty 1989, 4–7, 1998, 86–7). We will try and anchor the terminology in the world, to be sure, but as we are doing so we are thereby turning the world into an environment; and an environment—as our Deweyan, niche-constructionist take on evolutionary theory shows—is not something independent from us: it is what it is, the kind of environment that it is, only to some particular kind of organisms, just like the organisms are the kind of organisms that they are, act and think the way that they do (and stay alive in the first place), only because the environment and their transactions with it are the way that they are (see Dewey 1991a, 40).

The causal pressures that people face in their actions provide quite a sufficient connection between our beliefs and the world so that our ‘human belief cannot swing free of the nonhuman environment’, and ‘we can never be more arbitrary than the world lets us be’ (Rorty 1999, 32–3; also Davidson 1991). ‘The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs’, Rorty (1989, 6) reminds us. This should be obvious to us Darwinians: the whole Subject–Object dualistic problematic asking whether people are really in touch with and correctly represent reality ‘presupposes the un-Darwinian, Cartesian picture of mind which somehow swings free of the causal forces exerted on the body’ (Rorty 1999, xxiii). Like any organism transacting with its environment, a human being acts and is acted upon, adapts to the environment, copes with it, and forms habits of action. What makes us a little bit special among other species is our language, but language can also be viewed as but one more tool that we use in our transactions. It happens to be a rather peculiar tool, to be sure, such that it makes it possible to describe things and to form propositional knowledge about them, and to accumulate such knowledge by creating more and more—interrelated, networking—descriptions, which oftentimes help us see new connections between things and thereby come up with new ways of thinking and acting (see Kivinen and Piironen 2006, 2007; also e.g. Rorty 1999, 52–69).

One noteworthy advantage that follows from the methodological relationalist understanding that knowledge-acquisition should culminate in new, tried-and-tested, and demonstrably useful descriptions that help us cope with the worldly causal pressures better than before, is that it allows us to get rid of the useless philosophical dogma of metaphysical essentialism (Rorty 1999, Ch. 3; cf. e.g. Harré and Madden 1975). Whereas philosophizers of sociology, ontological realists such as Searle, are also essentialists in the sense that they are out ‘to explain the fundamental nature and mode of existence—what philosophers call the essence and the ontology—of human social institutional reality’ (Searle 2010, ix), methodological relationalists understand that the whole idea of science revealing some purpose-independent essences or essentials of reality is futile. Dewey saw this clearly: the notion that some descriptions capture something essential—as opposed to merely accidental—should not be thought of in terms of the ancient ontological distinction; rather, in modern science, to say

that something is ‘essential’ is simply to say that it is indispensable in this particular inquiry (Dewey 1991a, 141; also Kivinen and Piironen 2004, 2006).

Philosophizing, ontologizing relationalists, however, seem surprisingly unwilling to follow us methodological relationalists to that conclusion. Even when they profess that they are giving up Cartesian dualisms, they nevertheless think it fruitful to hold on to the ontology–epistemology dichotomy. How else to understand, for example, Mustafa Emirbayer’s (1997) proclamation, in his classic *Manifesto*, to focus ‘throughout upon ontology, largely ... bracketing associated questions regarding epistemology’ (p. 282)? Some eminent relationalists such as Margaret Somers (1998, 743–5 and note 16) have gone even further and avowed themselves some sort of representationalists and essentialists, claiming that the reason why some (relationalist) social theories are better than others must be that they represent the nature of social reality more closely than others—that they more accurately capture the real nature of that reality, which must exist independently from what we or anybody think about it.

Nevertheless, we should emphasize, the main point that Somers was making in the article just referred to was the very much agreeable and elegant critique of what she dubbed ‘theory driven’ approaches in social science, arguing for a more ‘problem driven’ standpoint instead—a standpoint from which research is understood as limited case studies aimed at solving specific, well-defined research problems, which in turn arise from some actual problems that people face in their social lives (all this taking place and making sense only in particular socio-historical contexts, of course) (Somers 1998, 730–9; see also Dewey 1991a). With this general point we agree wholeheartedly and only wish to add that, when research is understood to be problem-driven as opposed to theory-driven, there is no need to presume any nature of reality distinct from our problems and purposes, waiting for us out there to try and represent it more or less accurately. We can just drop the whole subject–object dualism and, along with it, representationalist epistemology and essentialist ontology (Kivinen and Piironen 2006, see also Kivinen and Piironen 2004, 2013).

What working scientists need is not philosophical ontology but agreement within the relevant community on what the case is and what is to be done about it—how could we get to know the basic mechanisms that produce the problem, and how might we do more appropriate and higher-quality research on it. This is firmly rooted in action because scientific theories are, in fact, tools of action, which people expect to be useful for solving some actual problems—making life easier, helping them avoid injuries and illness, allowing them to move and communicate faster, to enjoy a richer variety of entertainment and hobbies, to organize our societies and economic actions more effectively and agreeably (see Dewey 1988c, 1991a). The operationalizability of theories is crucial in this connection because any good knowledge will have to be acquired by doing things; ‘ideas are statements not of what is or has been but of acts to be performed’ (Dewey 1988c, 111).¹¹

Thus understood, it should be clear that scientific inquiry involves and aims at organizing data and prior knowledge into coherent webs of useful descriptions, useful tools. The development of scientific knowledge is not vertical deepening, revealing ever deeper layers of reality; it is horizontal widening—extending and finding new connections between networking knowledge contents and other descriptions, finding novel ways to describe things that are more useful and therefore more widely acceptable to scientific audiences (see Kivinen and Piironen 2004, 2006; also e.g. Rorty 1999, 82–3). That is to say: scientific progress is not to be understood in terms of science getting closer to some ultimate essence of reality, but in terms of increasing power to predict events and to thereby help people better control their lives (Rorty 1998, 5).

In the fields of social sciences, the events to be predicted and the situations to be controlled are events and situations of social life, so the problems to be solved, research questions to be answered, and the data to be considered relevant with respect to answering those questions, are or relate to social actions past, present, and future. Social scientific research, then, is best seen as a way to try and answer research questions that are as significant, precise, and unambiguously operationalizable as possible, so as to aid in solving some actual problems that people confront in their social lives (see Dewey 1991a, 481–505; Kivinen and Piironen 2004, 2006, 2007, 2013).

So the starting point of social scientific inquiry is not idle wondering about the ultimate nature of social reality. Thus it would be quite ridiculous to presume that some specific realist philosopher's—for instance, Searle's (1995, 2010)—ontology is the one and only, absolutely necessary foundation for proper social scientific inquiry. Nor, as we said, do we need any relational ontology to tell us, for example, how deeply relational and/or flat and non-stratified the ultimate nature of social reality is; we need neither a 'deep' nor a 'flat' ontology of the social universe (cf. Archer 1995; Dépelteau 2015). An actual working social scientist could never get any fruitful work done if she were to begin with some ontological presumptions outlining the nature of that to be known. Rather, she simply begins with some problem that she has come across, and utilizes linguistic conceptualizations, numbers, and other symbol systems to get a grasp on what the problem is and where to start looking for some relevant connections between it and some other objects—formulating empirically answerable research questions that can be operationalized into specific research actions to be taken.

4 FINAL WORDS

Problems faced in action, then, are the starting point of inquiry. This should be obvious to a Darwinian thinker: the reason why any organism would engage in inquiry is that it faces some sort of problem in its actions. And for us human beings the methodology for solving such problems is particularly relational, as discussed herein, already because our most important tools of thought, language and other symbol systems, are relational. Meanings come from networks

of words used together in social action, are rooted in and thus related to the ways they are used. Another reason why research methodology must be relational is that it aims at providing plausible descriptions, and the appropriateness of any description cannot but be measured in action—by trying to use it or otherwise act in accordance with it amidst the causal pressures that the world throws at us and then evaluating the consequences of those actions. So the usefulness or uselessness of our beliefs and the conceptual tools we utilize in them, and thus the credibility of the results of our inquiries, are fundamentally relational to action. The issues and problems that social scientists, for instance, discuss and investigate—say, the equality or inequality between social groups—are comprehensible in the first place only as relational affairs; and that is how they need to be investigated.

Research work along the methodologically relationalist lines will also allow us to better understand the ways in which human consciousness has changed over the thousands of years of recorded history. The changes can be understood through the changes in our socio-cultural niches. Human minds have changed with the changing human organism–environment transactions. Those changes could not be explained chiefly in the Searlian inside-out direction, starting with the brain and individuals' cognitive apparatus; the human brain has not changed very much for the past 200,000 years, whereas consciousness has changed dramatically even over the past couple hundred years. We need the notion of evolutionary niche to explain this: consciousness, like the rest of humanity, is to be explained outside-in, grasping the most crucial relations between people and the most salient features of their relational socio-cultural environment.

NOTES

1. Nor have social scientists and humanists been satisfied with solutions that simply add, as Dawkins (2006, Ch. 11) famously did, to genes the supposedly analogical concept of memes to cover human culture, much in the same vein as genes explain biological life (see also Dennett 1995; Blackmore 1999; Aunger 2000). As, for instance, Daniel Dennett (1995) admits, although the notion of meme is in some ways analogical to gene—referring to phenotype-affecting, behavior-guiding information packages that are less than perfectly copied and more or less successful in terms of prevalence in some population—it is also different in important ways from genes and lacks much of the latter's scientific rigor—explanatory and predictive power, testability, and precise measurability (see pp. 352 ff.). Dennett believes that meme is still a philosophically valuable notion, allowing us to appreciate that ideas and other cultural traits need not be good to the people who carry them (or, say, true or ethically praiseworthy) in order to spread among them, but rather only need to be good at replicating (pp. 361–9). That the meme's-eye view does achieve, yes; but it is a far cry from what social scientists want—it does not offer them much methodological assistance.
2. Baldwin was an influential figure around the turn of the twentieth century, and Dewey did make a few references to his work—although, as Popp (2007, 107) notes, only as a social psychologist, not in evolution-theoretical connections.

3. For example, Norbert Elias's (1978) 'social figurations of people' may be seen as kinds of niches providing support and means of life, besides systems of meanings and standards for actions, for their members, all the while being affected and changed by the people who participate in them. There is this whole network of interdependencies connecting people to one another insofar as they are human beings at all—a network binding them together in figurations, creating niches of social life for each individual therein (see Kivinen and Piironen 2013).
4. Apprentice learning, of course, is 'learning by doing [-] ... in an environment seeded with informational resources' (Sterelny 2012a, 35), and is thus a very Deweyan notion too (see Dewey 1985), although Sterelny does not mention Dewey in this connection (or anywhere in his book).
5. The populations of early farmers did grow, to be sure, so from a narrow evolutionary standpoint, *Homo sapiens* as a species started doing very well. Obviously that is a separate matter from the well-being of human individuals. Along with the populations, the numbers of untimely deaths grew, too—an individual's life expectancy actually sank with agriculture (Harari 2015, Ch. 5; also Diamond 1987).
6. On the other hand, it is arguably important to keep in mind that such steps do not break (out from) the continuum of nature and niche construction—this is one part of the message that we get from both Ellis (2015) and Dewey (e.g. 1988b). There are no 'gaps' in natural developments; as long as there has been life on earth there has also been continuous niche construction, organisms and their populations changing the environment through their activities and thereby presenting themselves and other organisms with somewhat different environmental opportunities and obstacles. Indeed, as Ellis (2015) points out, even hunter-gatherers did in fact have considerable niche-constructing impacts upon their local environment, and the agricultural (or even the industrial) revolution should not be seen as something that separated human culture from the rest of nature so that it would affect the delicate 'balance' of nature as if from outside it. Still, of course, no one would deny that the revolutions in human technology have had noteworthy consequences and have very much changed the human condition and the planet we live on.
7. The search for such a single principle is a common undertaking among ontological social theorists; even relationalist realists have contributed to it. Some, including Archer (1995), would say that the key principle is emergence, allowing several levels of relational, causally powerful *sui generis* entities; others, such as Dépelteau (2015), have countered that the one basic principle of social ontology is that the relational social universe is flat; and still others, for example Emirbayer (1997) perhaps, might insist that the one fundamental principle is the process-like fluidity of social reality. But we are arguing that all such attempts to find the fundamental principle(s) of social ontology are equally futile and unnecessary.
8. As Dewey, too, saw it, language grew out of (social) action-related needs and then started to modify and redirect those needs; it thereby opened up a whole new world of possibilities (1983, 57), and, most crucially, created our peculiarly human mental life (1988b, Ch. 5).
9. More broadly, and put in more evolution-theoretical terms: as niche constructionism explains both the evolution of organic features and the development of the relevant environment with reference to organism–environment interplay, it

- leaves little room for any fundamental dualism between the two: ‘dichotomous thinking is undermined by niche construction’ (Laland et al. 2008, 553).
10. Pierre Bourdieu, for example, would also agree: any field of science can be understood as a relational space of positions, resources (sorts of capital), and opportunities that separates professionals from amateurs. The field incorporates sets of practices and the logic of those practices guides what people do (see e.g. Bourdieu 1977, 1988, 1992). Bourdieu also called himself a methodological relationalist (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 15 ff.), and his position certainly had some similarities with what we call methodological relationalism—although it was also in some ways different from it (see Kivinen and Piironen 2006, 315–20).
 11. The aim of inquiry, after all, is to determine, through rigorous testing, which opinions or beliefs (as habits of action) work the best, all things considered, to gain that pragmatic justification for them (see Peirce [1877] 1974, 5.358–87). ‘We may fancy that this is not enough for us, and that we seek, not merely an opinion, but a true opinion’, Peirce already remarked on the age-old realist dogma; but in fact ‘as soon as a firm belief is reached we are entirely satisfied ... The most that can be maintained is, that we seek for a belief that we shall *think* is true. But we think each one of our beliefs to be true, and, indeed, it is mere tautology to say so’ (Peirce 1974, 5.375, see also 5.416, 5.525, 5.572).

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Deleuze and Relational Sociology

Peter Lenco

For some Deleuze might seem like an unusual addition to a handbook on relational sociology, for what does a relatively obscure, extremely far-out philosopher much more associated with poststructuralism and postmodernism have to do with recent debates in sociology? One of the goals of this chapter will be to show that Deleuze has a lot to do with sociology in general, and the ongoing research into relational sociology in particular. At the outset there are two things that make understanding Deleuze's thought in the sociological context difficult. The first is that his philosophy is simply dense. He writes in the tradition of rather treacherous, jargon-laden professional philosophy that tends to dissuade outsiders (one commentator remarked that reading Deleuze was like eating dry, unbuttered toast). The second is that Deleuze has been a bit of a victim of his own success. His work has been around in the English-speaking humanities for several decades but was subsumed into the international academic milieu in a rather disjointed way. The books that he co-wrote with Félix Guattari, in particular *Anti-Oedipus* and *One Thousand Plateaus*, enjoyed considerable currency in the field of American literary criticism. This effectively meant that Deleuze's reception into the social sciences was part of an anti-explanatory research paradigm that found fertile ground in politics and international relations. Moreover, many of his solo works, especially key ones written in the 1960s, were not available in English until the 1990s. In short, there are a number of Deleuzes out there, but often the most predominant is the one deployed in anti-explanatory political studies. What I would like to draw on in this chapter is another Deleuze that is somewhat

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eclipsed by this popular Deleuze but much more relevant to sociology and the themes of this handbook in particular.

Although Deleuze's philosophy is difficult, it also has a beautiful simplicity that I will try to lay out in this chapter. I propose to show how Deleuze's thought suggests an approach to studying society that is in itself relational and can inform and differentiate between various strands of relational sociology. First, I will introduce Deleuze for readers who have little or no knowledge of him and his work. Second, I will elucidate the aspects of his philosophy that are relevant for relational sociology. Here I pay particular attention to Deleuze's notion of the fold, an overlooked but very robust entry point into what a Deleuzian relational sociology would look like. Third, I think it is important to focus some attention on method. It is one thing to talk about Deleuze's philosophy in the abstract and what that means for sociological theory; it is quite another to figure out just how we are supposed to go about doing sociology while adhering to the principles his philosophy expounds. The final section of this chapter will explore some other salient implications of the analysis below, specifically focusing on what Deleuze's thought can do for relational sociology.

As a philosopher Deleuze presents a holistic system. Although he is particularly interested in ontological and metaphysical questions, his thought encompasses the gamut of philosophical realms (ethics, logic, aesthetics, language, etc.) and beyond. In a way he offers a kind of super theory that contains the world and accounts for all the various perspectives and theories therein. It cannot be called reductionist, but Deleuze's thought is totalizing in its way. In this sense it is more like Luhmann than Foucault, and thus it is very hard to succinctly deal with his work in a relatively short chapter. So I will begin with a few general remarks. If one had to roughly categorize Deleuze's thought, it should be seen in the tradition of Spinoza and Whitehead as a philosophy of immanence. This simply asserts that there is a oneness to the world of which all of the parts and variations are aspects. There can be no other transcendent subject or object that stands apart from or outside of this whole. The trick, of course, is to explain the relation between the whole and the parts, or the All and the One, and this is what Deleuze spends the vast majority of his solo works investigating. The most important of these is *Difference and Repetition* (2004a), first published in 1968, which provides a basic statement of his ontological and metaphysical system. A second book, *The Logic of Sense* (2004b), published a year later, rather innovatively and evocatively explores what the system would look like in a number of "series" or more or less self-contained yet interrelated chapters.

Much more widely known are the two early books that he published with the French psychoanalyst Félix Guattari. The first of a two-volume set called *Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Anti-Oedipus* (1983) caused a stir among literary and activist circles, and the second, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), inspired a generation of anti-explanatory thinkers, as mentioned above. Whereas the first book attempted to dismantle the implications of a transcendent subject,

the second took a less sustained approach, and presents a series of deployments or “plateaus” that essentially bring Deleuze’s philosophy (and Guattari’s political activism) to a number of cases, ranging from horticulture to fascism. Although it is tempting to dismiss it as flippant social commentary and vague psychoanalytics, when read through the lens of his other, solo works, Deleuze’s partnership with Guattari—including the much later *What is Philosophy* (1994)—presents a powerful vision of Deleuze’s philosophy in action. Bookending this flourishing with Guattari in the 1970s are his books on other philosophers including Hume (1991), Spinoza (1992a), Bergson (1988a), Nietzsche (2005), Foucault (2006b) and Leibniz (2006a). It was perhaps his fresh take on Nietzsche, originally published in 1962, that was most inspiring to his contemporaries and earned the respect and friendship of, among others, Michel Foucault. What is interesting about these works, and is probably the only instance in the history of philosophy, is that far from a virtuosic “treatment” of the work of the title philosopher (Martin Heidegger’s four-part exegesis on Nietzsche comes to mind as an example of such a work), Deleuze prods, bends and twists each philosopher’s thought into his own ontology and corresponding metaphysics. The results, as he once remarked, are a number of monstrous offspring—the outcome of Deleuze’s intellectual buggary (see Deleuze 1995, 6). These works are not so much about their title philosophers—though there is a lot to be learned here, to be sure—but rather more like riffs of Deleuze’s philosophy as played on the instrument of the philosopher in question. Thus we have the Bergson series, the Nietzsche series, the Leibniz series and so on. It is perhaps this combination of sheer density (*Difference and Repetition*), whimsy (*The Logic of Sense*), activism (*Capitalism and Schizophrenia*) and unorthodoxy (his books on solo authors) that made his impact rather less spectacular than that of the other big Fancy French Philosophers such as Derrida and Foucault. In comparison with these other intellectual rock stars of that time (see Cusset 2003), his work, though sometimes invoked, is rarely explored in great detail.

This has all begun to change in the last decade or two as his work, now translated into English and other languages, seeps into the broader academy. There has been a wealth of books on politics and culture—too numerous to mention individually here—but also on many other diverse disciplines such as law (Braidotti et al. 2009; Lefebvre 2009), ecology (Herzogenrath 2009), technology (Poster and Savat 2009), design (Marenko and Brassett 2015) and music (Moisala et al. 2017). It must be said that sociologists have been hesitant to draw on Deleuze,¹ but there are some exceptions, notably the work of William Bogard and, largely via Gabriel Tarde, Sergio Tonkonoff. This connection through Tarde is more than warranted, as Deleuze lauds Tarde’s microsociology throughout his oeuvre. And though it must be said that Deleuze was not interested in sociology per se, he was deeply interested in sociological questions and in the nature of the social whole. One of the goals of this chapter is to show Deleuze’s poignant relevance for sociology, not only in terms of theory but also in terms of methodology.

1 THE ONTOLOGY OF FOLDS

Rather different from today's sociological debates, Deleuze's rebuke of contemporary approaches is, not surprisingly, made through a critique of Western philosophy. As I have already mentioned, Deleuze is a philosopher of immanence who seeks to account for the entire scope of phenomena (thoughts, actions, individuals—theories) as being parts of a whole. This is in clear counter-distinction to Platonic-based philosophy, on which the vast majority of Western thought—and hence sociology—is based in one way or another. Plato, one of Deleuze's early targets, has his ideational realm of images or models (τό εἶδωλον), most clearly described in his allegory of the cave. Unlike many of his predecessors (to which Deleuze is naturally sympathetic) such as Heraclitus, Plato posited this transcendent realm, a position which went on to inform early Christian philosophy and Scholasticism. The notion of the transcendent—something in but somehow apart from the world, such as God and, by extension, human subjectivities—figures prominently in Enlightenment thought and humanism, as well as in psychology and the vast majority of sociological approaches,² indeed of the social sciences in general.

Deleuze argues that this affection for the transcendent is underwritten by a fundamental flaw in Western metaphysics most clearly articulated in Aristotle, and this has to do with difference (2004a, 40). Difference seems to be rather a straightforward thing for most: Trees are different from people in so many ways, as are two species of tree (some are conifers, some are broad-leafed and so on). Importantly for Aristotle (and for us today) these things that denote differences (coniferous, broad-leafed), these differentia, have being, and it is herein that the problem lies. We generally fail to notice it, but this way of understanding differences does not apply to individuals. For example, one cannot entertain a differentia—tall, for example—that makes Barack more of a human than Donald. We simply allow individuals their own distinct “thisness”.³ But such a notion of difference is clearly impossible when we begin to talk about differences between very large groups. This is because, for Aristotle, the “largest” category or grouping to which all belong, the one which predicates all others, is Being. With mid-range differences—among plants and animals, for example—the differences are not part of the groups that they differentiate. That is, “sedentary” is not a member of the group “plants”; it differentiates them from animals. But as we work our way up to more generalizations, eventually we end up using the members to divide the groups, in a classic example of the barber in the regiment fallacy. This may seem like pretty tangential stuff—old logical puzzles that have little bearing on sociology—but Deleuze argues that it is precisely this inability to talk about difference that leads to error in our thought. What we have, in effect, is a problem, a fallacy, embedded deep within the fundamental notions of difference in Western thought—Deleuze calls it a “sleight of hand” (2004a, 41)—which plagues the social sciences to this day. Although for Deleuze there were efforts to overcome this defect, focusing on the very large (Hegel) and the very small

(Leibniz), in effect the trajectory of Western thought has merely papered over this defect with ever more baroque caveats, qualifications and models. To give a glimpse of what is to come in this chapter, in Deleuzian terms, relational sociology can be read as an effort to overcome this problem.

Thus any attempt to reduce, reify or even qualify is for Deleuze an attempt to introduce the transcendent in order to shoehorn this notion of difference into thought. Just to put this briefly into context, the structure–agency problem and the ontological inconsistencies it often implies is a consequence of this. In other words, sociology is driven to establish some explanandum, some foundation or causal significance that would explain the social phenomena, because of its bond to the transcendent principle that hinges on difference. Naturally there are exceptions. I have already mentioned Tarde, whom Deleuze sees as doing sociology “right”. But as will become clearer below, we would have to include Actor Network Theory and possibly Luhmann among the exceptions as well.⁴

Of course, the big question is if, in order to do sociology properly, we are not allowed to deploy these basic notions of difference, how can we talk about anything? Precisely how are all the phenomena in the world distinct from one another and yet at the same time immanent to a larger One-All? Deleuze’s solution to this problem is based on his ontological principle of univocity, that is, being said “in a single and same sense, of all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities” (2004a, 45). Without going into the philosophical (and ultimately theological) implications of this position,⁵ we can succinctly describe this position as insisting that there be no difference or hierarchy of being, wherein some things are “more” or “differently” than others. Thus God *is* just as humans *are*, anger *is* just as apples *are* and so on. This does not imply that these elements are undifferentiated or the same, but rather that they have the same ontological standing. Now, whereas some philosophers (and sociologists) have sought distinct differences—inherited from Descartes’s clear and distinct (1993, 70)—among elements or objects, Deleuze insists on difference that does not separate entities into fixed groups or units with characteristics and inherent qualities (essences). For Deleuze, what we generally call difference arises from processes, processes driven by differences differentiating.

What makes his thought interesting and particularly productive for sociology is the metaphysical tableau he devises to drive this differentiation. Rather than the (social) world consisting of a bunch of stuff or things to which are variously attributed causes, patterns, structures and individual wills, Deleuze posits a world with two poles or aspects, the virtual and the actual. These are not separate realms or dimensions; everything in the world, what is real, is at once both virtual and actual. It is as if everything is a double, with one half in the virtual and the other in the actual (2004a, 260–1). The virtual half is qualitative and intensive, while the actual half is quantitative and extensive. In the virtual, elements in relation—or what Deleuze calls a series—form systems (intensive spatia) that interact through differentials or intensive quantities. This interaction, unlike numerical or metricized relations, is a purely

immanent difference, what Deleuze calls differentiation. In effect what Deleuze is calling for here is difference that does not rest in some other concept or difference from something else. For Deleuze, “difference must be articulation and connection in itself, it must relate different to different without any mediation whatsoever by the identical, the similar, the analogous or the opposed” (2004a, 143).

Although Deleuze does describe virtual intensities as those which cannot divide without changing their nature (the feeling of love, for example, can be seen in this sense to be intensive), he does insist on the quantitative nature of intensities. This is particularly relevant to relational sociology because it allows for a system and corresponding analytic of pure relation. If we take any two points in a series, $A-A^1$, for example, the first term, A , is defined in reference to another series, $a-a^1$, in which a refers to $\alpha-\alpha^1$, and so on. This enveloping takes place in both directions, where $A-A^1$ is a subseries of (is enveloped by) another term. In sum this makes for an infinitely enveloped/enveloping spatium of intensive differences. The “enveloped distances” account for the quantitative nature of intensive relations, which as such are always different from themselves and so leave a remainder (2004a, 298). These remainders resonate with other series leading to new intensive quantities. At this point the space of the system becomes populated by what Deleuze calls “larval subjects” and “passive selves” (2004a, 144). These are the proto selves which are actualized or differentiated into the extensive quantities or states of affairs.⁶ Thus in the virtual we have a metaphysics (or description of a total system) which is principally based on pure relation. At this point there are no furnishings, objects or subjects; indeed, the latter are the result of the connection of intensive differences. They are the actualizations (or differentiations) of the virtual.

It is important to emphasize that the actual does not resemble the virtual in any way. The process of actualization describes the movement from qualitative or true difference (differentiation) to the quantitative difference of species and parts (differentiation). But again, it is not as if these actualizations, these states of affairs, can be solely actual; the virtual half is always present. Or, in other words, everything is always still caught up in virtual movements. Thus the shifts in states of affairs, that is, the relationships among quantifiable entities, do not transmutate directly from one actual to another, but rather morph according to what Deleuze sometimes calls their counteractualization, wherein an entity’s virtuality is further differentiated and subsequently actualized. This accounts for the often chaotic and non-linear nature of the world, both material and social, and in effect defuses a potential determinism that might lurk in Deleuze’s system. As for actual individuals—that is, discrete, extended, differentiated individuals—they are the products of the concentration, accumulation and “coincidence of a number of converging preindividual singularities” (Deleuze 2006a, 72). So although in Deleuze’s metaphysics there are such things as individuals, they are not pre-given or transcendent entities (part of the world but somehow apart from it) but rather the result of quasi-causes (see

2004b) or intensive processes of the virtual. As for the precise nature of these subject-systems or converging singularities, here Deleuze shows the rigor and consistency of his immanent system, from which there can be no above, outside or exterior. In a subtle move, Deleuze posits the fold, or the folding of the outside to make an inside.

For Deleuze the stuff of the world, things, are the result or the actualization of the communications between intensities—this infinite architecture of enveloped and enveloping. In a rather ignored but extremely significant book entitled *The Fold*, Deleuze explores this matter-relationship as the baroque/Leibnizian notion of the fold. According to Deleuze–Leibniz the world is an infinite series of virtual foldings, like caverns within caverns (2006a, 6), which are unfolded in actual extensities. This highlights the processual nature of the world—both physical and social—for Deleuze. Things are not just units in action or undergoing processes (erosion, photosynthesis, social conflict), but are the result of this infinite folding wherein the smallest unit is not the point, but the fold itself. What Deleuze incites us to focus on, then, is not the apparent characteristics of the world, but the manner in which series are folded (virtually) and unfolded (actually), or in other words the relations between series and their effects. In this sense Deleuze’s schema does away with any kind of units with interiority/transcendence and is purely relational.

The fold is a way of arriving at an inside using only a pure, undifferentiated outside, “as if the ship were a folding of the sea.” Within such a system of folds there is no such thing as the primitive interior because

the double is never a projection of the interior: on the contrary, it is an interiorization of the outside ... It resembles exactly the invagination of a tissue in embryology, or the act of doubling in sewing: twist, fold, stop, and so on. (2006b, 81)

In sum, Deleuze insists on a distinction between the virtual and the actual that effectively splits the continuum of the real into two modes or aspects (2004a, 260ff.) where folding takes place among virtual, differential relations. Actual, discrete entities (such as political subjects, me, you) are the actual projections, the actual halves of these virtual foldings. It is important to be clear on the physical nature of reality itself. Observers of the real, including sociologists, see the world furnished and peopled with all manner of things and individuals, as well as intangible phenomena such as social groups, organizations and the like. Deleuze, following Spinoza and in many ways analogous to Foucault, sees the world as a mixture of substance and incorporeal flux. The former are physical things with properties (hardness); the latter are not physical or natural but logical attributes (2004b, 7). Substance is the flow of matter that receives its attributes from the incorporeal flux. Determining the latter, of course, are the resonating virtual intensities. Thus Deleuze never has to account for or explain an entity or individual—they are all emergent properties of a single substance. The world of incorporeal bodies is folded within itself, only to be unfolded as the entities and fixtures that make up the world, including social phenomena.

As for an account of the individual human subjects on which most of Modern or humanistic sociology is founded, Deleuze borrows Leibniz's notion of the monad as that which actualizes the virtual (2006a, 90). Significantly, and rather ironically given the discussion below, in the critical literature dealing with individual actors the monad is commonly used to refer to a subject that is self-contained or complete within the world, or in other words bounded, autonomous and generally sovereign and separate.⁷ But although Leibniz does present the monad as the self-contained entity that has no parts (1898, 217–8), Leibniz and Deleuze clearly point out that it is not at all separate from the world—in fact, crucially, the very opposite is the case. What Deleuze's Leibniz makes clear through the double usage of the fold and the monad is that this moment of perception called the monad is in fact the only guarantor of a consistent philosophy of immanence that precludes the very “bounded” subject that is the focus of so much radical critique. In the monad, Deleuze sees the ultimate expression of the principle of immanence that provides a coherent account of the relationship between the All of the world on the one hand, and the discrete, extensive individual or One (what we generally call the actor-agent, or subject) on the other. The monad's relation to the infinite is found in the way that it is always between the fold—again: a cave within a cave or a fold of the sea. The process that ends in an actualized extensity begins when certain ideal Events are condensed into a monad. These Events are the monad's clear zone of expression, which in turn are actualized into a body which is said to “belong” to the monad as its final cause (see Deleuze 2006a, 98). According to this schema consciousness is rather easily explained as those monads with memory. Deleuze here is drawing on Leibniz's distinction between three kinds of monads: perceptive (plants), sensory (animals) and thinking (humans—and angels). For Leibniz, the term monad should apply to “simple substances which have perception only, and that the name of Souls should be given only to those in which perception is more distinct, and is accompanied by memory” (1898, 230). It is the actualization of this soul that we normally refer to as the subject. Thus,

We go from the world to the subject, at the cost of a torsion that causes the monad to exist in the actual [*actuellement*] only in subjects, but that also makes subjects all relate to this world, like to the virtuality that they actualize ... The world must be placed in the subject in order that the subject can be for the world. This is the torsion that constitutes the fold of the world and of the soul. And it is what gives to expression its fundamental character: the soul is the expression of the world (actuality), but because the world is the expressed of the soul (virtuality). (Deleuze 2006a, 28)⁸

But although the world is expressed in the monad, it is not expressed in its entirety. According to the discussion of enveloping/enveloped in *Difference and Repetition* (2004a, 314–7), it is only the enveloped series that are expressed clearly, in this case in terms of a segment or a point of view which corresponds

to the individual that is differentiated into an actual state of affairs. The monad for Deleuze–Leibniz is bound up in the world and expresses it from a particular point of view, that is, a specific segment of it. If, as we noted above, the world consists of an infinite number of folds, each soul must be located in the space between two folds, at once being folded into (or enveloped by) the world, and at the same time folding the world within it (or enveloping it). In this way the continuum between the One and the multiple—and Deleuze’s truly immanent metaphysics—is preserved. As Deleuze puts it, “The world is an infinite series of curvatures or inflections, and the entire world is enclosed in the soul from one point of view” (2006a, 26). Through this process the soul or subject is what becomes actual, not the entire world at once. In terms of a subject, this fold within the fold, when taken to the limit, is incommensurable with other Modern variations of subjectivity. As Badiou notes, “Deleuze is searching for a figure of interiority (or of the subject) that is neither reflection (of the cogito), nor the relation-to, the focus (of intentionality), nor the pure empty point (of eclipse). Neither Descartes, nor Husserl, nor Lacan” (1994, 61). In other words, it is because the world is infinite that I am connected to the world; I envelop the entire world, and the world envelops me in the virtual sense.

Thus we can see that an examination of the subject sheds considerable light on Deleuze’s philosophy as it pertains to sociology in general. Individual subjects or those human beings that we so often take to be autonomous and active are, according to Deleuze, the result or actualization of virtual, differential relations. These monads contain the entire world but express only a certain, particular point of view.⁹ Human subjects obviously have materiality or extension, but they are not the originators of action. They are the result (unfoldings) of virtual foldings. As such, we can now see that the distinction between systems and individuals breaks down. All unfoldings or actualizations, be they cultures, political systems, animal species or singular human beings, are the result of the virtual intensities of foldings. Thus just like there can be no workable, fixed model of a sociological notion such as the family, singular human beings are also systems, with their roamings, slides, moments of sedentariness and lines of flight, which is why Deleuze sometimes refers to people as “dividuals” (1992b, 5). Singular, extensive human beings function like any other system plus memory. This effectively sidesteps the whole structure–agency paradox/debate and in the context of the current discussion exposes no small amount of cultural and ideological leanings when it comes to retaining the autonomous, bounded subject as a central feature of sociological thought, as will be further discussed below.

A valid and pressing question given the above sketch, but one that rarely comes up in the Deleuze literature, is: How do we go about doing sociology according to Deleuze’s thought? In this virtual–actual schema, how can we understand physical and mental objects as well as temporal distinctions—the “discrete things” as mentioned above—and how can we explain their becomings? How can we explain group behavior, for example? In short, how could

one actually study social phenomena? One of Deleuze's (and Guattari's, in this case) best tools for understanding material and ideational artefacts is the notion of assemblage (*agencement*, not *assemblage*). Put succinctly, an assemblage consists of the morphogenic processes which account for an existing state of affairs.¹⁰ Here Deleuze draws on Foucault. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002) Foucault proffers two forms of historical emergence: content and expression—two terms borrowed from Louis Hjelmslev (see 1969). These things (the visible) and words (the sayable) are in reciprocal presupposition and, according to Deleuze, perhaps receive their clearest treatment by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1977). What distinguishes an assemblage from Foucault's work on dispositifs, however, is the addition of the virtual–actual axis, which functions to join the visible and the sayable and accounts for movement and change within the system. Thus forms of content engender forms of expression, which in turn become new forms of content in increasingly fixed or stratified states of affairs (actualized institutions and identities), and at the same time are open to evolution, change and influences (that is, virtual relations) from what Foucault calls “neighbouring practices” (2002, 211), but Deleuze would insist are virtual series in communication or folds. Thus the assemblage straddles Deleuze's two-poled metaphysics, relating the relative movement between the virtual and the actual through mutually implicating forms of content and forms of expression. Not only does this avoid any dualism, but it also lends a propelling dynamic to understandings of emergence and change that are not based on any transcendent principle such as individual will or *sui generis* social structures or relations. To put it another way, all things are actualized (from virtual to actual) and counteractualized (from actual to virtual) according to varying forms of content and forms of expression. One real service the virtual–actual renders here is to overcome the limits of linear, path-dependent change and even more importantly, to resist determinism—as if through examining the elements of an assemblage we could determine their future constellations. Although to be sure there often appears to be continuity (although in contemporary networked society this seems to be less and less the case), the notion of the virtual allows for the new to enter the system, which can explain true, spontaneous change.

What in effect sociology investigates are the incorporeal changes in substance. Thus, although there may certainly be what sociologists would call structural effects, these cannot be structurally deterministic. Likewise, although assemblage theory allows for individual volition, the cause does not originate within an autonomous subjectivity. In other words, assemblage theory can seek the “causes”—or what Deleuze refers to as quasi-causes (2004b)—but they are not normal, natural or necessary. The full palette of sociological explanation is available, but it is as variable as the phenomena are mobile. Because of this there is no one-size-fits-all assemblage theory; just how an assemblage is formed must be determined on a case-by-case basis. To take a brief example, previous research of mine examines how ordinary (*lao bai xing*)

Chinese arrive at housing arrangements among various degrees of forced evictions to make way for urban planning and expansion. It is very tempting to rely on—and many sociologists do—Western-developed theories of civil society and resistance to analyze these shifts. And whereas a relational sociology might tend to look at the relations (friendships, reciprocities, institutional arrangements) between the actors (inhabitants, authorities, police, community leaders), assemblage theory sees the (in)dividuals, the flow and flux of building materials, the perceptions and the social values and relations as forming part of a system. Again, this admits no causal significance in any social structure, agency or relation, but rather all are the effects of virtual relations that are expressed in the built environment and the use of and speech about them (their incorporeal bodies).

2 DELEUZE'S RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY

The main focus for the rest of the chapter will be to see to what extent Deleuze could be said to be a relational thinker and so support a relational sociology, and what his philosophy does to provide a deeper understanding of relational sociology and the debates surrounding it. As to the former focus, the above evidence supports the position that Deleuze is a relational thinker par excellence. Because of his emphasis on differing differences (differentiation) and enveloping/enveloped or folding, the primary focus in investigating the world is pure relation. The elegant notion that the more “fixed” states of affairs that we observe and live are the results of intensive communications allows for both chaos and emergence as well as stratification and capture, but again what we call units or individuals are always the results, not the causes. This implies a sociology of pure, mobile relation, a calculus of thought without foundation or ground. It is a world of flux wherein mobile relations relate to mobile relations *ad infinitum*.

It seems to me that a central value of Deleuze for relational sociology is the focus on ontology that his work clearly lends. What is described above is probably quite radical for most sociologists trained in the sociology traditions of the twentieth century. As for relational sociology, to a considerable degree it has been an attempt to walk a fine line between methodological individualism and holism (Donati 2006), without succumbing to the bugbear of intentionality (Donati 2010). But this last was precisely what Deleuze was in no small way reacting against in twentieth-century philosophy: the intentionality of phenomenology (see Badiou 1997, 21; Schrift 2000, 151). Although we have only briefly touched on the role of the subject in a relational sociology, at minimum we can say that Deleuze's relational sociology solves, or at least clearly defines, the problem of the individual. As is clear from above, individuals are the effects of intensive relations in the virtual. We could call this strong relational sociology: a sociology of folds, an origami-sociology.

We can see what an ontology of folds and infinite envelopedness means practically for relational sociology by considering an illustrative example provided by Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987, 352–3). It illustrates the implications of the virtual–actual split for actually doing sociology. Crucial here is the notion of illustrative. Nowhere do Deleuze and Guattari claim that this shows the difference between the virtual and the actual. However, the following outlines the contours of what a sociology of pure relation might look like. The example concerns two board games, chess and Go.¹¹ The former is defined by structural rules governing distinct and finite pieces (one only has so many pawns, knights and so on) that have inherent characteristics or capabilities. Indeed, they have these characteristics abstractly, even when they are not in play. The strategy of chess is linear—to capture the king. Moreover the nature of the pieces makes the relatively small board a bounded, finite surface. In Go, in contrast, the stones are functionally the same—they have no inherent characteristics. The character that they take during play is derived solely from their relations to other stones. When they are not at play, sitting in their little jars, they really have no characteristics at all. The strategy is fluid and highly intuitive: one must develop relations among one’s stones in such a way as to block and surround the opponent—to create space. And while a Go board is also technically finite, the relational nature of the stones makes the entire playing surface much more relative and thus infinite in a sense. Now Go stones are not exactly folds, as Deleuze would have the smallest point be, but understanding how Go works and how it is different from chess is a close approximation of what a sociology of difference, the infinitesimal and the relational might look like. Although a relational sociology would seek to understand phenomena through the relations among the pieces and not in the chess pieces themselves, Go provides a clue as to how it would be possible to think a social world of pure relations. A more Go-inspired relational sociology would disavow any reliance on pre-given entities, focusing rather on the relational, often chaotic, aspects that in fact constitute fluid, purely relational characteristics.

Dépelteau stakes out one of the fundamental questions in relational sociology as the ontological one:¹²

What are social phenomena made of? Do we analyze how relations determine the individuals (RS as another version of social determinism), how social structures interact with agency (RS as another version of co-determinism), or how interdependent actors make various and fluid social processes (RS as a ‘deep’, transactional sociology)? (2015, 47)

What is handy in Deleuze is that his immanent philosophy resists or sidesteps all three of these options. He is none of the above. And as such Deleuze’s philosophy encompasses, can account for and thus allows for all three: a simple monism. This is not being wishy-washy; this is saying that patterns, apparatuses of capture or social structures do have ontic reality, in no way different from

the (in)dividuals that can, by collision, by speeds and slowness, be a part of an assemblage that dramatically changes a structure. And as for the question of what we should study if nothing is ontologically prior to anything else, it is clear that we must focus on the only thing there is apart from substance: the processes, the flows, the lines of flight, the territory that is created, the subjectivations that are actualized. This means relations themselves. Deleuze calls this starting in the middle (see 1995, 86). He argues that not doing this is another philosophy of categories that falls into the same fallacy of difference that has haunted Western philosophy—and so also sociology—since its beginning. This puts his philosophy far closer to Emirbayer’s shot over the bow of relational sociology, which argues for what some call a transactional kind of relational sociology, wherein the units “derive their meaning, significance, and identity from the (changing) functional roles they play within that transaction.” This for Emirbayer is relational. There is no existence independent of relation. From the perspective of Deleuze’s philosophy, we can call it transactional if we like, but actually it does not go far enough to attain Deleuze’s pure immanence, since there is still this undefined “they” of “their meaning” (Emirbayer 1997, 286–7). For Deleuze there is no meaning (although there is sense); the “they” itself is derived from pure relations.

If Emirbayer is the transactional extreme of relational sociology—dismissed as postmodernism by Donati (2015)—then Deleuze is even more extreme. But this does not render him beyond usefulness. On the contrary, his rigorous ontology suggests an equally rigorous method. Indeed, Donati is deeply concerned about the pitfalls of Emirbayer being “clearly caught up in full relativism” (2010, 3). Here, Deleuze comes stalwartly to Emirbayer’s aid, arguing that we have nothing to fear (or be ashamed of!) with full relativism. We only need a rigorous ontology analogous to a new calculus of thought capable of differentials in order to master it. The problem that holds us back for Deleuze is exactly the opposite: a sociology with the philosophical foundation rooted in a ground or a foundation that can ultimately only be a philosophy of categories, incapable of thinking the virtual. Donati’s “*sui generis* reality”, which he calls “the order of relations” (2010, xvi), is opposed to Deleuze’s univocity. Likewise it seems clear that Archer’s critical realism, although positing an independent realm of relation (although this suffers from the same ontological difficulty as Donati above), is not ready to jettison the transcendental subject (2010). Evidently the philosophy of sociology is not a contest for who can develop the most ontologically immanent account of relational sociology. Deleuze, however, can clarify many of the claims made by various proponents and critics of relational sociology. In Deleuze’s radical monism, there is no ontological difference between actualized elements and their virtual series (intensities, pre-singularities). His is truly a flat ontology.

To be sure, even a “weak” relational sociology wherein relations are given logical, analytic and methodological (but not ontological) priority would be, following Deleuze, preferable to a sociology that grants causal significance to either *sui generis* social structures on the one hand, or autonomous individuals

on the other—or worse, both. These clearly only deal with actual states of affairs, and we see this reflected in scientific experimental controls, from physics to psychology to international relations, that strive to block or resist the indeterminate and chaotic nature of the virtual. This fixation on actuals—steady states, (eternal) laws, essential characteristics, holism and individualism—Deleuze sometimes calls the transcendental illusion: our inability to think the virtual. But nevertheless any relational sociology such as Donati’s and Archer’s that maintains the *sui generis* nature of relations and, perhaps more problematically, simultaneously the full, Modern, autonomous subject, must also be a philosophy of categories, one wedded to the transcendental illusion. Although seldom stated, there are many reasons why such a relational sociology, for Deleuze, must hold on to the transcendental subject. In *Difference and Repetition* he calls them good sense and common sense (2004a, 42, 169, 284), but for the purposes of this chapter they constitute a kind of knowing, a kind of sociology that cannot break from its Modern, Enlightenment (and ultimately Platonic) roots.¹³ In many ways this has become an ideological bent for individualism. The point is that there is nothing to fear from Deleuze’s subjectless subjectivities. It is not such a bitter pill to swallow. It denies none of the feeling, sanctity or uniqueness of human-ness. It only denies the transcendent nature of human subjectivity: that individuals are in the world but somehow apart from it. Moreover, the centrality of the individual and the impossibility of doing social science without it is a relatively recent and culturally specific phenomenon. Even the heroes of the putative roots of Western civilization, of Homer, were not understood as being bounded and autonomous (Hirst and Woolley 1982, 133). By adopting a purely relational subject we merely need to rethink some of our institutions.¹⁴ It may be difficult, it may even seem utopian, but it is certainly not beyond the horizon of sociological thought based on a rigorous immanent ontology.

What is certain is that in recent decades there has been a desire for a firm and rigorous justification of a strong relational sociology, and Deleuze can provide that. We can see this in Tonkonoff’s *New Social Physics*. Here we see a Tarde deployment that expresses quite nicely the kinds of sociology Deleuze implies. We have a science that “instead of starting by analyzing the actual structure of social objects... should start by reconstructing the diverse ways in which these structures are produced (that is what Tarde calls polygenesis)”. This is a sociology of process, of emergence—not one that accepts that there is some thing called society (2013, 271). It is sociology as cartography, and perfectly Deleuzian:

to characterize any social system we have to identify the specific manner in which its elements have been articulated or disposed.... In addition, we must describe its internal morphology, the direction of its flows, its degrees of intensity (rises and drops), the positive or negative nature of its charges, as well as the inputs and outputs (regular or irregular) that nourish its economy, and its relations with other ensembles. This has to be done every time, for each social ensemble studied, for they are culturally, historically, and locally embedded. (2013, 276)

We see similar overlap with Actor Network Theory. Although based on Deleuze only lightly or indirectly (through studies of Whitehead perhaps), it maps on quite nicely, and poses no obvious or at least certainly no unsurmountable contradiction. The goal, as stated by its most notable proponent, Latour, is to purge “agency, structure, psyche, time and space along with every other philosophical and anthropological category, no matter how deeply rooted in common sense they may appear to be” (2005, 24). And when seeking the impulse, the newness, the causal significance, Latour turns to pure action or very Deleuze-esque events: “For the social sciences to regain their initial energy, it’s crucial not to conflate all the agencies overtaking the action into some kind of agency—‘society’, ‘culture’, ‘structure’, ‘fields’, ‘individuals’, or whatever name they are given—that would itself be social. Action should remain a surprise, a mediation, an event” (2005, 45). And so on, with actors being a moving target of an array of forces (46), as well as seeing matter as an ontologically equal part of an emergent social world (76).

Looking at the work of Emirbayer, Tonkonoff and Latour—and there are many others—we can detect a broader will in sociology to move beyond philosophies of categories and transcendentals, but it seems the tools are only now being developed. Deleuze’s thought as outlined above can help shape and hone these tools. He offers a rigorous philosophical justification for relational sociology deeply embedded in a powerful, consistent and sustained critique of the Western philosophical tradition that forms the foundation of sociology, even if it is only rarely acknowledged. In my own research I have tried to show how with some development and extrapolation Deleuze’s philosophy alone suggests a canny theoretical and methodological system in its own right. In any case, one useful aspect of Deleuze’s philosophy for relational sociology is that it can help us assess and map the various relational sociologies, from the transcendent to the transactional to the completely relational fold.

NOTES

1. Possibly with good reason. As hinted above, a great deal of Deleuzian commentary has been vague at best.
2. I say vast majority because there are considerable parallels and overlaps with non-transcendent sociology which I will address below.
3. From one perspective this acceptance is the root of the perennial and massively problematic agent–structure problem.
4. As yet there is no sustained research program on Deleuze and Luhmann. My suspicion is that Deleuze would reject Luhmann on a number of grounds (and vice versa), not least for the latter’s notion of emergence.
5. The best source on the significance of univocity in Deleuze is Widder (2001); or see my own *Deleuze and World Politics* (2012, 52ff.).
6. Readers may well wonder what precisely causes or enacts these resonances, and with good reason. The bulk of *Difference and Repetition* can be seen as a rather long-winded answer to this query. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore this question, but we will simply say that the mechanics rest on what is

- sometimes called the dark precursor in much of the Deleuze-complexity literature, but what Deleuze more commonly (and usefully, it seems to me) refers to as the Event, which should be read much more in the spirit of Nietzsche's eternal return or Bergson's *élan vital* as opposed to simply "things happening".
7. We find this everywhere, from Marx (1978, 42) to Wendt (2010, 297).
 8. Translation altered—compare with Deleuze (1988b, 26–7). Here Conley translates *actuellement* as "currently", which pays no heed to the crucial role of the actual in other works, especially *Difference and Repetition*. My view is that Conley's translation hampers the utility of *The Fold*.
 9. Widder (2012) makes productive use of the notion of perspectives in this sense.
 10. Rather than allowing names to designate "things" such as bicycles, computers and workers' associations, Deleuze and Guattari call them abstract machines, that is, that which designates the assemblage (1987, 70). For specific "individuals", Deleuze and Guattari use conceptual personae to designate that particular assemblage, such as the Lenin abstract machine (1987, 100). See also *What is Philosophy?* (1994, 61ff.). Thus like all "dividuals", great historical figures do not at all intervene in history, but are rather the names given to the assemblage: the Trump abstract machine!
 11. Known in the West by the short form of its Japanese name, *igo*. In Chinese, 圍棋 (*wéi qí*); Korean, *paduk*.
 12. Deleuze would probably rephrase this question somewhat. For him ontology is properly the philosophy of Being, not of beings. As for what social phenomena are made of, this is an ontic or, slightly more technically, metaphysical question.
 13. Deleuze also calls this representational thought, and it also would have been possible to write this chapter through this lens.
 14. For example, this rigorously supports an alternate view of justice and guilt: Hirst and Wooley claim that we need not get rid of the foundations of Western law and society (contract, obligation, responsibly, fault, guilt) just by denying the sovereign subject. "These categories do not depend on individuals being in some inherent, ontological sense responsible or guilty, but they do require that conduct is attributable to individuals, not as its origin but as its locus" (1982, 131).

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Triangular Relations

Michel Serres on Parasites, Angels, Quasi-Objects, and the Virtual

Olli Pyyhtinen

The French philosopher Michel Serres (b. 1930) is a polymath and intellectual crossbreed whose remarkably rich oeuvre—consisting of more than 60 books—moves across various fields of knowledge, spheres of culture, and historical eras, tracing their connections, mediations, and common structures. In Serres’s work, mathematics, physics, biology, philosophy, literature, fables, myths, fairy tales, visual arts, music, architecture, and religion form a heterogeneous network, of which his writings eloquently draw a mutable and turbulent navigational map. His thought therefore amounts to a kind of philosophical geography or navigation (this is perhaps not coincidental with the fact that Serres was first trained as a sailor), which both maps and forges new and undiscovered paths between science, philosophy, and culture. Such an undertaking of course cannot but fathom knowledge as topological. Serres’s work is suggestive of the importance of not being fixed in one place or confined within one field of knowledge, for in such a case one’s vision remains hopelessly limited and narrow. In order to know and draw a synthesis, one needs to set sail, navigate along passages, let oneself be led by fluctuations, and invent new routes.

Serres himself has sorted his writings into roughly three thematic groups (see Serres 1993b). First, there are writings that deal with the themes of foundations and balance (e.g. Serres 1993a, [1983] 2015a, [1987] 2015b), and second, those that concern themselves with energy and change (Serres 1975, [1977] 2001b). To the third group belong writings examining communication and the related themes of messages, transmission, messengers, and noise (Serres 1969,

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1972, 1974, 1977, 1980, 1993b, [1980] 2007). In recent years, Serres has also written about evolution and the anthropocene (e.g. Serres 2001b, 2014), the era of the human, by which he refers to how we have become masters of the earth and how humanity is a physical variable literally weighing on the earth (Serres [1990] 1995b). In this text, I focus especially on Serres's work on communication, for it offers a key to his understanding of relations.

The mode of abstraction peculiar to Serres's work is to follow relations and to move from place to place (Serres and Latour 1995, pp. 103–4). Instead of 'starting from some *thing* or some *operation*', Serres sets as his aim 'to paint a sort of fluctuating picture of relations and rapports' (ibid., pp. 104, 105). Whereas philosophy speaks traditionally in substantives and verbs, in his work Serres focuses on and operates with various kinds of relations, each expressed by a unique preposition: 'across', 'between', 'with', 'beside'... According to him, prepositions indicate relations that precede any fixed positions, and in this sense they are, literally, *pre*-positions (Serres and Latour 1995, p. 105): 'Relations spawn objects, beings and acts, not vice versa' (ibid., p. 107). At the same time, however, the prefix *pre*- can also be understood as referring to how relations are to some extent pre-settled, taking place in at least partly pre-given settings instead of each time beginning entirely from scratch. Prepositions are the 'precursors of every presence.... In fact, dare I say it, the *pré-posés* are there even before the fact of being there' (Serres 1995a, pp. 145–6). By laying emphasis on connectors and by inflecting nouns and verbs, prepositions indicate a way out of substantialism. Whereas nouns refer to things in a state of rest—usually '[o]ur languages', as Norbert Elias (1978, p. 112) points out, 'tend to express all change and actions by means of an attribute or a verb, or at least as something additional rather than integral'—prepositions, by contrast, name a relation.

Besides his mode of abstraction which relies on prepositions, Serres's work has a lot to offer for relational thought also with regard to its particular manner of conceiving and treating relations. I will begin by examining Serres's conception of communication, since it is largely in terms of communication that Serres considers all relations. According to him, all communication needs a channel. The channel not only transmits what it mediates but also transforms it. This suggests that what lies in-between has significance for both what is mediated and for the relata, and therefore, while relations are typically considered in dyadic terms, as relations between-two, Serres fathoms relations as *triangular* constellations consisting of three elements. For Serres, a relation between three is the basic model of relation and at the same time the elementary unit of the network; all relations—and in fact all entities, for that matter—consist of at least three elements. The triangular model lays special emphasis on the figure of the 'third'. Serres's main concept of naming the third is the *parasite*. The parasite is someone or something in-between, in the position of the third, interfering and intervening. Serres's treatment of the parasite interestingly suggests that interruption and disturbance are integral to every order, system, and relation, even though their exclusion is a precondition of the proper functioning of the latter. After discussing the

parasite I will explore the question of neutral mediation or transmission. While the parasite is an intermediary that intervenes and disturbs, Serres examines the angels appearing in religious myths as transparent and faithful messengers. What is more, astonishingly, according to Serres the figure of the angel also provides us a key to understand our contemporary communication networks. From there I will move to another key Serresian term, that of the *quasi-object*. Like the parasite and the angel, it, too, appears in the position of the third. For Serres, quasi-objects are things, objects, or materials which receive their meanings and properties in relations among humans. Human collectivities, for their part, are constituted in the movements of these quasi-objects circulating between subjects. After that I will discuss Serres's musings on the virtual and digital communication networks. Finally, by way of conclusion, I will contextualize Serres's work in relation to the so-called philosophy of difference as well as sum up what his triangular model of relations has to offer for relational sociology.

I COMMUNICATION AND SYSTEM

For Serres, who earned his first degree in mathematics, philosophy amounts to mathematics with other means in fields where mathematics as such does not work. In mathematics he appreciates how it combines rigorous truth with beauty—with elegant, dazzling, and lucid demonstrations ridiculing the slowness usually particular to philosophy (Serres and Latour 1995, p. 7, 68). To some extent, Serres's own way of thinking shares with mathematical thought the speed that is characteristic of it. When mapping relations and passages Serres often proceeds by taking shortcuts and without always describing in detail all the intermediate steps he has taken. Mathematics serves him as a model of thought in other respects as well. For example, the comparative structuralism of Serres's early work examining the shared structures and systems in operation in various texts has its background in mathematics. In addition, Serres's manner of conceptualizing history and space alike relies substantially on topology. Instead of considering history in linear terms, he understands it in terms of turbulence and folds: every single moment in time is a collection of various temporalities and therefore contains different pockets and sediments of time. In the book *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, Serres illustrates this by reciting a true story of a mountain guide who had died in the Alps in an accident (Serres and Latour 1995, p. 61). His body was discovered more than a half-century later, and therefore his sons, in their seventies, were gathered at the funeral to grieve their still young father, whose body had not aged a bit after he had died at the age of 30 or less, for it had been perfectly preserved by the glacier. As for space, Serres does not understand it in terms of stable and well-defined measurable distances but as a fluid network consisting in and of relations. Take for example a handkerchief. If you spread it out, you can see and measure certain fixed distances and nearby points, but if you fold or crumple it instead, two previously distant points may suddenly be close or even superimposed. And, further, if you tear the handkerchief these points can become very far apart (Serres and Latour 1995, p. 60).

In his work, Serres refutes the framework of clear-cut solids and substances, and operates with fluids and fluctuations. Instead of perceiving reality as stable and ordered, he commences from the idea that chaos and disorder are more originary and elementary than order; forms emerge from chaos and multiplicity (Serres [1982] 1995c). Order is thus not the pre-given state of things but an exception. Like the atomism of Lucretius, which Serres treats in the book *The Birth of Physics* ([1977] 2001a), he takes turbulence, vortex, flows, and deviation from equilibrium as his general model. Related to this, in *Atlas* (Serres 1994, pp. 112–13) Serres suggests that the fluid, unstable, and chaotic weather provides for philosophy a much stronger and more refined model than architecture, which builds permanent, solid, and heavy structures, clean lines, and sharp edges. The ‘hardest solids are only fluids that are slightly more viscous than others’ (Serres and Latour 1995, p. 107).

It is various kinds of flows of information that in Serres’s view construct the world and make it into a network. Ultimately, for him, communication amounts to a lot more than sheer transmission of messages and creation of meaning; communication designates movement and commutation that creates communion. It builds the world instead of merely expressing it. As he writes in the book *Angels*: ‘information constructs the universe, by means of networks’. And by this he does not mean only our ‘artificial message systems’ which ‘encompass the world’, but also the earth which, too, is ‘constructed by message bearing systems: currents of wind and water transmit information far and wide’ (Serres 1995a, p. 47).

Serres’s notion of communication draws especially from thermodynamics and information theory. From thermodynamics he has assumed its basic concept, *system*. Serres considers communication above all in terms of movement and circulation that construct and build up a system; there is no system without fluxes of communication and without things being transmitted. Here he is very much in agreement with Niklas Luhmann (for the similarities and differences between Serres and Luhmann, see Wolfe 2007, pp. xxi–iv). To the discourse of philosophy, the thermodynamic notion of system sought its way at the beginning of the twentieth century. Before that the prevailing notions of system were the logico-mathematical and the mechanical ones. The logico-mathematical system, as in a system of axioms or of differential equations, refers to ‘a coherent set of demonstrable propositions deduced from a small number of postulates’. The mechanical notion of system, in turn, concerns a set that is regular and governed by a law. The positions and velocity of its parts can be specified with precision. Unlike the logico-mathematical notion, which is independent of the variable of time, the mechanical system ‘depends on a time but not on its direction’. Time is completely reversible for it. Nothing changes significantly even if everything starts moving in the opposite direction (Serres 1982, p. 71).

However, starting with the industrial revolution taking place during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and towards the nineteenth-century thermodynamics, the logico-mathematical and mechanical notions of system were,

according to Serres, displaced by the thermodynamic one. Thermodynamics studies heat and energy and examines systems as producers of movement. For it, the motor is the model of system. Motors create movement and circulation and produce energy and power. Importantly, instead of permanence and equilibrium, the thermodynamic system is based on change and movement. And, with the building of and theorizing about motors—such as steam or combustion engines, chemical engines, electrical engines, and turbine engines—the notion of time changed. Time was no longer reversible, but was endowed with a direction, and thus became irreversible (Serres 1982, p. 71).

While in the nineteenth century philosophers and psychologists still adopted as their model systems based on the logico-mathematical and mechanical notions, at the beginning of the twentieth century and with such authors as Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud, philosophical and psychological discourses began speaking in terms of life, energy, and movement as well as of open and closed systems. Serres suggests that there is an unmistakable link to thermodynamics also in the theory of information or communication, which studies the emission, transmission, and reception of information. For Serres (1982, 73), information theory is ‘the daughter of thermodynamics’, and its means of studying the activities of reading and writing as well as the transmission and storing of signals are inherited from thermodynamics. In information theory, the transformation model of communication formulated in 1949 by mathematicians Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver in their work *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (1949) embodied the basic notion of communication prevalent until the 1980s. It presents communication as the emission of messages by the sender to the receiver transmitted via a channel. Importantly, according to Shannon and Weaver, optimal communication is achieved only by excluding noise. Like the thermodynamic system, the system of communication is not in equilibrium, but communication constantly faces obstacles disturbing optimal transmission. Both in thermodynamics and in information theory the system thus establishes itself against disorder: in thermodynamics by struggling against entropy, and in information theory by way of excluding the obstacles to communication (Serres 1982, pp. 72–3).

Serres suggests that, beginning from the twentieth century, communication has even become a kind of conceptual framework preconditioning how we think and how we perceive the world. Knowledge appears as codes (Serres 1982, pp. 72–81). Just think of technological systems, for example, and how they process information; how biosciences study life by looking at how the genetic code of organisms is copied and transmitted to their offspring; how language and literature are conceived on the one hand as systems or structures of rules and conventions of meaning, and as speech acts creating meaning, on the other; and how psychoanalysis assumes the unconscious to be structured like a language. For Serres, information theory is thus not only a special field studying the transmission of messages, but it is ‘located at the crossroads of all fields of contemporary knowledge’: modern knowledge is specifically concerned with various aspects of transmission, transformation, and multiplication of messages (Harari and Bell 1982, p. xxiii).

However, the problem of communication was not invented by information theory, but the latter is only a modern translation of an age-old problem, addressed long before the rise of modern sciences. For Serres, the first philosopher of communication was Leibniz, who is also a key source of influence for his own thought (Serres 2007; Serres and Latour 1995). Of crucial importance is especially Leibniz's *Monadology*, which came out in 1714. In it, Leibniz calls the fundamental elements of reality 'monads' (from Gr. μονάς [monas], 'unit'). They are non-composite entities of which all that is material consists but which are immaterial and have no extension themselves. According to Leibniz, monads are self-subsistent and separate; they are without 'windows' through which they could receive or supply causal influences (Leibniz [1714] 2010, p. 7, 56).

How can monads interact, then? This question lays out the contrast of simultaneous distance and proximity that presents the precondition of any communication. In order for entities to be able to communicate with each other they need to be separate, but at the same time they must overcome the distance separating them. Whereas thermodynamics and information theory offer for Serres's thought of communication its vocabulary and framework, by and large his work can be seen as an attempt to solve the problem of communication expressed in Leibniz's philosophy. Like Leibniz, Serres thinks that separate beings cannot connect to each other immediately, but only via a mediator. Communication needs a channel—without a channel communication ceases. 'There is always a mediate, a middle, an intermediary'; the mediator 'is the being of the relation' (Serres 2007, p. 63). However, instead of an omnipresent God that was Leibniz's solution to the problem—suggesting that even though windowless monads are not interconnected immediately, they can communicate with each other via God (Leibniz [1714] 2010, p. 14)—Serres pays attention to multiple smaller and more local mediations and channels: to, for example, language, writing, the body, the telephone, the television, trains, airplanes, satellites, as well as to the circulation of various kinds of objects, from messages to food, money, and words. It is only by tracing them that the network of communications becomes visible, and each singular mediator makes visible the entire network. At the same time, the properties, capabilities, and action of a mediator are apparent only by examining it as part of a network.

For Serres, *mediation* is thus a precondition of relations. There is no communication without mediation, no speech without the sound waves carrying it and without a language that makes it meaningful, just as there is no writing without a surface on which to write, without writing instruments, without drawn symbols, and without a grammar that rules how the symbols can be combined in a manner that makes sense to self and others. Serres adds that there is also no mediation without *translation*. The communicated message never travels through neutral and empty space, but the space in-between is a 'space of transformation' (Serres 2007, p. 70). The channel in-between, the medium, always to some extent transforms what it transmits. For example, the act of translating a text from one language to another never produces absolute

likeness and sameness, but the translation is a new creation that is also bound to betray the original to a greater or lesser degree.

In the *Hermès* series that appeared between the years 1969 and 1980 and consists of five books, Serres uses Hermes as the metaphor of communication, mediation, and translation. In Greek mythology, Hermes appears as the god of trade and of thieves, as a patron and guide of travellers, and as a messenger of the gods. Hermes is depicted as cunning and witty, and he is said to have invented the alphabet, weights and measures, alchemy, astronomy, musical scales, games, and the prediction of the future. Among his attributes are winged sandals and occasionally also a helmet with wings on it. The wings fly him from place to place on his way to carry messages. One of his tasks is to escort dead souls into Hades, the afterlife; no one but Hermes is allowed to cross the boundary of our world and the underworld and return. In Greek mythology, Hermes is also pictured carrying a caduceus, a staff with two serpents around it and surmounted by wings. Compared with Leibniz's God, Hermes personifies a much more active and mobile figure of mediation and communication. Hermes is constantly on the move from place to place. In many respects, Hermes embodies Serres's very manner of thought. Serres is an intercessor between science, philosophy, and culture, moving quickly between different worlds and eras and transporting messages and conceptual tools freely, from fables to anthropology, from antiquity to modernity, from the natural sciences to human sciences, and from mathematics to philosophy. However, as a mediator Hermes has a double character: he is both loyal and deceitful, both a messenger and a protector of thieves as well as a thief in his own right. Serres explores this problem of 'good and bad Hermes' (2007, p. 224) in a most versatile manner in *The Parasite*, which will be treated in the next section.

2 THE PARASITE

In *The Parasite* (2007, orig. 1980), Serres develops a view of relations as triangular constellations. He is not, of course, the only one nor the first one to pay attention to triadic associations or to the importance of the figure of the 'third' for our understanding of relations. For example, in his masterwork *Soziologie* ([1908] 1992) Georg Simmel explored the dynamics between social formations involving two members and those of three elements. However, unlike Simmel, Serres does not assume that the third would automatically take a personified human form, but acknowledges that also the channel of communication and intervening external noise, for instance, can present such a third. There are many more thirds out there than just our fellow humans. We have the non-human—or, better, more-than-human and less-than-human—thirds around us, alongside us, and within us. They are implicated in every relation. What is more, Serres renders the interplay of the inclusion and exclusion of the third in much more explicit terms than Simmel does, showing that neither can ever be absolute.

Serres calls the one in the position of the third a *parasite*. But why a parasite? At first, the word choice seems odd, given that from the science called parasitology

we have come to know the term as referring to small invertebrates, such as tapeworms, fleas, vermin, flukes, and lice. However, in French the word *parasite* also means ‘static’ or ‘noise’, which information theory discusses. And, of course, it is also not uncommon to speak about social parasites, when we think of people living at the expense of others, for example. In fact, Serres proposes that, as parasitology ‘uses the vocabulary of the host: hostility or hospitality’ (Serres 2007, p. 193), its discourse ‘bears several traces of anthropomorphism’ (ibid., p. 6), and thus its understanding of parasitic relations is to a great extent shaped by our sense of ancient customs and habits related to hospitality, table manners, hostelry, and relations with strangers.

So, the notion of the parasite refers to animals, habits or customs of hospitality, and noise. In *The Parasite* (2007), Serres plays with all three of these meanings of the word. First, in its biological sense, a parasite is an organism feeding on another without benefiting its host in any way. Second, in the anthropological sense, a parasite is an abusive guest, who takes without giving anything in return. Unlike the biological parasite, the social parasite does not necessarily live in its host, but just by it. The etymology of the word ‘parasite’ is informative here. In it, as Serres remarks, the ‘prefix *para-* means “near”, “next to”, measures a distance. The *sitos* is the food’ (ibid., p. 144). Third, in information theory, the parasite designates noise, static, a break in the message. The neighboring function of eating is making noise: the open mouth that eats also emits sound. Obviously, there is no immediate connection between the three meanings, but Serres stresses that they only share a similarity of form. Each of the three meanings displays a relation of a similar kind: a simple, irreversible arrow (ibid., p. 8). The parasite is the one who, or that which, intervenes and interrupts.

With the help of the notion of the parasite, Serres complicates how we usually conceive relations. Relations are usually considered in dyadic terms, that is, as connections between two. We understand communication, for example, as taking place between the sender and the receiver, picture exchange as a transaction between two parties, model conversation on the basis of a dialogue, and perceive there being two sides to every struggle, conflict, and war. Serres’s theory of the parasite, by contrast, presents the *triangle* as the elementary form of relations: according to him, a relation is never a matter of only two elements, but every relation—or in fact any thing or entity—is a constellation of at least three elements (Serres 2007, p. 63; 1997). As soon as there are two, the parasite is in-between them, in the position of the third, and any relation between two and only two is possible only provided that all thirds are excluded. Communication—exchange and dialogue—for instance, is possible only on the condition of excluding the parasite. And adversaries are able to hold up a debate or a struggle only if they manage to work together to keep noise and all possible intervening third parties at bay (Serres 1995a, p. 9). Thus, as they fight against one another, they are at the same time fighting together, on the same side, against a mutual enemy, as they at least tacitly need to join their forces to exclude all possibly intervening thirds.

What is thus most interesting in Serres's triangular model of relations with regard to relational sociology is the idea of *exclusion* as a precondition of relation. This suggests that networks do not extend ad infinitum, but have limits. No system or community can be absolutely inclusive. A completely open, inclusive system without exclusion could not last. It would crumble and collapse in a minute. If the parasite were not kept out, chaos would ensue. The constitution of any system or community relies on drawing a dividing line between the inside and the outside. A border needs to be set up to establish order within and close it off from the disorder of the outside. Undisturbed communication, the peacefulness of a community, and order are possible on the condition that the parasite is excluded, while disorder and the parasite exist, of course, only in relation to order and the system.

Serres's thoughts must be contextualized above all in relation to cybernetics and information theory. Cybernetics, developed by mathematician Norbert Wiener ([1948] 2000), studies the self-regulation and self-guidance of various systems, from living organisms to machines. Accordingly, Wiener defined it as 'the theory of communication and control in the machine and in the living organism (1956, p. 269). Originally, cybernetics was related to World War II and the efforts of the US military to improve the accuracy of anti-aircraft fire, but later it was applied more broadly in the study of biological, technological, and social systems. Cybernetics is interested in operations by which systems maintain their balance and their relation to their environment by adapting to changes. In addition to cybernetics, another important theory examining the preconditions of successful communication is the aforementioned famous model introduced by Shannon and Weaver. In it, Shannon and Weaver present noise as a threat to the system of communication, and thereby optimal communication is possible on the condition of excluding noise (1949).

Like cybernetics, Serres, too, is interested in how all kinds of systems, from machines to living organisms, communicate and maintain order and balance, and, like Shannon and Weaver, he also emphasizes the relation of communication to noise. However, in contrast to Shannon and Weaver, Serres stresses that the parasite or noise is not external to a system, only a transitory, marginal nuisance, but part of the system itself. It is at once necessary for the system and an obstacle to its proper functioning (2007, p. 79). Noise, disorder, wastage, disturbances, leakages, interruptions, and accidents are part of the normal operation of any system. No system can ever be absolutely enclosed and trouble-free: 'There is no system without parasites. This constant is a law' (Serres 2007, p. 12). For example, whilst regional accent, mumbling, stammering, and cacophony tend to disturb oral communication, just as writing is liable to the noise of spelling errors, ill-drawn graphs, and bad penmanship, speech and writing could get rid of perturbations of this kind for good only at the expense of eliminating voice and graphs that are essential to their own being; there is no speech or writing without them (Serres 1982, pp. 66–70). As long as there is a relation, the parasite is there as well. It is always on the channel, plugged into the relation. To eliminate all noise, one would have to also eliminate the channel of communication itself.

According to Serres, ultimately communication succeeds thanks to noise, not in spite of it, as Shannon and Weaver assume. Serres (2007) suggests that it is in fact impossible to tell in general whether the parasite is an obstacle to the proper functioning of a system or necessary for it. No system is perfect, but they work because they don't work (ibid., p. 72). Noise is simultaneously 'the fall into disorder and the beginning of an order' (ibid., p. 79). This is because the channel itself, placed in-between, in the position of the third, is simultaneously a precondition of communication and a parasite disturbing it. This complicates the basic triangular model: the third doubles itself, as it were, into an included and an excluded third, a 'mutual friend' and a 'mutual enemy'. Given that the third at once constitutes the bivalent relation (e.g. sender-receiver, subject-object, producer-consumer, etc.) and disturbs it, the third must thus be simultaneously assumed and excluded. Let us think of a debate. The adversaries do not fight only against one another and against a mutual enemy, but to be able to hold up the debate they also need to have some common ground. This is to say that the debate presupposes an agreement (which is often tacit) on codes, rules, and stakes. Struggle is thus preceded by two contracts or tacit agreement on two points: on the one hand, on the rules, codes, and stakes of the struggle, and, on the other, on the mutual enemy. '*To hold a dialogue is [therefore] to suppose a third man and seek to exclude him*' (Serres 1982, p. 67). This means that the initial triangular schema is transformed into a game with four players played on a new figure, that of a *square* or a *cross* (Serres 1995b, p. 9). To quote Serres:

The two parties to the dispute exchange fair arguments or low-down insults along one diagonal, while on the second, sideways or across, most often without the speakers' knowledge, their contractual language fights inch by inch against the ambient noise to preserve its purity. (ibid., p. 9)

Whenever two actors speak, struggle, fight, or exchange something with one another there are 'two invisible if not tacit specters' present, 'keeping a vigil' (calling them 'specters' also refers to the idea that the third may carry out effects even without being present) (ibid., p. 9). To every relation between two there is an included third which mediates and conciliates the parties *and* an excluded third that marks the outside or exterior of the relation by not belonging to it or, more precisely, by belonging to it only by being left out or excluded.

The originality of Serres's treatment of the dynamic of parasitic relations and its significance for relational sociology becomes evident when one compares it with the theory of network society by Manuel Castells. Castells, too, regards exclusion as an important means for the maintenance of the unity and cohesion of networks. According to him, networks operate on a binary logic of inclusion and exclusion (Castells 2000, p. 15). However, Serres sees the difference between inside and outside as relative. They may fluctuate depending on

the observer: what is observed as a meaningful and orderly message by one may appear as noise to another. A mobile phone ringing in the audience in the middle of a lecture is noise disturbing the lecture, but if the person whose phone it is answers the call, the lecture becomes noise to the people over the phone. Hence, Serres and Castells see the boundary between the inside and the outside very differently. With Castells, exclusion refers to those who, whether individuals or groups, are down and out. He thinks that the outside of a network can be traced on a geographical and socioeconomic map, for example in poor countries as well as in the excluded populations of a country or a city. For Serres, by contrast, exclusion is an active procedure to secure the system: boundaries need to be established to keep at bay everything that disturbs the proper functioning of the system. In addition, Serres emphasizes that no inside is ever inviolable or fully sealed. All borders have holes, passages, portals, and porosities through which parasites keep flowing in. Each community is therefore exclusive without ever being fully enclosed or sealed. Disturbance, interference, variation, and interruption are thus part of every system, network, and community. To maintain order, the gesture of exclusion therefore needs to be repeated incessantly, over and over again.

3 ANGEL AS THE FIGURE OF IMMEDIATE MEDIATION

What would noiseless communication be like? Is it possible in the first place? Serres explores these questions in the book *Angels: A Modern Myth* (1995a; orig. *La Légende des Anges*, 1993b). By engaging with legends of angels in the mono- and polytheistic traditions Serres explores the possibility of undisturbed communication. Written in dialogue form and devoid of nearly all technical jargon, the book is very different from the average scholarly treatise. The main scene of events is Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris, and the main characters are Pia, a doctor at the airport medical center, and Pantope, a travelling inspector for Air France who is all around the world, as also his name, derived from *pan-topos* (everywhere), implies.

For Serres, the angel is above all a metaphor for effective and neutral mediation. He bases his usage of the term on the Greek word *αγγελος* (*angelos*), a ‘messenger’. For Serres, radio signals, phones, television broadcasts, airplanes, passengers, letters, postmen, couriers, representatives, reporters, and teachers are all angels, as their job is to carry messages. The angel represents the opposite of the parasite: whilst the parasite intervenes, interferes, disturbs, and also distorts what it transmits, the angel stands for perfectly loyal, neutral, and transparent mediation. The angel is a messenger that appears only to disappear, a messenger that steps aside and withdraws: ‘the angel of the Lord appears in order to better disappear before the Word of the Lord which he brings’ (Serres 1995a, p. 106). For Serres, this illustrates how the channel of communication must vanish into immediacy and invisibility in order to succeed. As soon the mediator appears and is present, it falls; ‘[t]he fact of appearing makes for a fall’ (ibid., p. 102). As Serres writes in *The Parasite*: ‘If the relation succeeds, if it is

perfect, optimum, and immediate; it disappears as a relation. If it is there, if it exists, that means that it failed. It is only mediation. Relation is nonrelation' (Serres 2007, p. 79). This can be illustrated by taking a lecture as an example. To succeed, the teacher should step aside and write himself out of the picture:

[T]he body and the voice of the teacher disappear in relation to the text that he's expounding in the lecture theatre. A lecture only succeeds if philosophy herself appears, in the flesh, to take the lecturer's place, and he lets her have it. Imagine it, a dazzling woman enters the hall by a secret door and despatches the teacher who had summoned her up in secret and was speaking in her name. A miracle! ... On the other hand, there are scoundrels who pretend that they themselves are philosophy, and whose disciples are then obliged to speak only of them, never of her. (Serres 1995a, p. 102)

Serres's engagement with legends of angels contains also media-archeological insights. The problem of loyal mediation is hardly new. Instead of emerging just with the development of modern technology, it was present already a long time ago in the legends. The revolution in communication technology has only made the problems of mediation, transmission, and translation ever more acute and broader in their scope. Today, for example, work is largely about communication: gathering information, speaking, and writing. We no longer work on the same raw materials as our ancestors did. Instead of doing manual labor with solids or working with machines to liquefy them, we work mostly with volatile information. We are bearers of messages, like angels: 'We communicate with ourselves at the speed of light; we travel at the speed of sound; and we transform others and the world by our words!' (ibid., p. 294). The image of the angel is thus 'at once ancient and modern' (ibid., p. 43). On the opening pages of *Angels* Serres describes in a lively manner the modern angels departing and arriving at Charles de Gaulle:

Unlike you, I see something in all that 'transmission' of things. I see angels ... Take a good look around. Air hostesses and pilots; radio messages; all the crew just flown in from Tokyo and just about to leave for Rio; those dozen aircraft neatly lined up, wing to wing on the runway, as they wait to take off; yellow postal vans delivering parcels, packets and telegrams; staff calls over the tannoy; all these bags passing in front of us on the conveyor; endless announcements for Berlin and Rome, Sydney and Durban; passengers crossing paths with each other and hurrying for taxis and shuttles while escalators move silently and endlessly up and down ... like [the] ladder in Jacob's dream ... Don't you see—what we have here is angels of steel, carrying angels of flesh and blood, who in turn send angel signals across the air waves... (Serres 1995a, p. 8)

To conclude, Serres employs the figure of the angel to address effective and loyal mediation. Angels are multiple and assume many forms. Serres also uses the metaphor to explore both refined technology and nature, and to decipher various networks of communication as well as the signals, things, and people

moving along and across them. He insists that both the global networks built by information technology and the operation and dynamic of physical flows occurring in nature can be thought of in terms of communication: ‘Our artificial message systems encompass the world; and the world in turn is constructed by message-bearing systems: currents of wind and water transmit information far and wide’ (ibid., p. 47). From the legends Serres finds himself a language which enables him, first, to speak of the world that is at once chaotic and serene, mixed and pure; second, develop a philosophy of communication, deciphering and mapping systems of networks and interference; and third, refer to the noise, chaos, and hubbub that precedes all theory and order (Serres 1995a, p. 93).

4 QUASI-OBJECT

Serres thinks that relations can be examined both by focusing on the links or channels themselves and by following the things that travel in and along them. Whereas the notions of the parasite and the angel appear as conceptual tools to address the functioning of channels, Serres introduces the notion of the *quasi-object* to examine the things circulating along relations.

In the ordinary sense of the word, the term ‘object’, derived from the Latin *ob-* (against, before) and *iacere* (to throw), designates something presented, put, or thrown before or against the mind or sight. The object is conceived as an isolated, self-contained, and self-identical piece of massive and mechanistic matter, distinct from active, free, and self-moving human subjects. In contrast to this, Serres suggests that objects are not sheer passive ‘objects’ of our actions, but they have active and generative effects. They *do* things: ‘a panpipe warbles, a clarinet sings, a violin weeps, a bassoon sobs, the sensitivity of brass, strings and wood’ (Serres 1995a, p. 48). Instead of humans standing as the sole creators of things, objects significantly shape our human capabilities and what we are. Serres terms this view ‘pragmatogony’, derived from the Greek terms *pragma* (thing, matter) and *agnos* (that which is begotten, the created) (Serres 1987; see also de Beer 2010, p. 6). Given the effects that objects obviously have, they necessarily possess some creative powers: ‘Do you really think that machines and technologies would be able to construct groups and change history if they were merely passive objects?’ (Serres 1995a, p. 48).

Most importantly, Serres suggests that objects are not detached from human sociality and social relations. There is no human collectivity as such, devoid of objects and matter, but objects are implicated in every relation between humans. It is because of this that he insists that the term ‘object’ needs to be furnished with the prefix *quasi-*; objects are not only of the physical world but essentially also of *us*. Therefore, objects cannot be properly understood when stripped of their relations and detached from their environment; for it is in and through relations that they ultimately receive their meaning and effectivity. For Serres, it is also the object that, literally, *collects* subjects together—something which is underlined by the concept he uses for the community: *collective*

(Fr. *collectif*). Accordingly, Serres suggests that the best way to grasp the birth of the collective and how relations get spun is to follow the movements of quasi-objects. Relations, invisible in themselves, become visible in the quasi-objects.

In Serres's books, a frequently used example of the entanglement of the collective and the object is the ball, as in football. Without the ball there is no game, and one cannot 'play ball' all by oneself. On the one hand, the ball is the center around which the game shifts and is alive: 'Around the ball, the team fluctuates quick as a flame, around it, through it, it keeps a nucleus of organization. The ball is the sun of the system and the force passing among its elements, it is a center that is off-centered, off-side, outstripped' (Serres 1995c, pp. 87–8). In the movements of the ball, the collective at once expands and contracts, spreads out and comes together, as the ball assembles it by travelling from player to player. And yet, on the other hand, the ball is what it is only amidst the game, in touches, kicks, and hits, and in being passed on from player to player. The ball that is in the attacking zone becomes hot and dangerous, in contrast to the controlled, relatively harmless, and safe ball shuttling back and forth in the middle of the pitch. It is important to note that the ball is no passive 'object', but it is active. In a sense, the ball itself is playing, playing with the players. The best, most skilled players do not manipulate and force the ball to go with them. On the contrary, they 'serve' the ball and its movements; when the 'preceding one is shunted aside, laid out, trampled', the next one carries on (Serres 1995c, p. 88). To play is to make 'oneself the attribute of the ball as a substance' (Serres 2007, p. 226). It is only the bad players who treat the ball as if it were only an object and are therefore clumsy with the ball, or are too selfish and hold it all to themselves. In its circulation and movements, the ball creates relations, expressed by different prepositions. As the players serve the ball, it connects them with each other and welds their team together: instead of everyone looking out for themselves, the players play for their team. In its movements, the ball also connects the teams in their rival aims: it makes the teams play against each other. Nevertheless, the ball not only weaves the collective, but it also stands as a sign of the subject: 'it marks or designates a subject who, without it, would not be a subject' (ibid., p. 225). When completely detached from the ball, the player is in the dark. The 'I' is a token passed between players: the one who has the ball is marked. S/he is 'marked as the victim', as the one to be chased and tackled (ibid., p. 226). Hence, it is thanks to the ball that we know in the game 'how and when we are subjects and when and how we are no longer subjects' (ibid., p. 227).

For Serres, the object and the collective are thus co-constituted: there is no object without a collective, and no collective without an object. You do not get the one without the other. Objects receive their meaning, abilities, and stability in and through relations, and the objects circulating from subject to subject weave or assemble human collectivity. And the social relationships of a collective, in turn, are stabilized more through the stabilization of its objects than through social contracts, norms, sanctions, or values, for instance. It is above all through objects that we know that 'we' are 'we'.

5 VIRTUALITY

Serres's work also contains fascinating ideas with regard to our contemporary technologically generated networks. However, Serres is definitely not among those who acclaim the technological revolution and the virtuality to which we have assumedly been introduced by it. Where thinkers normally see radical ruptures and revolutions, Serres stresses continuity. He reminds us that virtuality is not an invention of contemporary electronically operating media, but that we have more or less always communicated with each other virtually. Writing letters, speaking, looking at each other, and reading all function virtually. Each relation of communication sets and assumes a betweenness, a space between-two. When two people look at each other, engage in conversation, or exchange emails, for instance, their communication presupposes and produces a space in-between, a midway across and through which the effects and messages must pass. The association does not take place here or there, but here and there, in virtuality, in-between the poles connected by the relation; it is movement from pillar to post. The between, the space in-between, is not, however, itself localizable. Instead of inhabiting a definite place or having a fixed spatial identity, it is rather a virtual space, a path of movement and renewal, a non-site, a nowhere or a non-place, a place outside all places. Serres refers to such places with the notion of *hors-là*, which means not so much 'out there' but literally 'outside-of-there' (Serres 1994). It is important to understand that the notion of the virtual does not designate here something less real, as it does in the common usage of the term 'virtual reality', which signifies a technologically simulated environment and thus implies an imitation of the real. On the contrary, it needs to be understood in accordance with Marcel Proust's formula 'real without being actual, ideal without being abstract', which according to Gilles Deleuze best defines virtuality. The virtual is not less real or merely a simulation of the real, but it rather 'possesses a reality' (Deleuze 1991, pp. 96–7, 2004, p. 260). Deleuze's approach to the virtual thus shifts attention from virtual reality to the reality of the virtual itself. The notion refers to how beings are irreducible to their actualized forms, but have the ability to be something else—things could also be otherwise.

Serres's *hors-là* bears some resemblance to the notion of *heterotopia* used by Michel Foucault. The French term employed by Foucault is *dehors*, which is also one that Serres, too, occasionally uses (see e.g. Serres 1994, p. 187). For Foucault, the notion of heterotopia was a conceptual tool to address spatial multiplicity and otherness. With heterotopias he refers to 'other spaces' which are, as it were, enacted utopias, which nevertheless are real and do exist (Foucault 2000, p. 178). They have an unusual spatial status and are not like ordinary cultural spaces in that they are in a sense places outside all places, some kind of counter-sites that contest or invert other spaces or are at least set apart from those spaces even when they represent them. As examples of heterotopias Foucault gives, for instance, sacred, forbidden, and privileged places, reserved for taboos or things such as nudity, menstruation, sickness, and

death that the community wishes to avoid having contact with. Heterotopias are the ‘elsewhere’ or the ‘nowhere’ where they may safely take place.

However, the main differences between Serres and Foucault in their thought on *dehors* is that Serres thinks of this spatial outsidership or otherness above all with reference to communication. In-between spaces have existed as long as there has been communication, but what is new in our own age is that contemporary information technology has rendered virtuality more material. It gives the openness and utopian character of virtuality a perceptible material form by transforming imagination into images, voice into messages, and the non-place of the in-between into interconnected spaces of dense networks (Serres 1994, p. 15, 131). The communication network built by the movement of information, according to Serres, is an ‘archipelago of utopia’ (Serres 1994, p. 199). The non-places of the contemporary communication network are nevertheless ultimately much more volatile than Foucault’s heterotopias. Many of the heterotopias that Foucault discusses—such as the sauna, the cemetery, the rest home, the library, the cinema, the psychiatric hospital, and the prison—are perfectly localizable. The non-places of communication technology, by contrast, do not exist at any specific location. Even though web pages, for example, have an IP address, it is often impossible to say exactly where they are located. And when surfing the net the user simultaneously is and isn’t there: while one sits at one’s computer, one is also already somewhere else.

Contemporary information technologies, according to Serres, have also changed the nature of networks. Today their mode of being is different. Whereas previously networks became visible by means of quasi-objects, such as money circulating in their relations, Serres suggests that today the existence of networks is no longer invisible and volatile, but they are always already there, visible, and available for use. Networked space has become our environment: ‘it is under us and even more: we live in it’ (Serres 1994, p. 203). Thereby also agency is distributed differently. Whereas previously we built interconnected things which acted and thought with us, for us, and in our place, now ‘we can even say that the network itself thinks, knows, governs, judges, produces spatiality and temporality, power and history, values and the sacred, and is itself the social bond’ (ibid., p. 201). The network as it were has powers and potentialities of its own that are irreducible to the intentions and actions of any human subject.

6 CONCLUSION

The aforementioned notion of *hors-là* may be said to provide a key to Serres’s entire work. He thinks in the intersections, folds, convolutions, and mixes of the material world and human collectivity. Serres insists that the one cannot be understood without the other: as long as we pay attention only to human beings and their contracts, we do not see how their interrelations are woven, and it is in and through relations that objects receive their properties and effectivity. Nevertheless, bridging the natural sciences and the humanities does not

happen just like that. Discussion between them faces obstacles not only due to their different traditions, theoretical vocabularies, methodological approaches, and the nature of knowledge, but their differences also manifest, for example, in department and faculty boundaries as well as in the buildings and walls of campus architecture. Connecting the natural sciences and the humanities thus requires a third space, a place outside both that enables the exploration of the two side by side. Serres's work may be understood as presenting such a mediating third, a space in-between, a *hors-là*. The general model of Serres's work is mixture (Serres 2008, pp. 27–8, 161). As he writes in *Genesis*: 'We live and think within the mix. Zebra-streaked, tiger-striped, variegated, motley, fleck-speckled, bedizened, star-spangled. We invent, we produce like the Demiurge, in and through the mix' (Serres 1995c, p. 132). The space in-between is not secondary vis-à-vis the things connected, but it is in the in-between, in encounters and folds, that the properties and the identity of the relata are produced, while it is also in that very same in-betweenness, in the *hors-là*, that those things meet their limits and may transcend themselves.

The primacy of the in-between places Serres's work in the stream of philosophy of difference, which began to take shape around the turn of the twentieth century in the work of the sociologist, criminologist, and philosopher Gabriel Tarde and the philosopher Henri Bergson. In his neo-monadology, which pushes Leibniz's monadology in new directions, Tarde (1999, pp. 72–3) grounds the being of monads in *différence*. Contrary to how Leibniz saw them, for Tarde monads are not self-subsistent and self-propelling, but they exist only in relation to others, to what they themselves are *not*. Bergson, who followed Tarde in the professorship of modern philosophy at the Collège de France in 1904, regarded all fixed forms and beings as expressions, achievements of a pre-individual and dynamic life force, *élan vital*, and duration, *durée*. In *Time and Free Will* ([1913] 2001), Bergson also made a distinction between qualitative and quantitative multiplicity, with the first referring to duration and the latter to space and spatiality. The philosophy of difference forms the backbone of the work of Jacques Derrida, too. One of Derrida's original contributions lies in that he connected the question of difference especially to the problems of the sign and writing. Difference, in the form of *différance*, forms the starting point of Derrida's whole oeuvre. Of course, already the founding father of semiology and structuralism, Ferdinand de Saussure ([1916] 1973), perceived language as a system of signs founded on difference. But whereas the Saussurean system of signs was relatively closed and the differences were classifiable in a precise manner, Derridean *différance* is movement, incessant fleeing of traces, erasure, rewriting, and postponing. In Derrida's work, all codes are constituted as tapestries of differences modeled on *différance* (2004). However, whilst Derrida's work is mostly structured around language and texts, Deleuze exports the philosophy of difference to the world outside texts and meaning. His philosophy takes the idea of difference to the extreme. He conceives difference as a positive and productive force: reality is constituted in the process of becoming, and becoming amounts to becoming different; difference or becoming is the

movement where being differs from itself. According to Deleuze, the tradition of philosophy from Aristotle via Leibniz to Hegel has failed in thinking difference, for it has reduced the concept of difference to the difference between concepts (Deleuze 2004, p. 30). Thereby difference has been understood as being secondary and subject to structure, unity, or fixed meaning (ibid., pp. 60–1). In alignment with Deleuze’s insistence on originary difference, Serres suggests in *The Parasite* (2007, p. 13) that ‘difference is part of the thing itself, and perhaps even produces the thing. Maybe the radical origin of things is really that difference, even though classical rationalism damned it to hell. In the beginning was the noise.’ Along this line of thought, there is no substance to entities other than difference and event, the occasion of their associations. They are grounded in multiplicity.

Serres’s work is much closer to Deleuze’s philosophy than that of Derrida also in the sense that instead of subscribing to Derrida’s statement that ‘there is no outside of the text’ (*Il n’y a pas de hors texte*), he attends to the world outside discourse, culture, and human consciousness. What is essential takes place not only in words, but also with the things of the world. Among his contemporaries, Deleuze is also in many other respects the thinker who stands the closest to Serres. In an interview, Serres says that he and Deleuze were ‘amis de vieillesse’ (Kunzru 1995), ‘friends of old age’, and Deleuze’s texts, for their part, contain numerous references to Serres (see e.g. Deleuze 2006, pp. 22–3, 145; Deleuze and Guattari 1987, pp. 361, 371–2, 489–90). Most importantly, what Serres and Deleuze have in common is, first, their emphasis on *multiplicity*. Deleuze (2006, p. vi) insists that ‘[s]tates of things are neither unities nor totalities, but multiplicities’. Not dissimilarly, Serres suggests that things are multiples; nowhere do we ‘hit upon truly atomic, ultimate indivisible terms that were not themselves, once again, composite’ (Serres 1995c, p. 3). For Serres, ‘The multiple’ is thus no ‘epistemological monster, but on the contrary the ordinary lot of situations ... our common object’ (ibid., p. 5). We live among multiplicities and are ourselves multiplicities. ‘Sea, forest, rumor, noise, society, life, works and days, all common multiplicities; we can hardly say they are objects yet require a new way of thinking’ (ibid., p. 6) To take multiples or multiplicities as the object of inquiry is to examine alloys, mixes, confusions, and assemblages. It is to examine them without reference to a prior or more basic unity. Second, both Serres and Deleuze insist that things have no substance beyond their associations and intermeshed becomings. Composites and assemblages are not aggregates of simple elements, but mixture is the true mode of being of entities. It is only subsequently that simple entities may appear, from the encounters of mixtures (Serres 2008, pp. 27–8).

Accordingly, both Serres and Deleuze stress the importance of starting in the middle of things, *in medias res*. However, unlike in Deleuze, in Serres the Latin phrase also refers to the ‘things’ (*res*) placed in the middle, both acting as mediators and intervening. It is perhaps precisely the idea of mediation that presents the greatest potential of Serres’s triangular model of relations for relational sociology. Its contribution is threefold:

First, Serres's work directs attention to the movements of the objects and materials circulating in relations. A lot more stuff goes into producing a collective than just agents and structure, social contracts, or humans with their social skills. There is no social relation as such, but matter and objects are implicated in every relation between humans. Serres's work also suggests that relations cannot be seen directly and in themselves, but they are made visible in and through the mediators. The scattered and fluctuating multiplicity of people forms a collective thanks to the quasi-object moving from subject to subject. Money, for example, assembles the markets and with its incessant circulation it feeds the economy, and ball games are organized around the ball running from player to player. Serres's thought on mediation and quasi-objects has significantly influenced Michel Callon, Bruno Latour, and John Law, who developed the so-called actor-network theory (ANT) (see e.g. Latour 1993, 1999, 2005). Besides the notion of 'quasi-object', ANT has also received some of its other key concepts, such as 'translation', 'collective', and 'black box', from Serres. While Serres's own influence on relational thought and on the study of networks, for example, has remained rather limited within sociology, ANT has introduced some of his concepts to the field by making use of them in empirical study, though often the readers of ANT scholarship do not seem to be aware of the origin of those ideas.

However, second, the significance of Serres's work to relational sociology is far from being exhausted by ANT and its approach. On the contrary, Serres's work contains insights that could enrich ANT's understanding of mediation, for example. This becomes most evident in the notion of the parasite. The figure of the parasite illuminates the duality of any mediator: the mediators establish the relation, but also intervene, interfere, and disturb. The parasite thereby also unfolds the elementary algebra of social relations. The possibility of any dyadic relation is conditioned by a 'third', and the actions of the third, in turn, already presuppose the dyad. It is only by excluding a third that two can be together, and the third may carry its effects only in relation to the relationship between the two. Serres's thoughts on the position of the third can be fruitfully connected, for example, to Ronald Burt's studies on so-called 'structural holes'. In a network, a structural hole appears between points and agents whose contacts are not connected to each other, and hence any actor capable of placing itself in such a position has the chance of strategic manipulation and profit (Burt 1992, 1993; see also Callon 1998). Burt further suggests that entrepreneurial action is associated with the possibility of placing oneself in the position of the third in structural holes: 'When you take the opportunity to be the tertius you are an entrepreneur in the literal sense of the word—a person who generates profit from being between others' (Burt 1993). In this sense, Burt's 'entrepreneur' comes close not only to Simmel's *tertius gaudens* but also Serres's parasite; all of them rejoice by intervening between two. Nevertheless, what distinguishes the notion of parasite from Burt's concept of the entrepreneur is that the parasite is there in all relations, and not only in structural holes. There is no relation without parasites, no two without a third; the parasite and

noise are there as soon as a relation is established between two. What is more, importantly, being a parasite is no fixed quality of this or that agent, nor is it even a fixed position, but parasitic action is part of a certain relational configuration. Parasitism is never absolute, but always relative.

Third, the parasite and the collective share the same root. The parasite is not something added to the relation, merely a marginal nuisance, but ‘the essence of relation’ (Serres 2007, p. 79); simultaneously a condition of possibility and impossibility of the collective, both the ground and interruption of associations. The parasite illustrates how all systems border on disorder. To establish order within, a borderline needs to be set up that encloses the collective from the disorder of the outside. Order is possible only provided that the parasite is excluded, while the parasite of course exists only in relation to order. Yet all attempts at the permanent and absolute exclusion of parasites are doomed to fail, and thus ordering is bound to remain unfinished. At the same time, the very gesture of establishing order simultaneously also creates disorder. The ‘processes of ordering and disordering’ go hand in hand, as Michael (2000, p. 29) remarks. The very act of establishing an order to some extent disturbs the functioning of the system it tries to protect, as we very well know from such cases as information security, war on terrorism, immigration executive orders, and efforts to build walls on nations’ borders. Since total exclusion would be as unattainable as total inclusion, all relations are necessarily structured along finding a balance between inclusion and exclusion.

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Bruno Latour and Relational Sociology

Christian Papilloud

1 INTRODUCTION

His passion for theology, particularly regarding the question of the truth in religion, leads Bruno Latour to the problem of the truth in science. At first, nothing predisposes this philosopher, who has turned to the exegesis of texts—Latour writes a doctorate in 1975 on the topic of exegesis and ontology—to address this question from an ethnological and a sociological viewpoint (see Dosse 1997). The fieldwork that Latour carries out between 1975 and 1977 in California at the laboratory of the Nobel Prize laureate in medicine, Roger Guillemin (1977), puts him in contact with the avant-garde of French philosophy exiled to that state, in particular with Michelle Serres, who will have an important influence on Latour (see for example Latour 1987, 83–98; Serres 1992). When he returns to France in 1977, Latour meets Michel Callon who works at the Centre de Sociologie de l’Innovation (CSI) of the Ecole des Mines in Paris (founded in 1967), and who is, like him, interested in the development of an ethnological and sociological approach to sciences. Both authors give shape to their common interest by editing a newsletter—*Pandore*—which is intended, above all, to allow French researchers to become acquainted with works on sciences published in other countries, in particular in the United States in the field of the social sciences. *Pandore* also enables Callon and Latour to make the work done at the CSI more visible in France, as well as to introduce the STS trend (science, technology and society) to French social scientists, in which science and technology have to be considered not only as influenced by society but as embedded in society. Following the withdrawal of Lucien Karpik as director of the CSI in 1981, Callon takes over leadership of the Centre, and Latour joins him in 1982. This is the beginning of the

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institutionalization of the actor–network theory (ANT) in France, and of its progressive dissemination in the world of sociology.

2 LATOUR’S RELATIONAL SCHEME: FROM TRANSLATION TO ASSOCIATION

Beyond their common interest for a sociological perspective on science and technology, Latour and Callon become inspired by Michel Serres’ concept of translation, which gives Latour the starting point of his relational sociology. If Latour borrows the concept of translation, he further expands it by using the concept of association. For Callon and Latour, translation does not refer only to linguistics. More generally, it means the empirical demonstration of the social contract (Callon and Latour 1981, 279), namely, a link between different actors and actants. Latour uses both concepts in relation to Algirdas Greimas’ structuralist theory in linguistics, even if he tends increasingly to use the concept of actant only in order to underline the constant activity of actors that defines them in relation to their actions. Translation expresses the collectivity in the acts of individuals, or in the terms of Callon and Latour, “all the negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and violence, thanks to which an actor or force takes, or causes to be conferred on itself, authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor or force” (*ibid.*). The concept of association shows up later on at the core of ANT, extending the meaning of translation, but mainly supported and developed by Latour alone. Latour defines association as pertaining to the social: “We can begin with the common definition of social—‘to associate’” (Strum and Latour 1987, 793). This general meaning of association, which Latour mentions in some of his texts at this time, around 1986–1990 (vgl. Latour 1986, 264–280; Bowker and Latour 1987, 715–748; Latour 1988a, 298–310), will quickly gain three important characteristics. Firstly, associations blur if not break the boundaries between categories. Secondly, they are power relationships. Thirdly, they foster the building of relationships between heterogeneous phenomena (see Strum and Latour 1987, 783–802; Latour 1987, 83–98, 1988b, 20–43, 1991, 103–131, 1993a; Callon and Latour 1981, 275–303).

The first character of associations is an output of Latour’s reflection on what he calls the symmetry principle. The symmetry principle means, in a strict sense, that we can observe the interactions between actors and things from the viewpoint either of the actors, or of the things: “You are different with the gun in your hand; the gun is different with you holding it” (Latour 1999a, 179). In a broader sense, the symmetry principle means that there is no given correspondence between the categories of the actors and the objects in society and the nature in which the actors apply their categories. Several categories can be applied to the same object—as Latour shows in his example above, to hold a gun does not necessarily mean that you are a criminal. One category can be applied to several objects as well—to be a criminal does not necessarily apply

only to actors holding a gun. In other words, the actor does not make out of the object what this object is, and the object does not make out of the actor who he is. Rather, the association between actors and objects modifies the meaning of the subject as well as his categories and the meaning of the objects. This is the first stage in Latour's relational scheme, which finds its origin in the controversy with David Bloor, from whom Latour takes up the symmetry principle in order to generalize it (Bloor 1999, 81–112; see also Latour 1999b, 113–129). For Bloor, it is true, as Latour argues, that subject and object are the same thing. However, they still have two different roles. The subject is the producer of the knowledge about the object, and the subject is capable of reflexivity; that is, he is able to see himself as the object of knowledge. For Latour, this kind of distinction remains a metaphysical one. Privileging epistemology over metaphysics means that we assume we do not know yet what is a subject, what is an object, and what actually is the distinction that can be made between both. Thus, there is no reason, as Bloor assumes, to make a distinction a priori between subject and object—all the more so if, as Bloor says, we would have to investigate how such definition of subject and object has been accepted, that is, which controversies in sciences have led to acceptance of such a definition (see Bloor 1976).

The second character of associations refers to power relationships, which Latour conceives as a condition in order to accumulate associations, and to support them over time: “Who will win in the end? The one who is able to stabilize a particular state of power relations by associating the largest number of irreversibly linked elements” (Callon and Latour 1981, 293). In this sense, Latour explains, “the principle of symmetry aims not only at establishing equality—which is only the way to set the scale at zero—but at registering differences—that is, in the final analysis, asymmetries—and at understanding the practical means that allow some collectives to dominate others” (Latour 1993a, 107–108). The symmetry principle combined with asymmetries registers and generates at the same time differences, which leads to the third characteristic of associations: They support the heterogeneity of phenomena because they are made of such heterogeneous elements, and because they generate them.

3 MAIN RELATED CONCEPTS

Latour not only describes the three main characteristics of his concept of association. He also shows how associations behave in the practical life of social actors. This opens the way for a dynamic view of what associations are supposed to do in everyday life. Latour uses the analogy of the syntagm in order to explain this (for example, Latour 1991, 103–131; Latour et al. 1992, 33–57; Latour 1993a, 50ff., 2002, 194ff.). Associations rest on a common property, which is, to use an image, the same as the one that we find in the Latin conjunction *vel*, that can be interpreted either as an “and” conjunction or as an “or” conjunction (see the most explicit statements in Latour 2001, 165; also Latour 2002, 194). Associations bring different actors and actants together—the “and” conjunction—or they

separate them from each other—the “or” conjunction. Considered over time, associations cumulate the “and” and “or”, with Latour stating that associations both connect new elements together (“and”/“or”) and change the connections between already connected elements in order to produce new configurations of the same elements either at the same time (the “and” combinations presupposing the “or” combinations, i.e. the rearrangement of associations), or at a different time (first “and”/“or” combinations, then a rearrangement of associations). In other words, associations suppose several operations of “substitution” (Latour 1993a, 19, 2001, 165, 2002, 194), where existing associations between actors and actants will be replaced by other associations between them.

Actors and actants are not the passive receptors of associations. They construct associations in order to produce alliances; they connect and disconnect elements; they make the “and”/“or” bond happen. The concept of alliance is a further critical idea in Latour’s sociological considerations, because it shows the very *modus operandi* of actors and actants. Actors and actants act, which means for Latour that they actively build up associations, they invest themselves in this activity, and they participate together in the life of associations: “this enormous labour of persuasion and liaison is never self-evident: there is no natural connection between a military man and a chemical molecule, between an industrialist and an electron; they do not encounter each other by following some natural inclination. This inclination, this *clinamen*, has to be created, the solid and material world has to be worked on to make these alliances appear, in retrospect, inevitable” (Latour 1999a, 104). Alliances are not only the product of actions. They are those actions of actors and actants that lead to reactions: some alliances work, others break or do not lead to associations. Thus, alliances cannot be considered as stable structures in the life of actors and actants. There must be something else that successfully binds actors and actants together, and which can stabilize alliances—a specific bond, which Latour describes in French as “attachment” (Latour 1993b, 53). This “attachment” is not the product of the actors or of the actants, but it comes from quasi-objects/subjects (in modernity, entities like nature, or society; in the daily life of actors and actants, discourses, reports, descriptions, information, etc.). Such quasi-objects/subjects are collective entities supporting the work of actors and actants on associations: “they are collective because they attach us to one another, because they circulate in our hands and define our social bond by their very circulation” (Latour 1993a, 89). These quasi-objects/subjects are mostly non-humans, which create the conditions enabling the “attachment” and, further, the alliances as well as the associations between humans and non-humans. With the concept of association, as well as with the related concepts of alliance and “attachment”, Latour doubly stabilizes his symmetry principle.

On the one hand, Latour shows with his concept of association that distinctions between subjects and objects—or actors and actants—are distinctions between viewpoints in the sociological investigation, or in other words, that subjects and objects must not be taken as separate entities which would be essentially different from one another. Let us take an example inspired by those

used by Latour (see Latour 1993b, 64ff.). In order to write a letter to my friend, I would need the assistance of my computer. It must communicate with my printer, which must cooperate with my computer in order to print the letter. Sometimes my printer does exactly that. Sometimes it does not. Then I must take time to find a solution with my computer, so that my printer communicates with us again. Maybe a quasi-object in the form of another driver could bring my printer back to talking to my computer and to me, and to do what it used to do in the past—to print a sheet of paper. Like other examples of the same kind, this should make comprehensible that humans as well as non-humans can be described using the same categories. Not only are the technical characteristics of the printer important for the printer to print a letter; there are also social and cultural characteristics of the printer in the form of quasi-objects expressing the work of humans and non-humans on the printer—in our example, a driver for the printer—which are important for the printer to communicate with my computer and with me: “Yes, we live in a hybrid world made up at once of gods, people, stars, electrons, nuclear plants, and markets” (Latour 1999a, 16). Associations show that everything and everyone is always in relation to other people and things. Thus, the first duty of sociology is to investigate such associations so as to develop a deeper understanding of what they are, and of how they contribute to the position that humans and non-humans have in work on association, and eventually in society.

On the other hand, the symmetry principle does not appear as a dogmatic view of the world, or as an ideology, but rather as a principle emerging out of the interplay between association and alliance, which relies on the concept of “attachment”. The function of “attachment” is to interconnect association and alliance differently in time. The “attachment” differs from the association and from the alliance, because it depends on quasi-objects/subjects, the interconnections between which also vary. This latter argument goes along with Latour’s critique of modernity. The idea that we have never been modern also means that quasi-objects/subjects become all the more present in modernity, the more modern societies want to exclude them because they cannot be properly categorized either as plain objects or as plain subjects (see Latour 1993a, 57–58). For this reason, modern societies put the quasi-objects/subjects in a space between objects and subjects which, for Latour, precisely describes a space of “hybridization”, of “mediators”, of “intermediaries” (ibid., 59). Thanks to such mediators, associations and alliances are variable and, therefore, flexible: elements can be dissociated and recombined indefinitely. However, this does not always happen: associations can be more or less permanently stabilized in the process of association/dissociation. This is where associations gain their meaning as relationships of power.

How can associations be stabilized? Let us take an example from Latour’s book chapter “How to write ‘The Prince’ for Machines as well as for Machinations” (Latour 1988b, 20–43). An important challenge in scientific activity is to have research results in order to generate publications which deliver the knowledge to the public, aiming also at stimulating a discussion, and at acquiring

new projects and corresponding research funds. However, there is something else which is very important in science as well: the machines with which a research group works. These machines must be reliable, so that experiments can be conducted and controlled by anyone using the same tools, and following the same procedures. Thus, scientists can permanently associate and dissociate elements without compromising the alliances between them and their machines. There is an “attachment” that stabilizes the alliances between humans and non-humans, and which gives power. But this is just the beginning. To have power does not ensure being able to keep it forever. Therefore, in order to keep power, actors and actants have to construct a “black box” that will secure existing associations. This means that they must accumulate associations that must be stabilized in order for the black box to exist, which, in turn, means that they must work on alliances. The black box can be filled with further associations until it becomes unavoidable. Due to the increasing quantity and the density of the associations it contains, the black box becomes at the same time “black”, in other words, opaque. When associations have been satisfactorily accumulated, the black box is locked down. It is considered as what remains of questions, and it legitimates further associations. Thus, closed black boxes build a basis for the legitimation of power of certain associations, and of their corresponding actors and actants. They lead to an asymmetry between actors, actants and quasi-objects/subjects, they are established in history, and they build the basis for further black boxes. Therefore, it is difficult to reopen a closed black box (see Latour and Woolgar 1979; Latour 2005a, 193ff.), and if we follow Latour, it is even impossible. One who wants to open a locked black box must dissociate all the innumerable associations that have been accumulated in that box (Callon and Latour 1981, 275–303; Latour 2005a, 210ff.). These associations rest on other associations—on a history of science, of industries, of inventions, of institutions—which would have to be likewise dissociated in order to understand what is in the black box, and what is the meaning of such a black box. As we see, the role of black boxes is to discourage opponents, critics and sceptics from asking why these associations exist, why they correspond to certain actors, and why these quasi-objects/subjects have maintained an attachment with them (Latour 2005a, 323). So, once black boxes have been built, they can hardly ever be reopened—even if for Latour, democracy presupposes controversies about closed black boxes that can be, therefore, reopened, which leads to further controversies in society—and if the queue of black boxes can be inspected from the first black box that was constructed to the last one by following the actors who built them, the position of black boxes in the chain of black boxes remains irreversible. Thus, in order to overcome such relations of power, one must build another relation of power. In the sociology of Latour, this means mobilizing actors and actants, building another network that takes up work on other associations, alliances and “attachments” in order to make black boxes that compete against the other black boxes—or in other words, this leads to a symmetrical construction of black boxes which generate asymmetrical relations to existing chains of black boxes.

This—oligopolistic or “oligoptic” (Latour and Hermant 1998)—concurrence between networks and chains of black boxes on the one hand relativizes the monopolistic position of actors having and using power in society. On the other hand, it underlines the irreducible internal and external heterogeneity of associations, as well as the plurality of alliances and quasi-objects/subjects.

With his concept of association, Latour finds his symmetry principle in a—rather classical—relativistic and pluralist sociological conception of society. A one-sided view on society considered either as the product of individual actions, or as the product of hidden macro-mechanisms, or a view of society only taking into account humans and excluding non-humans, would deliver partial research results, which would not enable an understanding of how our societies are what they are. Social reality is a mixture of heterogeneous humans and non-humans, and their associations lead to a collectivity (Latour 2001, 102). The unpredictability of associations is directly connected with the heterogeneity of the associated elements and the associations themselves (see Latour 2005a, 488). Associations are not necessarily planned, even if the actors/actants act strategically. Because associations are unforeseeable, new combinations of associations can occur at any time unexpectedly, and they consequently lead to inequality between constituted associations, that is, to asymmetries (ibid., 495). Here we find again the two meanings of associations as dissolvers of boundaries between categories on the one hand, and as relations of power on the other. The level of heterogeneity enables Latour to generalize his relational perspective to society. In sociology, according to Latour, we have to deal with such associations which describe a movable reality. How can we do that in practice? Which methods can be used in order to record such relational reality in the making?

4 METHODS AND EMPIRICAL ILLUSTRATIONS

In his famous work with Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life* (1979), Latour mostly uses qualitative techniques, like an ethnographer observing foreign cultures. Participant observation, in the form of following actors and actants (Latour 2005b), plays a key role in the book, as well as the procedural description of experiments and, more generally, of the associations between humans and non-humans in a laboratory. As Lorenz points out (Lorenz 2009), this kind of qualitative methodology can be described as a “process”, or “case reconstruction” methodology. It largely deals with non-standardized data accumulated and systematized in the investigation process, leading to the formulation of a hypothesis about the relation of the data to the contexts of their associations, as well as to the theoretical interpretations that can be made. This methodology gathers case studies, sequential analysis of interviews, as well as grounded theory approaches (iterative cyclical approaches) and ethnomethodological approaches—particularly based on Harold Garfinkel’s works—in order to gain cumulative insights about the case that is to be reconstructed. In this regard, *Laboratory Life* remains a good illustration of such a procedural methodology.

In their book, Latour and Woolgar show how the laboratories of Roger Guillemin and Andrew Schally quickly isolate TRH (Thyrotropin Releasing Hormones) at the same time, by repetitions of experiments which they conduct independently of one another but in fierce competition. These experiments are described in research logs, and they take place “between desk and machines” (Schmidgen 2008, 35). The research process on TRH can be reconstructed using the variations of such logs or quasi-objects over the time of the experiments, and their consequences for the alliances between scientists and machines. Following the evolution of associations between these actors and actants, Latour and Woolgar show how TRH not only becomes an object but a discovery, a new reality (Latour and Woolgar 1979, 127), which soon leads to the construction of a black box. This black box is meant to institutionalize the existence of TRH in such a way that for everyone a world without TRH is now no longer conceivable. Guillemin and Schally receive the Nobel Prize for their discovery (1977), which ensures them dominant and unavoidable positions in the field of life sciences. Behind this apparently normal history of science, Latour shows a less charming world. Guillemin and Schally not only had a curious—if not hostile—relationship to one another. They also developed a practice of science that was uncommon at the time. They did not communicate to one another about their research results. They avoided citing each other in scientific publications. If they met at scientific public events, each tried to defame the scientific work of the other. Both wanted to build an asymmetrical relationship to the other. Schally did not work by chance with the hypophysis of pigs but did so in order to clearly differentiate himself from Guillemin, who worked with the hypophysis of sheep. Schally employed physiologists, because he thought that he was not as good in physiology as Guillemin. Schally as well as Guillemin tried to exert leverage on other scientists—whom they sometimes did not know, or who did not have special relationship to them—in order to build a network of supporters able to help them in the run for the Nobel Prize.

The relationship between Schally and Guillemin is a typical example of what will be a recurring topic in Latour’s research work: the study of scientific controversies, where “scientific worlds could become once again what they had been: possible worlds in conflict that move and shape one another” (Latour 1996, ix), as Latour states in *Aramis*. *Aramis* shows another kind of method that Latour uses in order to describe scientific controversies: fiction. In *Aramis*, Latour writes about the failure of the French to build Aramis, an automated personal transport system which should represent a potentially major advance in rapid urban passenger transit, combining the efficiency of the Parisian Metro (subway) with the flexibility of a car. But its innovative, computerized coupling system proved both overcomplex and expensive and, with an eventual failure of political will, the project trundled to a standstill in 1987, before being abandoned. Instead of portraying the story of Aramis in a classical sociological way, such as with scientific investigation and a reconstruction of the history of Aramis, Latour frames Aramis within a detective story. The sociologist Norbert—a detective-like figure—and his assistant try to understand why Aramis is dead, and who is the

murderer. In order to solve this criminal case, Norbert and his assistant have to understand who assembles and disassembles Aramis parts until it is dead, or in other words, they have to reconstruct the associations between humans and non-humans involved in the death of the project. The book is in itself a detailed description of the way in which a sociological investigation of associations has to be done, in depicting what kinds of elements have to be used at which time in the investigation process, and how those can be assembled with other aspects of the criminal case in order to find the paths of the dissensions, compromises, conflicts, vacillations and uncertainty over decisions made by the French engineers having worked on that project. At the same time, *Aramis* is an attempt to go beyond scientific controversies, or better: to make them take place in the everyday life of the people involved in Aramis. Latour suggests that his sociological methods can be applied not only to the world of science but also to every sphere of society. Scientific controversies are only one typical example of a sociology which sociologists can find at work in other social areas. Thus, what is valid for the controversy between Schally and Guillemin, or between the French engineers of the Aramis project, can also be found in other fields of society, and this is what the concept of association presupposes. Associations are the social. In everyday life, we have to deal with the construction and new combinations of associations, which lead to asymmetries—as if each actor were constantly competing for a possible, self-defined Nobel Prize. Of course, we use the expression “Nobel Prize” as a symbol here: what happens in science does not happen in exactly the same way on society but similarly. This similarity and, thus, the generalization of Latour’s prospect from science to society, rests on bundles of associations.

In his later works, Latour tends to construct bridges between his qualitative methods and quantitative-oriented procedures; for example, by proposing formalizations of qualitative results, and their representation in the form of “socio-technical graphs” (see Latour et al. 1992, 33–57), or by exploring the usage of digital computer-assisted techniques in order to analyse a corpus of qualitative data, as in the MACOSPOL (Mapping Controversies on Science for Politics) project—a joint research group of seven European universities and one research centre led by Latour and funded by the European Union (see <http://www.mappingcontroversies.net/Home/AboutMacospol>). This reconstructive and procedural methodology has one definite aim, which Latour underlines indirectly in these terms: “there is no metalanguage, no master discourse, where you wouldn’t know which is the strongest, sociological theory or the documents or the interviews or the literature or the fiction, where all these genres or regimes would be at the same level, each one interpreting the others without anybody being able to judge to say which is judging what” (Latour 1996, 298). In other words, this means for Latour that the aim of sociologists is not to construct a discourse over the actors’ discourses but to give their voices back to the actors, the actants, the humans and the non-humans. In a sense, Latour’s methodology takes into account one of the cardinal features of fieldwork in ethnology: to let the others speak, to let them provide the content that the

sociologist collects, systematizes and interprets so as to construct his sociology out of it, which cannot be separated from the contributions of these others. Sociology is, thus, a collaborative project of science, actors and actants, or to put it more precisely: it is a participative project to which everyone can commit. Consequently, Latour creates a website for his book, *Enquête sur les modes d'existence* (2012) (see <http://modesofexistence.org/>) in which everyone is invited to participate to the benefit of the augmented edition of the book. At the same time, Latour unveils the very meaning of his last works—to provide a socio-philosophy of values which has so far remained unaccomplished in the frame of his ANT.

5 SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES TO OTHER THEORIES

Besides the methodological similarities with some trends in qualitative social research, as reported in Sect. 4, Latour's ANT shows similarities with the theories of social networks inspired by the work of Harrison White. For example, White's concept of identity is similar to the concepts of actor and actant in ANT. White describes identity as any source of action which does not rest on biophysical regularities, and to which actors can attribute meanings (White 1992). The first specificity of White's concept of identity is not to define a priori who are the acting entities, which can be human actors—individuals and groups of individuals—as well as non-human ones. The second specificity of White's concept of identity is to avoid naturalizing the actors as the producers of action, and in particular as rational actors producing rational actions. This way, the concept of identity enables White to focus on the work that actors and actants are doing in their everyday life in order to maintain their own coherence, and in order to be considered in public as non-problematic actors—or in White's view, so as to control their own adaption to their environment. Because each actor/actant has his/its own way to do this, each one is unique and cannot be replaced by another actor/actant. Each actor/actant is also involved in relations to other actors/actants, and these relations enable them to stabilize their identity. Unlike Latour, White considers such relations to be made of “stories” as “a medium for control efforts” (ibid., 68). Networks of relations are essentially networks of stories, and they specify the relations between humans/non-humans and social action. In this regard, White's conception and Latour's conception of a network are not identical. Like Latour, White emphasizes the role of relations, the fluid character of the social world, the distributed character of action. But unlike Latour, White conceives the network essentially as a network of meanings, that is, as a semantic network which interacts with the relations between identities. Each actor/actant includes elements of past stories in his/its story, or stories of other actors/actants, which represent the complexity of the network itself, within which some relations can link to a specific theme, then forming a netdom, or to a specific category of actors/actants—a catnet. Furthermore, White's network theory considers not only process phenomena or associations in the sense of Latour but also the positions of entities in the

networks, from which he derives his notion of “structural equivalence” (Lorain and White 1971, 48–80). Two entities are structurally equivalent within a network if they have the same position, in other words, if they have the same relationships (or relatively similar ones) to a set of given identities. Therefore, one cannot understand the structuring of relations without taking into account the identities involved, and vice versa. Maybe most importantly, if White considers actors and actants, as does Latour, he does not believe them to be equally important in the sociological investigation. Actors and actants cannot be considered symmetrically. They should be considered asymmetrically because only actors tell and have stories. Moreover, White’s sociological work does not lead to methodological formalizations as Latour suggests with his socio-technical graphs, and it does not lead to quantification.

Apart from these affinities to White, Latour mostly constructs his relational sociology in opposition to existing theoretical frameworks, and particularly against the French sociological tradition as he portrays it in his book *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor–Network Theory* (2005b). Following Latour, the French sociological tradition might deliver the best example of a sociology which has been transformed into a social—and not sociological—theory of society. “French sociology” mostly means for Latour the theories of Emile Durkheim and Pierre Bourdieu. The former is described as the founder of the social as something that has always been there—the social number one. The latter supports the conception of the social as a permanent construction—the social number two, to which one can add the social number three, that is, the level of face-to-face interactions which is embedded in Bourdieu’s sociology at its three main levels (the habitus, the capitals and the social fields). In Latour’s book, Bourdieu is probably the one who attracts most of Latour’s critique, which can be seen as an answer to the critique which Bourdieu expresses against Latour in his posthumous book *Science of Science and Reflexivity* (2004). In this work, Bourdieu seems at first glance to support an investigation of science in Latour’s style, when for example, he remarks: “Sociologists have, to varying degrees, opened up the Pandora’s box of the laboratory” (Bourdieu 2004, 3). However, this is only the tree hiding the forest of Bourdieu’s critical considerations about Latour, and in general, about STS. For Bourdieu, Latour’s “audacity and facile radicalism” would have found in the sociology of science “a terrain” on which he could express his views “without any mask or constraint” (ibid., 31), depicting science as “just a discourse or a fiction among others, but one capable of exerting a ‘truth effect’ produced, like all other literary effects, through textual characteristics such as the tense of verbs, the structure of utterances, modalities, etc.” (ibid., 28). Thus, Latour is conduced to develop “a naively Machiavellian view of scientists’ strategies” (ibid.), which actually would only be “playing on words or letting words play” (ibid., 26)—a discourse that Bourdieu tends to relate to Latour’s scientific habitus marked by “its incantatory and self-legitimizing formulae (one is ‘radical’, ‘counterintuitive’, ‘new’), its peremptory tone (designed to overwhelm)” (ibid., 31). Latour, who sees in Bourdieu’s concept of habitus “once it is freed from its social theory [...] such

an excellent concept” (Latour 2005b, 209, fn. 280), nevertheless rejects his critique in *Science of Science and Reflexivity*, a “rather crepuscular book” (ibid., 95, fn. 121). Bourdieu’s sociology of science “defines the possibility for the sociologist to reach the famous God’s-eye-view of nowhere after having purged himself of all perspectives through an extreme application of critical reflexivity” (ibid., 139). However, “It is not because the sociologist cannot occupy the place of the all-encompassing and all-seeing God of social science that he or she has to be imprisoned blind in a cellar. We, the little ants, should not settle for heaven or hell, as there are plenty of things on this earth to munch our way through” (ibid., 140). Or in other words, the quest for a sociology which understands the social and society as positional realities should be abandoned, because it is “misleading if taken as a description of what is the common world” (ibid., 189). The common world is the world of associations between humans and non-humans, which, besides the question of the origins, supports the vision of the social as reassembly: “I am going to define the social not as a special domain, a specific realm, or a particular sort of thing, but only as a very peculiar movement of reassociation and reassembling” (ibid., 7).

In this regard, Bourdieu inherits a mistake that Durkheim already made in his time: “Durkheim showed how all logical and personal categories inside are in some ways the translation and internalization of the outside. But this outside was mistaken for a society” (ibid., 213). This outside is not “society” in the definite meaning of a human milieu, and at the exclusion of the non-human. This exclusion of non-humans, of the actants, is what surprises Latour the most in Durkheim’s sociology: “How is it that, in spite of this massive and ubiquitous phenomenon, sociology remains ‘without object’? It is even more startling when you realize that this discipline emerged a full century after the Industrial Revolution and has been evolving in parallel with the largest and most intensive technical developments since the Neolithic” (ibid., 73). Instead, sociology has to consider not the ensemble but the glue between humans and non-humans, the “plasma, namely that which is not yet formatted, not yet measured, not yet socialized, not yet engaged in metrological chains, and not yet covered, surveyed, mobilized, or subjectified” (ibid., 244). Latour does not explain his criticism of Durkheim in any more detail, because according to him, the ANT has another “forefather” (Latour 2002, 117) whose importance was often neglected, and which he wants to emphasize. He refers to Gabriel Tarde, whom Latour depicts as the direct opponent of Durkheim: “Tarde always complained that Durkheim had abandoned the task of explaining society by confusing cause and effect, replacing the understanding of the social link with a political project aimed at social engineering. Against his younger challenger, he vigorously maintained that the social was not a special domain of reality but a principle of connections” (Latour 2005b, 7). Latour considers Tarde’s first conceptions of society in order to put them in relationship to his concept of association. In order to highlight that Tarde understands “society” as referring to any kind of associations, Latour quotes Tarde’s *Monadology* (Latour 2002, 121ff.; see also 2005b, 13, fn. 13, 51, fn. 50) and he interprets it as follows:

“Tarde’s idea is simply that if there is something special in human society it is not be determined by any strong opposition with all the other types of aggregates and certainly not by some special sort of arbitrarily imposed symbolic order which will put it apart from ‘mere matter’. To be a society of monads is a totally general phenomenon, it is the stuff out of which the world is made” (Latour 2002, 120). This interpretation has the advantage that it stresses and generalizes heterogeneity and the associations between heterogeneous elements. Associations are “society” and even “societies”, since Tarde’s concept of society does not designate a human society only. How then does a human society differ from a non-human one? Following Tarde, Latour says that it is a problem of quantities: “In Tarde’s general view of societies, human societies are typical because of the small number of agents they mobilize, contrary to biology or physics that deal with millions or billions of elements. So being particular is what encountering the social is all about” (Latour 2005b, 137, fn. 194). For Latour, this means that if there is a sociology, this could not be a sociology of a society in a Durkheimian meaning, that is, a science of the collective, but a sociology of particularities which assemble and reassemble differently.

With Tarde, it is then possible to say that traditional sociology can be reduced to a simple metrology, which would not survive a minute more than the metrological chains on which it rests, even if it could reach a hegemonic position. In this attempt to give sociology new foundations, Latour says that he is tempted to call it not “sociology”, but “associology” (Latour 2005b, 9), the word containing the ambivalent meaning of “sociology of association”, as well as “anti-sociology” (a-sociology), in other words, as a kind of sociology that would be radically different to the ones preceding it, and which would be the only possible way for sociology to be a science of the social number four—the associations.

6 CONCLUSION

Bruno Latour’s attractive writing style is certainly what draws most people to his works, and indeed it helps in making his relational sociology better known to a large audience. In the scientific community, however, his attempt to dichotomize sociological investigations, and to categorize them in past-or-dead-sociologies/new-sociology-or-ANT, as well as his partial view of the historical foundations of the discipline, tend to attract criticism. One can easily grasp that his theoretical framework—with its new concepts such as the actants remaining not very clearly defined, its very general idea of association, and its metaphorical use of the concept of networks, as well as other ones with which Latour wants to avoid the use of more conventional sociological concepts and their associated preconceptions—pales as an alternative to the quantities of sociological prospects that he rejects. This could lead sociologists to choose the four or five studies that they prefer, and to adapt them further in their work without really reflecting upon the contexts out of which they

stem—the ANT. Thus, one might tend to consider Latour's sociology as a kind of—reassembled—qualitative method only, particularly fostering the attention of researchers on non-humans and their impact in the everyday life of actors. However, this would not do justice to some important ideas that Latour has brought into sociology, and which are worth more discussion. These ideas do not pertain to non-humans only, nor only to the generalized symmetry. They are also relevant to how actors and actants can develop critical capacities towards the associations that they develop, and in which they live. In this regard, Latour's initial focus on scientific controversies can enable another look at society as something that can be approached under the constraint of uncertainty, that is, while considering the development of the position of actors, instead of postulating that such positions remain the stable and the unchangeable starting and finishing points of the sociological inquiry.

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SECTION B

Social Forms, System Theories
and Network Analysis

Georg Simmel and Relational Sociology

Christian Papilloud

I INTRODUCTION

Invited by an American University near Chicago to apply for a professorship to begin in 1893, Georg Simmel refuses. He brings forward, besides other arguments, that he would not be capable of expressing his thoughts satisfactorily in any other language than German (Simmel 2005, 92). This anecdote leads to a complementary comment: The English language makes it difficult to express Simmel's vocabulary adequately. The very small number of English translations of Simmel's cardinal works, which are primarily due to the efforts of Albion Small, Kurt Wolff and David Frisby, tell a similar story. This seems a bit paradoxical, considering that Simmel was and remains one of the most well-known and inspiring European authors for American and English social and cultural scientists, and an important resource for relational sociology (see, for example, Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994, 1411–1454). Nevertheless, it is not an unusual situation. Not many more of Simmel's books were translated into French and Italian, even though Simmel adored France and Italy, where his works were received enthusiastically. The difficulty of translating Simmel's ideas into other languages lies not so much in the German language itself but in the way in which Simmel uses it. To draw an analogy, borrowing a metaphor from Simmel's *Rembrandt*, one could say that Simmel operates like a photographer. The words he uses, similar to a photographer's images, are not necessarily new, but Simmel gives them another appearance. Let us take some examples. The word "soul" has to be understood as referring to the events of practical existence, as they enrich the forming of individuality. "Soul", says Simmel, emphasizes the existence of a subjective culture. Furthermore, Simmel often expresses the concept of subject using the word "Dasein". But in his usage the word does not mean a Being behind the existence of human beings, like in Martin

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Heidegger's philosophical ontology. Rather, Simmel uses the word "Dasein" to describe a subject who resists his complete transformation through the socio-cultural world. We could provide more examples, but it would only make clearer that the difficulty of translating Simmel is not a mere question of language. The challenge lies in the interpretation of Simmel, and in trying to pay tribute to a wish that Simmel continuously repeated to his relatives and close friends: to leave labels and commonplaces behind in order to innovate in the socio-cultural sciences, even if nobody would ever follow his attempt (Simmel 1919/1920, 121). This kind of innovation in Simmel's works often moves along polysemous concepts, such as the main ideas within his relational sociology. Before describing these concepts, let us look at the definition and the context of Simmel's relational sociology.

2 RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY: DEFINITION AND CONTEXT

In his *Soziologie* (Simmel 1992a), Simmel summarizes the main characteristics of his relational sociology, stating that sociology rests on three major assumptions. The first is the assumption of relation. The others are the singular character of the individual position—each individual has a proper place in the social world—and the role that actors play in public situations. Further, Simmel describes his sociological method, which can be summarized with the following formula: relativism is a relationism. Simmel's sociology is a relativistic one, not in the common meaning attached to the term relativism (all is relative) but in the sense that social reality is made up of relations.

Three stages summarize the main articulations of Simmel's relational sociology, as well as its further extension towards a philosophy of life. The first stage extends from his first sociological writings, beginning with the critical considerations of Immanuel Kant, and taking us up to the closing years of the nineteenth century. The relation here rests on a process of attraction/repulsion between actors (Simmel 1989a, 284, 1989b, 60, 1992a, 187). This idea opens the way for his criticism of Kantian epistemology, and makes it possible to propose basic methodological criteria in order to make sociology a scientific discipline. The second stage covers the writings that Simmel produced from 1898–1900 up to approximately 1906–1908. The relation is now presented as a process which emerges from three concepts: *Wechselwirkung*, *Vergesellschaftung* and *Tausch*. The last period concerns the writings published after 1908, the origin of which can already be found in the middle of the second stage, in particular in Simmel's sociology of religion (Simmel 1995). Relation is becoming the principle of a philosophy of life, with Simmel generalizing his relativism to life at the cost of the fine distinctions between *Wechselwirkung*, *Vergesellschaftung* and *Tausch*.

This turn from relational sociology to the philosophy of life is often attributed to the influence of Henri Bergson on Simmel's writings, particularly Bergson's conception of time as duration (Kintzlé 1988, 1–13; Landmann 1987, 7–30; Fitzi 1999). Similarly to Bergson, Simmel believes that time is not

immutable but that it takes its meaning in relation to life. More precisely, life has a reality as existing for actors in the relation between what is not lived anymore, and what has not been lived yet. Life oscillates unceasingly between these two poles; it cannot be reduced to past experiences, and it will not vanish because of death. Death, as the farthest point in the future of human life, only reflects one possibility for life to escape the forms of life which it contributed to activating. This tragedy of life as something that escapes the forms that actors use in order to live, which is more than these forms, and which itself generates more forms of life, is at the same time at the bottom of society and culture. Life, society and culture take shape only in the movement between poles which can never be reconciled. This “dialectic of irreconcilability” (Landmann 1987, 16) is the culminating point in Simmel’s relativism, and in his relationism: the relation always escapes its concrete forms, which only keep fragments of it. This is why one form can express various relations, and one relation can be expressed by various forms. Regarding Simmel’s sociological prospect, this formula means that sociology is a science that must investigate the plurality of the forms of relation, a prospect mostly built up in his works from 1890 to 1908. This period corresponds to the formation of the main concepts of his relational sociology, and above all, the *Wechselwirkung*, the *Vergesellschaftung* and the *Tausch*.

3 CONCEPTS

Even if there are several translations of the word *Wechselwirkung*—in English, as well as in other languages into which Simmel’s works have been translated—we can see a general tendency to understand it either as reciprocity or as reciprocal action or as interaction (for example Coser 1977, 193; Freund 1992, 71–72). These translations highlight one of the meanings of *Wechselwirkung*, as something that calls to mind an idea of reciprocity, something that goes away and comes back to us, something that affects us (*Wirkung*) and that brings changes (*Wechsel*). Another meaning of the word *Wechselwirkung* that often remains difficult to understand is that it does not designate a social tie or an action—not yet. *Wechselwirkung* does not mean interaction, and as a concept used in order to develop a macro-perspective on society, hence a theory of society, it does not only refer to the world of intersubjectivity or to the interpersonal relations between actors. The idea of reciprocity that it evokes is not a norm in the sense of Gouldner (Gouldner 1960, 161–178). *Wechselwirkungen*—Simmel uses this word mostly in the plural form—are reciprocal tendencies, the possibility of relations which can be located in our daily activities and occupations. Simmel speaks about them as dynamic but unstable “driving forces”, linked to the concept of energy that Simmel understands as the “general energy of life” (Simmel 1989a, b, 1992a, b, 130–145, 1995, 39–119). The *Wechselwirkung* is one of these forms of life-energy—its social form. Its driving forces are made of attractions and repulsions. Thus, the *Wechselwirkung* is a first step in the development of social relations (Utz and Krämer 1994, 21),

their condition of possibility, but not a relation in itself. A relation as social relation only exists when the *Wechselwirkung* contributes to attaching the actors to one another, or in other words, when it substantiates one of the possible attachments that it represents. At the same moment, it disappears behind the reality that it has contributed to building, which Simmel calls *Vergesellschaftung*, and which can be translated by socialization.

Vergesellschaftung refers to these kinds of concrete relations which make up society—the German word saying it almost directly, as the prefix “*Ver*” means “to make something”, and the suffix “*gesellschaftung*” indicates the development of a society (Gesellschaft; see also Spykman 1992). Simmel explains that *Vergesellschaftung* describes the moment at which social relations take social forms. On the one hand, these forms represent social regularities which structure the situations of interaction, and which build expectations on the side of the social actors. For example, the various rituals going along with the presentation of the self are such forms. When people meet, they exchange signs, they shake hands and say typical sentences like “How do you do?” or “How are you?” Social forms play an important role in stabilizing actors’ expectations in social situations, as well as the exchanges between them.

On the other hand, social forms enable the exchange of contents between actors. They allow us to transport meanings to others that we would be unable to communicate otherwise, and moreover, they enable a conservation of what has been exchanged between actors. Thus, they are initially forms of associations, whose meaning depends on the arrangement of the psychological contents that the actors express. Simmel describes this interdependence between form and content like this: “there is no configuration, no process which is simply social without being at the same time the composition, or the development of some contents” (Simmel 1992b, 56). The contents can be objective ones—for example the manufacturing of objects, the progress of technology—or subjective ones like the satisfaction of psychological drives, the sentiment of justice/injustice. Unlike the manifold and changing contents, social forms exist as stabilized and regular types of relations in social situations, and they serve as a shared social memory, as points of reference in social life, which give some direction to actors, groups and societies. Social forms also give actors the occasion to play with the situations of everyday life, for example by manipulating them or transgressing them, where social actors test the resistance of society to them, as well as their own resistance to society (Simmel 1989a, 131).

This opposition between form and content prevails until Simmel’s last sociological work *Grundfragen der Soziologie* (Simmel 1999, 59–150). It will also be widened to another opposition between form and life. This opposition appeared earlier in Simmel’s *Soziologie*, but it will be deepened in his philosophical essay “*Lebensanschauung*” (ibid., 209–425), as well as in his posthumously published personal journal (Simmel 1919/1920, 121–151). *Soziologie* had already advantageously shown that the form, while being opposed to the content, is also opposed to life, because form collects life and precludes its further development. “*Lebensanschauung*” describes an extension of this same

basic scheme: “life is somehow engulfed as in a dead end, where something having taken form is lived; its intensity crystallizes here, it takes shape, and through this form, it will be closed” (Simmel 1999, 222). As for the particular case of the antagonism between individuality and society, the general rule of the opposition between life and form prevails: “Insofar as there is life, form is needed, and insofar as there is life, it is necessary more than the form. The life is given in this contradiction where it can occur only in forms and cannot escape them, which extend and destroy it” (Simmel 1999, 231). Thus, there is a continuity from the opposition between content and form, as well as from sociology to the philosophy of life.

Tausch or exchange “is the purest and most developed kind of interaction, which shapes human life when it seeks to acquire substance and content. [...] Every interaction has to be regarded as an exchange: every conversation, every affection [...], every game, every glance at another person” (Simmel 1989b, 59). As was the case for *Vergesellschaftung*, exchange is distinct but not completely separate from *Wechselwirkung* (ibid., 212). It symbolizes the movements of *Wechselwirkungen* (ibid., 59), whose function is to make society concrete by connecting social relations together, leading Simmel to understand society as the “total sum of these relations” (ibid., 175). Therefore, socialization and exchange represent two different moments of the extension of *Wechselwirkungen*, or more specifically:

- socialization is the quantitative growth of social relationships as social forms, or the stage of the pluralization of relations;
- exchange is the relations between these social forms leading to something more than these relations themselves—to a society; this is the stage of the plurality of relations.

Wechselwirkung(en), *Vergesellschaftung* and *Tausch* are the three moments of Simmel’s relational sociology, whereby life represents their extension beyond sociology, building the starting point of Simmel’s philosophy of life. If *Wechselwirkung(en)* is the most particular, as well as the most abstract moment in the constitution of social relations, exchange is the most universal, and the most concrete one. Both concepts enable a better understanding of the importance of socialization, without which there is no society, because there would not be any concrete social relation. This relational scheme has consequences regarding the way in which Simmel considers social actors, social groups and society. They are not objects of the sociological investigation as such but rather perspectives that the sociological investigation can use in order to understand and explain relational phenomena—such as, for example, the kind of relationship fostered by big cities, by poverty, by adventure, by strangeness and so forth (Simmel 1989a, 131). This leads Simmel to describe typical relational phenomena, where the type is not understood as the best example of an object, like saying that the best example of the expression “yellow fruit” would be a lemon. The type indicates the way in which specific social relations are developed in

correspondingly specific contexts. For example, the blasé is a type because his lifestyle gathers the most important elements of the relations that social actors and groups usually develop in modern urban spaces. For this reason, Simmel's sociology has often been described as a sociology of the fragment, where, starting from the investigation of a particular type, Simmel explains the logic of the whole to which it belongs. Let us take another example, Simmel's *Rembrandt*.

Rembrandt is an important figure in Simmel's writings on art. For Simmel, the power of Rembrandt's art, as its modernity, is to drive us from our private feelings in front of the artwork to the experience of other tastes, and others' tastes. When Rembrandt paints, he creates a distance between himself, his work and the potential spectator by using light, the expressions of his figures, their heaviness or their ugliness. If this distance attracts the modern human so very much, it is because it corresponds not only to what he finds in his relationship to the artwork—the level of socialization—but also to aesthetic experiences in his everyday life—the level of *Wechselwirkung*. According to Simmel, art cannot be reduced to aesthetics in modernity (Simmel 2003, 317), because aesthetics is a type of knowledge alongside reason (Simmel 1992a, 198; *ibid.*, 206–207). In contrast to reason, aesthetics operates in the field of senses. It gives form to sensitive experiences. It maintains the unity of perception through a plurality of feelings, and it also has a social and cultural function. It operates as a moment of resistance within the abstraction of culture and social differentiation by pointing out their more or less strong, and more or less direct, relationships to sensations and feelings. In modern society, lifestyle choices (e.g. fashion) are typical examples of such aesthetic relations, where tasting and feeling organize the practical life of social actors in order for them to adapt to the growing complexity of social situations—the level of exchange—and eventually to the abstraction of modern society, which is, for Simmel, the dominating characteristic of our contemporary lives.

As in the case of Rembrandt, Simmel provides many examples suggesting—more than explaining—how the three concepts *Wechselwirkung*, *Vergesellschaftung* and *Tausch* interpenetrate in various manifestations of social life in modern societies. Nevertheless, after 1908, Simmel hardly mentions his three concepts, and he does not develop them further. We can observe this through three important modifications in his work. Firstly, the concept of exchange worked out during *Philosophie des Geldes* (Simmel 1989b), and present in *Soziologie*, disappears almost completely from his texts. Simmel mentions it for a final time in his *Grundfragen der Soziologie* (Simmel 1999, 59–150) very briefly. Regarding *Vergesellschaftung*, Simmel uses it for his analysis of social groups by applying to them his views on socialization, but he does not develop the concept of socialization any further. Lastly, Simmel extends *Wechselwirkung* beyond its sociological meaning, making it almost identical to his concept of life, defining the *Wechselwirkungen* as a principle of “energy's exchange” (Simmel 1995, 104) or as a “spiritual reciprocity” (Simmel 1999, 68). Simmel could have directed his research towards the deepening of socialization, and overall towards the systematic study of the transition from *Wechselwirkung* to exchange. However,

he does not do this, although he does formulate some notes attesting that he does not see his relational sociology as completed: “If we can say that society is the effect of reciprocity between individuals, then the prospect of the sciences of society in the strictest and truest meaning of the word ‘society’ would be to describe the forms of this effect of reciprocity” (Simmel 1999, 82).

4 METHOD

For Simmel, relativism builds the scientific foundation of a relational sociology, because a relativistic sociology abandons the idea of a law, or of a system of laws explaining society, and because it favours instead an understanding of the irreducible diversity of relations between social facts (Simmel 1989b, 117; Landmann 1987, 17). Simmel’s methodological prospect is not about explaining the totality of social relations. He rather wants to understand how relations take shape, and how such shapes will or will not be linked together. The verb “to understand” has a critical importance in Simmel’s method.

To understand means neither to describe the factual reality, nor to build an ideal system in a philosophical, moral, historical or sociological language in order to apply it to society. To understand means, above all, to take an idea, and to investigate the conditions under which such an idea can be maintained. In more contemporary language, we would say that to understand in the sense of Simmel means to build a hypothesis. The sociological perspective has its roots in this comprehensive sociology, which is basically the art of building a relation between our representation of things and those things in the world. Such a relation is nothing less than a form of knowledge—scientific knowledge—which should be investigated or controlled in order to be stabilized; nowadays, we would understand this kind of operation as reflexivity. Considered as an analytical method, Simmel’s comprehensive sociology does not look for causal patterns between social relations. Instead, it seeks the conditions and contextual effects making social relations (im)possible, therefore starting from the “outside” of social phenomena, that is, from their social forms. The contents of the phenomena themselves are interesting for the sociologist only insofar as they unveil their more or less typical relationships to the forms of the phenomena. But the starting points of sociological inquiries are the forms of social relations. As a method, Simmel’s comprehensive sociology thus has two complementary stages:

- investigating the relational phenomena from their conditions of possibility onwards;
- investigating the relationships between forms and contents using the example of typical relational phenomena.

This method enables sociology to reproduce the meaning of society as relations, which is what Simmel’s comprehensive sociology aims to do. This reproduction is

an operation of abstraction that isolates the phenomena from the social processes in order to reconstruct them. Simmel often uses analogies instead of factual examples to foster a better understanding of the phenomena he reconstructs (Simmel 1992a, 65), but his goal is always the same: to take into account the relations between the social forms and the processes which brought these forms into society, and also to consider the ways in which these relations have been described by other scholars. Indeed, an understanding of relational phenomena not only regards the investigated objects and the scientific knowledge related to them but also the relations of these objects to other forms of knowledge (Simmel 1999, 174). Comprehensive sociology, as Simmel's method of investigation applied to social forms, leads to two consequences. Firstly, in order to understand a social phenomenon, one does not need to have experienced it. One needs distance from the phenomenon, because this distance is itself the basis to build knowledge of the phenomenon as a social form of a specific relation to this phenomenon. As Simmel remarks: "It is not necessary to be Caesar in order to understand Caesar" (Simmel 1996, 436). Consequently, there are as many ways of understanding and as many forms of knowledge as relations to investigated objects, and to investigating subjects. Each one has its proper style and its own shape, and none of them is subordinate to another, or would be exclusive to others. In other words, there is no epistemological gap that would place scientific knowledge as separate from other forms of knowledge. The ways of understanding in sociology or in everyday life differ in their style—the shaping of the distance to the investigated objects—but basically, they do not distinguish between each other, because they are relations. Second, Simmel often identifies the operation of understanding with the "thou" (Simmel 1999, 162), meaning that to understand something supposes the real or fictive presence of another subject. Or, to put it differently: to understand something is to give shape to a relation to an object, which is an operation relying on the social forms that we shape with other social actors (*ibid.*). Behind the relations to things, there are always relations to others. The relation is a deeply human phenomenon, not because social actors fabricate such relations but because these relations construct the social actors.

Besides his comprehensive sociology, Simmel develops a complementary methodological tool that he calls the "as if", and which he takes from the Kantian philosopher Hans Vaihinger (Vaihinger 1913). Simmel explains his use of the "as if" method like this: "Instead of saying that the things behave in such or another way—it is better to take a more general and external position stating that our knowledge must proceed as if the things would behave in such or another way. Thus, our knowledge in its own nature and in its own development is able to very adequately express its real relation to the world" (Simmel 1989b, 106). In saying that the objects of investigation should be considered as behaving "as if", Simmel suggests that sociology cannot understand its objects of investigation without taking a variety of factors into account determining their behaviour. This assumption rests on Simmel's relational sociology, stating that there is not just one stereotyped relation to an object but many possible relations whose configurations have to be reconstructed in order to

explain how such objects make sense for certain actors in a certain time, and in a specific social space. The “as if” opens the method to the multiplication of viewpoints, and consequently to the use of multiple methods in sociology, the strength of which depends on the kind of object to be analysed. The “as if” as a complementary tool to Simmel’s comprehensive sociology has led the secondary literature to speak of Simmel’s methodological pluralism, which Freund characterizes thus: “He (Simmel) speaks for a methodological pluralism, each method being legitimate and convenient according to the nature of the problem which should be investigated” (Freund 1989, 282; see also Levine 1992, 77–107; Kracauer 1990, 150f.).

5 RECEPTION AND CRITICISMS

The literary style of Simmel’s writings unfortunately contributes to impairing the status he deserves to hold in relational sociology, his works being generally considered as non-scientific (Masaryk 1909, 600–607; Wiese 1910, 900 calling Simmel a “salon sociologist”; Aron 1981, 6; Marcuse 1958, 188–192). For this reason, Simmel will often be seen as a kind of practical philosopher working between sociology, social psychology and philosophy, and not really as a sociologist. His sociological prospect, which did not consist in founding a German sociology but rather in anchoring sociology in an international space of scientific collaborations with other sociologists within and outside Europe, has also attracted more criticism than sympathy.

From 1893–1894, Simmel turns towards France and the International Institute of Sociology built by René Worms in order to publish the first results of his sociological investigations. But the relationship between Simmel and Worms turns sour. Simmel sends two articles to Worms, one for the periodical that Worms publishes—the *International Review of Sociology*—and the other for the yearbook of Worms’ Institute, *Annals of the International Institute of Sociology*, which need to be translated from German into French. Simmel is very disappointed when he gets the translations back (Simmel 1894a, 198–213, 1895a, 373–385, 1992a, 63–159). The French versions by Worms and his collaborators deform his thought. Moreover, nobody keeps Simmel informed, either about the publication of his articles or about the delays in the publication of the Review. Simmel is all the more surprised, as his relationship with other foreign scientists is actually very good—at this time, Simmel had already published one of his programmatic articles, entitled “The Problem of Sociology” (Simmel 1894b, 497–504), in the French *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* of Xavier Léon and Elie Halévy. He sends this same article to Albion Small at Chicago University, who translates it from German into English, and which is published in 1895 in the *Annals of the American Academy of Social and Political Science* (Simmel 1895b, 52–63). Thus, Simmel decides to give up on Worms and his periodical, and turns to another new French journal, *L’Année Sociologique*, inaugurated by the young French sociologist Emile Durkheim.

Durkheim wants to publish Simmel's contribution entitled "Comment les formes sociales se maintiennent" in the first volume of *L'Année* (Simmel 1898, 71–107). However, Durkheim has difficulties recognizing Simmel as a sociologist, and these difficulties increase when he translates Simmel's contribution into French. The conflict between the two authors regards above all the opposition between individual and society, as well as the relationship between psychology and sociology. Durkheim wishes to exclude any kind of psychology from sociology. For Durkheim, if there is a viable psychology as a scientific discipline, it could only be social psychology. For Simmel, as he shows in his article for Durkheim, the problem cannot be described with such strong categories. There are no psychological phenomena strictly separated from sociological ones; there are phenomena which have social as well as psychological properties, and the sociologist must investigate the social facet of them. This is the most important conflicting point in the relationship between Simmel and Durkheim. It not only highlights two ways of defining the object of sociology but also two different methods, and two irreconcilable perspectives on the scientific legitimacy of sociology. For Durkheim, facts are social facts which can be investigated empirically in an inductive way. For Simmel, facts are partly social, and should be investigated deductively. This quarrel will extend to fundamental divergences between Simmel and Durkheim, which lead Durkheim to publish a polemical article on Simmel's sociology (Durkheim 1900, 127–148), claiming that Simmel is not a sociologist, and that his prospect has nothing to do with any kind of science of society.

Simmel's attempt to anchor sociology with other sociologists at an international level fails, and his position in German academic circles is not good. Indeed, one of the key features of Simmel's biography is that he does not manage to obtain an academic position before 1914—four years before his death at the beginning of the First World War. It is at the University of Strasbourg, in a city that is at that time the object of serious tensions between France and Germany. Moreover, although Simmel's lectures and writings are met with public success, his German colleagues—Ferdinand Tönnies, or the young Leopold von Wiese, for example—are not very enthusiastic about his scientific work, and particularly about his sociology. Almost the same can be said about one of Simmel's close friends, Max Weber. Although Weber, unlike Durkheim, does not take a position on the scientific character of Simmel's sociology, he nevertheless criticizes the way in which Simmel practices sociology as a comprehensive science of society. Indeed, for Simmel, sociology has to understand the relations that are at the origin of society. For Weber, understanding these relations is to understand their meaning, as well as the subjective motivations of the actors who produce them. For Simmel, such a theory of the sense of social life leads to distinguishing subjective meanings—psychological contents—from objective meanings—the expression of these psychological contents in forms. But for Weber, this distinction is not strong enough, because there are no well-defined boundaries between subjectivity and objectivity. Objective meanings can often become subjective ones and vice versa (Weber 1972, 1). Furthermore,

with regard to Simmel's theory of understanding, Weber points out that Simmel differentiates between an objective understanding related to the meaning of an action, for example, and a subjective understanding related to the reasons of such actions. However, for Weber, such a distinction between a subjective and an objective understanding does not have any relevance. An objective understanding supposes, as in the case of a subjective understanding, the subjective interests of the actor. This objective understanding is thus just as subjective as its so-called opposed one, and both of them are oriented towards practical concerns (Weber 1988, 93–94). Simmel responds to Weber that the opposition between subjective and objective understandings is not a rigid one but depends on the viewpoint of each actor. What we consider to be objective can be subjective for other actors. Consequently, it is obvious to Simmel that this opposition is not related to the objective or subjective quality of the meanings, and therefore, to the objective or subjective quality of the understanding. Rather, it is related to the relation established between the meanings. In other words, where Weber sees in the meaning the starting point of any sociological theory of action, Simmel sees the meaning as a relational concept like any other concept of sociology. Only by understanding this relation can the sociologist investigate the motivations of social action, which lead to the reasons why actors choose one such social form in order to act, rather than another.

In the United States, Simmel's theory will influence the founding fathers of American sociology, such as Lester Ward and Albion Small, who encourage their students to travel to Berlin in order to attend the lectures of Simmel and other German scholars. This occurs in the case of Edward Alsworth Ross, the nephew of Lester Ward, who quotes Simmel in his contributions to the concept of social control (Lundberg 1939, 42–55). When he returns to the United States, Ross advises Arthur Bentley to go to Berlin to study. When Bentley listens to Simmel's lectures, they make a very strong impression at him, and Bentley dedicates his book *The Process of Government* (Bentley 1908) to Simmel, among other scholars. In the circle of what will become the Chicago School, Charles Ellwood, Edward Hayes, Nicholas Spykman and Robert Park also travel to Europe and attend Simmel's lectures (Levine et al. 1976, 813–845). After the First World War, American sociologists continue to read Simmel's writings. Robert Park, for example, encourages his students, such as Everett Hughes and Edward Shils, to deepen their knowledge of Simmel's sociological works. Talcott Parsons discovers Simmel during his intellectual journey to Heidelberg University. Reinhard Bendix, Lewis Coser and Kurt Wolff contribute to reinforcing interest in Simmel in the United States after the Second World War (ibid.). Nevertheless, as Levine comments, "American sociologists [...] have often patently misrepresented what Simmel was saying" (ibid., 822). Indeed, Simmel appears to the American sociologists as the microscopist of society, according to Nisbet's portrait (Nisbet 1966, 97–98), or, for other scholars, as the founding father of a non-reductionist methodological individualism (Boudon 1998, 177). Others see Simmel as an eclectic thinker preceding the trends of postmodernity and poststructuralism (Weinstein

and Weinstein 1993, 53–71), or as the founding father of an aesthetic perspective on society (Maffesoli 1987, 460–470, 2001, 5–11).

These attempts to classify Simmel in one sociological programme or another show above all the extent to which sociologists always have difficulties understanding what exactly Simmel's contribution to sociology was, if Simmel can ever be considered a sociologist, or—ad minima—as one of the most sociologizing philosophers (Vandenberghé 2001). This doubt, which spans the ages, can probably partly explain why the relational sociology of Simmel, even if regularly quoted by sociologists, has not been subject to a reconsideration in contemporary sociology. In addition to his exclusion from the academic system, or his misrepresentation by sociologists, as Levine points out, the programme of a Simmelian relational sociology remains to be continued.

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

With the publication of Volume 24 of Simmel's complete works in 2015, the Georg Simmel Gesamtausgabe (or GSG) came to its end. The piecing together of Simmel's oeuvre was a long and unstable process, beginning with the initiative of Michael Landmann and Horst Müller in 1958, by the publisher Dunker & Humblot, aborted in the 1970s, and taken up again by Otthein Rammstedt at the University of Bielefeld in 1982, in collaboration with the publisher Suhrkamp (Simmel 2015, 1039–1090). Simmel's complete works not only deliver his writings but also a rich array of documentation contextualizing the production of each of Simmel's contributions. One can clearly observe the diversity of Simmel's interests, which have led to various essays on the corresponding manifestations of modern culture. One can also read Simmel's systematic scientific programme, evolving from a neo-Kantian and post-Darwinian philosophy, to sociology and social psychology, and to his philosophy of life. At the core of these complete works, we have the rock upon which Simmel develops all his ideas: the relation. We have seen that relation summarizes the interpenetration of three processes: *Wechselwirkung*, *Vergesellschaftung* and *Tausch*. We have also seen that Simmel places different importance on each of these concepts throughout the development of his works. At the time of his earlier writings, Simmel elaborates above all the notion of *Wechselwirkung*. At the time of his sociological writings, he insists on *Vergesellschaftung* and *Tausch*. In his late writings, he extends the meaning of *Wechselwirkung* to a cosmological principle of life-energy.

Each of these three concepts describes the same shift in modernity from substance to function, that is, from a social differentiation resting on socially defined positions to a social differentiation that itself defines social positions. For Simmel, this cultural turn in modern society leads to an abstract society in the sense that social forms play an increasingly important role for the definition of these social positions, and finally, for the determination of the possibilities that will make society concrete. To put it in a less abstract way, modern society is one in which social actors, groups and institutions grow by concentrating

ever more content in forms capable of occurring in every possible relation. In this regard, money as well as love are good examples of such modern social forms which tend to be life principles, highlighting the indifference of these social forms towards their contents, and ultimately the exchanges that they mediate, as well as towards the actors, groups and institutions using them to build society. For Simmel, the indifference of such generalized forms potentially fosters strong social inequalities not only because they tend to be monopolized by the actors but also—and maybe above all—because they reduce the concrete work on relations to an abstract game with social forms. The tragedy of modern culture and modern society eventually finds its sociological expression in this ambivalent situation, where modern society is possible as a concentration of its most contradictory tendencies—which means, at the level of Simmel’s relational sociology, that modern society is based on relations which, at the same time, it tends to substitute against social forms. This concluding consideration maybe best reveals what characterizes Simmel’s relational sociology. Despite its coherence and inherent systematic approach, Simmel’s relational scheme mostly remains an exploratory and unfinished prospect, which—as we have tried to show—certainly delivers many useful insights for a contemporary relational sociology but which rests at the same time—and maybe voluntarily—on the image of Simmel’s regulative scheme itself: a fragment of the possible.

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Georg Simmel's Concept of Forms of Association as an Analytical Tool for Relational Sociology

Natàlia Cantó-Milà

I INTRODUCTION

Relational sociology is nowadays present in many sociological debates. Often it is presented as an interesting perspective, somewhat unknown but worth exploring, or reduced to a synonym of social network analysis. There are many ways of 'doing' relational sociology and of engaging in it as a theoretical and methodological framework. However, a point upon which scholars working on relational sociology agree is the fact that relational sociology strives to overcome the old battle between agency and structure, or between methodological individualism and holism, thus proposing a new and more fruitful object of study for sociology, which may bring us together following the steps of one of sociology's forefathers, Georg Simmel (1858–1918). At the turn of the twentieth century, Simmel already claimed that the object of sociology could not be the individual or the societal whole, but what makes society and individuals possible: social relations, and particularly social relations that crystallize into more durable 'forms of association.' Forms remain stable for a certain period of time, and yet they are deeply relational in their nature (GSG 5, 1992 [1894], GSG 11 [1908], GSG 16, 1999 [1917]).

Thus, relational sociology is as old as the discipline of sociology itself, and its grounding principles and basis have been with us for more than a century. As Emirbayer pointed out in his *Manifesto for a Relational Sociology* twenty years ago (Emirbayer 1997, p. 290), we can already find a strong relational tendency in sociology as early as Karl Marx's thought, for instance. And yet, despite the undeniable relational component of his thought, it could be argued that Marx still sought to ground his theories upon substances, as his theory of value paradigmatically shows. It was only a generation later, in the works of Georg Simmel, as suggested, that this grounding on substance was completely

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left behind. In fact, Simmel himself thematized the tendency of looking for substances, for ‘absolutes’ that hold that which has been crystallized in relations beyond these relations, and depicted this tendency as follows:

To begin with an obvious example of this tendency: light is regarded as a fine substance emanating from bodies, heat as a substance, physical life as the activity of material living spirits, psychological processes as being supported by a specific substance of the soul. The mythologies that posit a thunderer behind the thunder, a solid substructure below the earth to keep it from falling or spirits in the stars to conduct them in their celestial course—all these are searching for a substance, not only as the embodiment of the perceived qualities and motions, but as the initial active force. An absolute is sought beyond the mere relationships between objects, beyond their accidental and temporal existence. Early modes of thought are unable to reconcile themselves to change, to the coming and going of all terrestrial forms of physical and mental life. Every kind of living creature represents to them a unique act of creation; institutions, forms of living, valuations have existed eternally and absolutely as they exist today; the phenomena of the world have validity not only for man and his organized life, but are in themselves as we perceive them. In short, the first tendency of thought, by which we seek to direct the disorderly flow of impressions into a regular channel and to discover a fixed structure amidst their fluctuations, is focused upon the substance and the absolute, in contrast with which all particular happenings and relations are relegated to a preliminary stage which the understanding has to transcend. (Simmel 2004, p. 100)

In a poetic language that makes the temporal distance between us and his works palpable, Simmel presented his ‘relativist’ (relational) approach as an alternative to the search for absolutes in times in which he thought that knowledge was capable of sustaining itself relationally for the first time—without last assumptions, without eternal validity and truth beyond any scope of time, place, circumstance, and, above all, relations.

Simmel viewed sociology as the discipline that would make this turn possible for the social sciences, thus focusing on relations in general and specifically on relations that were durable enough to amount to ‘forms’ of association.

This chapter focuses upon these forms of association as Simmel’s proposed key object of sociological study, and as a central analytical tool for relational sociology. Particularly, and beyond the general concept of ‘forms of association,’ this chapter pays special attention to two particular types of forms, with which Simmel dealt separately: Simmel’s apriorities for society to be possible and his concept of the forms of the second order. This is important for these ‘forms’ have seldom been analysed within the wider context of ‘forms of association,’ and thus their ‘special’ role within the wider category is rarely made explicit.

2 FORMS OF ASSOCIATION AS THE OBJECT OF SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Simmel formulated for the first time his proposal of focusing the main object of sociological analysis upon the forms of association in his 1894 article 'The Problem of Sociology' (GSG 5 1992, pp. 52–61). His monograph *Sociology* (1908; GSG 11 1992) remained faithful to this proposal of 1894. This was not a matter of coincidence, or inertia, but the result of a decision. In fact, Simmel had struggled for years to finish his 1908 monograph, and he wrote in a letter to Célestin Bouglé (1908) that he had completed it with the firm intention to prove to his readers that his approach to the emerging and (fighting to be) specific discipline of sociology through the study of the forms of association was a feasible, fruitful, and coherent proposal for the present and the future of the discipline. Hence, in his monograph, he did not only propose what objects of study sociology should concentrate upon, as he had done in the previous 'The Problem of Sociology,' but he actively engaged in applying his perspective and proposal to different thematic fields in order to empirically argue his point.¹

Of course, Simmel's proposal for a 'pure' (*reine*) sociology was not meant to be the only possible approach to the discipline this author envisioned, and certainly not the only contribution that sociology could deliver to the endeavour of enlarging the knowledge we have of the world we inhabit and daily (co/re) produce. Simmel made this point clear in both 'The Problem of Sociology' and *Sociology*, and he dwelled even further upon it when he revisited it for the last time in the first chapter of his final sociological work: *The Fundamental Questions of Sociology* (1917; translated into English by Kurt Wolff 1950; GSG 16 1999). In that chapter, at the end of his life, Simmel spoke about the upper and lower boundaries ('*obere und untere Grenze*', or 'upper and lower limits' as suggested by Wolff's translation, Simmel 1950, p. 23) of formal sociology. These boundaries were concerned, on the one hand, with questions of epistemology, and, on the other, with questions of metaphysics. Both types of questions may very well be inevitable for the sociologist, but they are philosophical questions as well. And Simmel was aware that the sociologist's field of specialization needed be one that only sociology could claim as its own. Sociology as a concrete discipline had to offer something that no other already existing discipline could offer; and both epistemology and metaphysics were already taken by philosophy. History was also an already established field, and so was psychology. Sociology's new terrain, its specific field, had to be something else, something that was not already the object of study of another discipline. And Simmel identified the study of the forms of association as this specific field, which opened the possibility for sociology to become a discipline in its own right, both empirical and abstract at the same time. Simmel argued that sociology was to extract/abstract from empirical work and observation those forms that channel and shape social relations, thus presenting and analysing them, separated from the many contents to which they could be giving shape. Sociology was hence to be the discipline of the 'in between,' of the invisible

threads that bind us together, thus neither focusing on individuals nor on societal wholes, but rather upon the relations that make them both possible, stabilize them as we know them, while at the same time enabling change.

Forms allow us to understand each other socially, they are our vehicles of expression at the same time as they are the way in which we learn sociability and what it is to be social in the first place. Simmel worked with social forms in all his sociological works, including his writings on religion, and also the essays that we could now identify as closest to cultural studies (such as ‘The Tragedy of Culture’).² He saw a gradation between religion, economic systems, or legal systems as forms, and those fluctuating, minimal, and fleeting relations that do not crystallize into fixed forms, and yet without which forms such as the state (as an example) would not be possible.

In a continuum between macro and micro, as well as in a continuum between duration and ephemerality, we identify those forms that he used (and have since most often been used) as paradigmatic examples of the concept: competition, superordination and subordination, coquetry, friendship, marriage, and so forth. These forms are abstracted from all their possible contents, meanings, and motivations, and the focus is on the concrete ways in which the invisible threads of relations that bring people together are woven in these concrete cases. Naturally, the form ‘competition’ or ‘coquetry’ may change with time. What we understand today as coquetry might have caused a scandal a century ago, and certainly what is accepted as competition nowadays has not remained the same either. However, sociologists can observe and trace relationships and connections, and they can analyse what kind of relations they are, what they involve, and thus, abstracted from their contents and from the continuous flow of life and events, present them as ‘forms of association’: temporal, changeable, fragile, and local, but, at the same time, making possible society as we know it.

3 ‘SPECIAL’ FORMS OF ASSOCIATION

Beside the forms of association that are gained from observing and tracing social relations, as geometry may abstract the form of any object from the material in which it is embodied, Simmel also worked upon ‘special’ kinds of forms of association. These are special forms because of their relation to the contents they embody (forms of the second order), or because they are especially central for society and socialization and are furthermore embodied within the individuals and not between them, despite being deeply relational (the three apriorities that make society possible).

These ‘special’ forms reside somewhat at the boundaries of formal sociology: coinciding with the two boundaries or limits, which Simmel identified as those of formal sociology—from beneath and from above. The three apriorities are certainly an important contribution to a relational epistemology of society, and yet they (especially regarding the third apriority) also touch upon a dimension of existential meaning, of a sense of belonging, to this society, which has become an object of our knowledge and experience. The forms of the second

order clearly incorporate into the study of forms of association the dimensions of time, of memory, of durability, belonging, and meaning; thus relating us not only with each other within the here and now but extending their validity from the past and towards the future.

It is important to emphasize that, within *Sociology*, Simmel analysed a great number of forms; but he very rarely argued that he was dealing with forms without which society as we know it would not exist (GSG 11 1992, p. 47, 652, 661, 663). In fact, this last assertion may sound strange, considering that Simmel is a founding father of a relational sociology that states that there are no changes that can be made in the highly complex web of relations that constitute society without them having consequences beyond these changes themselves. That is, any movement in the chain of relationships that constitute society as we know it, changes this society.

Therefore, when he emphasized the centrality of certain forms of association regarding the stability and continuity they imply for society, or, furthermore, how they are even the *sine qua non* for society to be possible, he underlined the central positioning of these forms within the web of reciprocal actions and effects, within the web of interrelations that constitute this very society. These forms of association particularly hold society's threads together, so to speak, allowing it to be formed as a whole (GSG 11 1992, p. 33).

These central forms are the special forms we are dealing with now: 'forms of consciousness' (the three apriorities for social life, elaborated upon in 'How is Society Possible?', GSG 11 1992, pp. 42–61), and 'the forms of forms' or the forms of the second order (above all elaborated upon in the eighth chapter of *Sociology* in its digression on 'Faithfulness and Gratitude', GSG 11 1992, pp. 652–670). These forms are not 'ordinary' forms that shape the contents that are part of our lives, hence turning them into communicable and socially apt. Rather, they are very special forms that allow all other forms to exist and endure as they do: be it because they allow us to apprehend ourselves and other members of society as such—and thus *form* a consciousness as social beings (the three apriorities), or be it because they confer durability to the otherwise rather momentary bonds that we weave (the forms of the second order).

The three apriorities of social life are forms of the mind, that is, of human consciousness, forms that are necessary for society to be possible. They allow each of us to apprehend, understand, and expect social relationships, and to partake in social life. The forms of the second order have not caught the attention of Simmel scholars as the forms of consciousness have; however, Simmel presented them as being so fundamental to society that it would not be recognizable if they stopped existing (GSG 11 1992, pp. 652–653).

These two 'central' types of forms do not share any particular qualities beyond the fact of their centrality for the very possibility of society. Thus, we could argue that without forms such as competition or coquetry, society as we know it would not exist the same way, but society would still be possible. In contrast, without the three a priori conditions for both society and

the forms of the second order to be possible, society as an objective entity (*objektives Gebilde*), as the relational web of coexistence and relative continuity within the same time line (durability), would not exist at all. It is for this reason that Simmel asserted (when dealing with the three a priori conditions) that in fact the whole book *Sociology* was an attempt to answer from different viewpoints the question of the three apriorities: ‘How is Society Possible?’ (GSG 11 1992, p. 45). How can an objective reality such as ‘society’ exist if it emerges as a product of subjective consciousnesses of socialized (*vergesellschafteten*) human beings? (Fitzi 2002, p. 101).

4 ON THE THREE APRIORITIES FOR SOCIETY TO BE POSSIBLE

The relational perspective that allowed Simmel to formulate the apriorities for society as he did, also permeated each of the three concrete apriorities that he presented in his digression. Let us briefly focus on each apriority before we elaborate on them further.

The first apriority: The way in which we perceive and understand each other is conditioned through ‘certain shifts’ (*gewisse Verschiebungen*, GSG 11 1992, p. 47) that are not errors resulting from missing experiences; they are ‘substantial alternations in the condition of the real object’ (*‘prinzipielle Änderungen der Beschaffenheit des realen Objekts,’* GSG 11 1992, p. 47). This means that we do not apprehend ‘society’ and the people with whom we weave it as ‘they are.’ We cannot. In order to perceive and understand them as members of our society, as socialized beings, we need relationally construct them in such a way. And this is not a mistake we make when we apprehend them. It is our way to apprehend and understand them and also ourselves (GSG 11 1992, pp. 47–49). It is relational, or it is not.³

Some elements of this first apriority have already been introduced: the immediacy, unconditionality, and certitude of the experiential quality and intensity of the ‘you’. In fact, Simmel asserted that this experience, this ‘you,’ was the deepest psychological-epistemological problem and scheme of socialization (GSG 11 1992, p. 45).⁴ The first apriority is concerned with the very possibility of apprehending each other as other members of the same relational web we call society; as people with which we can empathize, who we can understand, but who are not us—and despite all the forms and relational threads that unite us and make us to a certain extent predictable to each other, are radically not us. Thus, the ‘you’ is that entity we can only experience yet never fully apprehend but which strikes us as just as real and immediate as ourselves. There are dimensions of the ‘you’ we will never grasp, and we know it: dimensions of unknowability that we nevertheless overcome by building coherent wholes out of fragments.⁵ And Simmel went a step further: even the pictures we gather and construct of ourselves are also compositions made out of fragments of all those ‘I’s we could be and never fully are. Without this capacity to build wholes out of fragments—wholes that never include the myriad of fragments of ourselves and others, wholes that complete and finalize

what we would be if each of our fragments were a whole—society would not be possible.

The Second Apriority: In our social apprehension and understanding of each other and of ourselves, there are dimensions that we cannot reach and make sense of, dimensions that we cannot apprehend and include in the pictures we make of ourselves and of others. Furthermore, we cannot grasp all the different facets of a human being, not even all his or her social facets. There are limitations to what we can apprehend: regarding context, time, and also regarding some completely individual traits (to express it somehow, yet aware of the impossibility of expressing what I am trying to say, as for that which is purely individual, there are no forms of expression that can be used) and a materiality that cannot be fully grasped within our forms of consciousness that nevertheless 'make society possible.'

Simmel addressed this issue by arguing that human beings are social, and yet they are also something that is not social, and therefore not socially communicable. This not-social part of us is not like the other side of the moon, which we cannot see or feel. It is not the flip side of the coin, either. No, all that which resides beyond the social in us is nevertheless in relation with the rest, relationally bound up with it, and therefore colours our way of being social, our way of relating and interacting and being ourselves. These asocial dimensions of ourselves are necessary for our social being to be able to exist as it does, and they make a difference in the way we 'perform' socially.

The Third Apriority: Society, if we imagine a way to map it or take a panoramic picture, is a complex web of relational positions crossed by structuring and structural lines that form axes of superordinations and subordinations, of oppositions and complementarities, of power and meaning, of distances and proximities, of openings and closures. At the same time, this society is built of relating and related individuals, who we now know to be socialized and yet also know to be something else beyond this sociality; of individuals who are members or part of this society but simultaneously also wholes in themselves. How can these two planes be viewed together? How is society possible as the objective entity we mentioned earlier, Simmel wondered, when it is composed of these universes in themselves, who are individuals? This is the question the third apriority aimed to answer.

Simmel argued that each socialized individual had to believe that there was a place in society for her, a place she (and only she) could fill and fulfil. In modern society, Simmel argued that the idea of '*Beruf*' (profession/vocation) was a key mechanism for this (cor)relation: on the one hand, of the structural positions, on the other, of the meanings and meaning enhancing and creating situations for individuals.⁶ There are indeed many ways of matching these two different planes of social reality, however, and here resides the apriority sine qua non: their matching is essential for society to be possible. One can project the apriority towards the future and thus this place gains meaning and continuity within one's life as something we are working for, or aiming to; this apriority can also reside, or can come to us from the past, as a way of life we have been born into by being the

children of parents who did the same thing we shall do—due to law, due to belief, due to tradition. There are different ways of realising the third apriority, but its fulfillment is by all means necessary.⁷

There are different ways of reading the three apriorities proposed by Simmel, beyond the common and accepted basis that they are fundamental forms for society to be possible as an object of human understanding, communication and experience. Simmel did not view them as the only and eternal a priori conditions for society to be possible, or as the only possible forms of consciousness. In fact, he argued that they were conditions that had to be fulfilled to a greater or lesser extent in the actual socialization of society's members. Moreover, he argued that their total accomplishment would represent a complete socialization. They are the ideal, logical conditions for a complete socialization and socialization, for the perfect (in the sense of most complete) society—a society that does not actually exist (GSG 11, p. 46).

* * *

Simmel focused on the three apriorities for society to be possible, paralleling Kant's apriorities for nature to be possible. They are thus a key part of the dialogue that Simmel sustained with Kant's oeuvre throughout his life, and which was so fruitful for his philosophical and sociological thought (and so much against the mainstream interpretation of Kant during his lifetime, Köhnke 1986; Cantó-Milà 2005, pp. 113–115).

Simmel presented nature in Kant's eyes as a particular manner of apprehension, as a picture that has been made and has grown with and through our categories of understanding (*Erkenntniskategorien*). If we ask: how is nature possible? we are asking about a relation between our categories of understanding and that world outside of us, which we can only apprehend and make sense of through these categories. It is *in the relation* that nature becomes possible, and never in an arbitrary manner. There are conditions that have to be fulfilled for nature to be possible (GSG 11 1992, p. 43). Simmel was firmly convinced of the relationality of the apriorities, and this relationality is what he emphasised the most within Kant's proposal. Thus, as Kant was asking for the necessary conditions for nature to be possible, he proposed to ask the same question regarding society; because society, as nature for Kant, implied the weaving of a 'relation' (*Verbindung*, GSG 11 1992, p. 42) among a myriad of incoherent and unconnected impressions into coherent wholes. Furthermore, he sought to develop the relationism contained within his apriorities further than Kant had done in the case of nature, as society certainly has a crucial historical dimension, and change plays a key role in its continuous (re)configuration.

When we apprehend and understand each other, we also do it according to certain forms and patterns: 'For here too there are individual elements that continue to exist apart from one another in certain sense, operate as sensations and undergo a synthesis into the unity of society only through a process of consciousness that places the individual being of the one element in relation to that of the other in definite forms according to definite rules' (Simmel 2009, p. 40).

According to Kant, nature only becomes possible in our minds. According to Simmel, society as an 'objective unit' (*objective Einheit*, GSG 11 1992, p. 44) only does too. This does not mean that nature and society only exist in our minds in the sense that they are imaginary, arbitrary, daydreams of isolated consciousnesses. Not at all: the very possibility of the emergence of society as an object of our knowledge and experience resides in its relationality. Only through the establishment of relations, in certain forms and according to certain patterns, individuals can apprehend and understand each other as such, and as constituting members of the same relational web, named society. Relations are necessary for the apprehension of nature as well as for the apprehension of society (and thus for nature and society to be possible).

These relations are woven in our minds. The impressions, the elements out of which we can trace these relations, the 'you'(s) who are opposite us, with us, building society with us, are not in our minds, and our relation to them is not solely in our heads. However, the society we build together becomes possible as a result of the forms of consciousness in our minds; the relations that are established among all these impressions, and their relation to us, are woven in our minds, and in these relations resides the possibility of the creation of coherent wholes such as society or nature.

Simmel argued that the apriorities are forms of consciousness, and he presented the objective of his digression as an attempt to answer the question regarding what these forms were, or which categories needed be in the mind of individuals so that a consciousness may emerge. Thus, the question regarding which forms have to be present in human consciousness is a question that belongs to the theory of knowledge (epistemology) of society:

Which forms must remain as the basis, or which specific categories a person must, as it were, bring along while this consciousness develops, and which are thus the forms that must carry the resulting consciousness society as a reality of knowledge, this we can undoubtedly call the epistemology of society. I try in the following to sketch several of these a priori conditions or forms of social interaction—for sure not identifiable as, in a word, the Kantian categories—as an example of such research. (Simmel 2009, p. 43)⁸

There are many elements that are of great importance for us here. They have already been introduced in this text, but the time has come to concentrate our attention on them:

1. Simmel clearly viewed his 'How is Society Possible?' as a contribution to the 'epistemology of the social,' hence searching for those conditions of possibility for society to become an object of understanding, of knowledge, of apprehension, and of experience. What has to happen in our minds, how is our consciousness shaped, so that we can actually weave society, apprehend others (and ourselves) as members of this always evolving society, to weave relationships and understand them?
2. Simmel highlighted as strongly as he could the crucial differences between his apriorities and Kant's: he did not mean the proposed apriorities to be

exhaustive or everlasting, and highlighted that their a priori character lay in their effects—they were ‘as if’ apriorities.

There are further differences between Simmel and Kant’s apriorities: for Simmel, the apriorities for society to be possible are valid within a (social) context in which subjects are, at the same time, object and subject of understanding. They are the apprehending and understanding subjects, but simultaneously, they are part of the whole that is being apprehended. Thus, society needs no external observer in order to be possible, as it becomes possible relationally in the minds of human beings. This very possibility of the existence of society emerges in and through relations between our forms of consciousness and the world that surrounds us. We are at the same time both consciousness and objects of apprehension and understanding: system and life world. At the same time, we experience our fellow human beings as a ‘you’ who, despite being different from us, and certainly not an ‘alter ego’ of ourselves, are, however, experientially different from other ‘objects’ of our apprehension; we acknowledge and experience them with the same unconditionality and certitude as we experience ourselves (GSG 11 1992, p. 45).

All in all, as we have seen, the apriorities for society to be possible aim at answering the question regarding how society becomes possible as an objective entity when it is fulfilled and woven within the minds of individuals as an object of knowledge and experience. The apriorities make this match possible through operating from the perspective of simultaneity, of being together in space and time (the ‘*nebeneinander*’ Simmel so often mentions), focusing on how the relations between us and the world that surrounds us are woven in a context of simultaneity.

At the same time, the forms of the second order make society possible by dealing with the relations that we establish from the perspective of asynchronicity (the ‘*nacheinander*’); thus, through the bestowal of the continuity in the timeline.

Of course, we may argue that there are dimensions within the three apriorities that touch upon the dimension of the ‘*nacheinander*’, and indeed there are—especially regarding the third apriority, as we will discuss shortly. However, from the distance that allows us to build ideal types, the three apriorities are mainly concerned with the ‘*nebeneinander*’ (synchronous, simultaneous, next to each other) and the forms of the second order with the ‘*nacheinander*’ (one after another, in succession, asynchronous).

5 ON THE FORMS OF THE SECOND ORDER

Simmel developed the concept of forms of the second order in his digression on ‘Gratitude and Faithfulness’ in the eighth chapter of *Sociology*. Indeed, he had already worked on both forms of association separately in two essays published respectively in 1907 (‘Gratitude’, GSG 8 1997, pp. 308–316) and 1908

(‘Faithfulness’, GSG 8 1997, pp. 398–403). Yet, despite the fact that he had already argued in both texts that society would cease to exist as we know it without these two forms,⁹ he did not use the concept of ‘forms of the second order’ until he combined both essays into one single text in his monograph.

The linking of these two forms in one single text and the proposal of viewing them both as forms of the second order is of great importance for our contemporary reworking of Simmel’s forms of association in particular, and relational sociology in general. Simmel highlighted emphatically the crucial importance of these forms for the existence of society, and he argued his case by asserting that the forms of the second order had to be understood as ‘forms of forms,’ which he defined as ‘instruments of relations which already exist and *endure*,’ thus relating them to ‘first-order’ forms as the latter relate to the ‘material contents and motives of social life’ (Simmel 1950, p. 379, my emphasis).

The special nature of these forms of the second order resides in the way in which they help to link first-order forms of sociation to the duration/durability of society. Forms of the second order extend in time the momentary social bonds and formed constellations of association, allowing society to have a memory that exists beyond the immediate moment: ‘Without this inertia of existing sociations, society as a whole would constantly collapse, or change in an unimaginable fashion. The preservation of social units is psychologically sustained by many factors, intellectual and practical, positive and negative’ (Simmel 1950, p. 381).

Faithfulness and gratitude manage to bestow durability upon a momentary *Wechselwirkung* by linking the emotional (and experienced as individual and unique) to social relations and bonds. The emotions that faithfulness and gratitude engender in people assure that they will endure in their attachment to (the memory of) their emotional experience and momentary social relation by creating a durable tie—one that will exist beyond the moment that made its emergence possible. Thus, gratitude or faithfulness are at the same time emotions that are experienced by individuals, and relations that weave two social actants together beyond their actual interaction. Through forms of the second order, fleeting connections become relationships.

6 CONCLUSIONS

If we take a last step and link the three apriorities and the forms of the second order to each other, we could thus interpret Simmel as arguing that a socialized person (that is, having incorporated the three apriorities within one’s own consciousness) who is completely unfaithful and ungrateful is not possible. Being able to develop emotional bonds (which are also social bonds that are kept alive over time through forms of second order such as gratitude and faithfulness) belongs to the most crucial and basic processes of association, and these bonds permeate the knowledge and experience we have of the ‘other’ (and the same time as they are constituted by them)—first apriority— they show the intrinsic and deepest connection that takes place within individuals of psychical and

social systems (of us as individual beings and as members of our society)—second apriority—and argue the case for the need of a certain lastingness of the social experiences and bonds in which individuals engage and partake.

Simmel argued that gratitude is the moral memory of society (GSG 11 1992, p. 662) precisely in these terms, and society needs this memory in order to exist, as all forms of association require from us a certain capacity to expect, to take future things, relations, and events for granted, for likely, for possible, for hardly possible, or even for impossible. In fact, the third apriority relies heavily on this possibility of continuity, memory, and projection towards the future that the forms of the second order make possible (Cantó-Milà and Seebach 2015, pp. 198–215). Indeed, the very possibility of having ‘a place’ in society requires that this ‘place’ is not an experience of an instant but rather a durable and meaning-creating experience and relation. Hence, I would venture to say that the forms of the second order and the three apriorities need each other in their role as fundamental forms of association without which society as we know it could not be possible, as they rely on the forms of the first order, without which they would make no sense whatsoever.

Simmel’s relational contributions to the knowledge of the very foundations of our being social has received relatively little attention. It is not that they have not been reviewed and commented upon, but not many authors have emphasized their great value for our understanding of what it means to be human and to be social, and what the necessary conditions of this otherwise so taken-for-granted sociability are. This is especially so in moments like ours, when inequalities are growing to alarming dimensions, tensing our relational bonds to the point of breaking, while the future becomes a hard place to imagine for many people who see their possibilities of sociation, and of being full members of our world society, as seriously endangered.

NOTES

1. In order to do so, Simmel reworked (and brought together) different essays that he had written in the years between ‘The Problem of Sociology’ and the publication of *Sociology*. This monograph was thus less a monograph than a collection of essays. See Rammstedt, 1992 in GSG 11, pp. 877–905.
2. See David Frisby and Mike Featherstone’s edition of *Simmel on Culture* (Simmel, 1997) for an excellent overview of Simmel’s essays on culture translated into English.
3. Here we could search for parallels with the works of George Herbert Mead. We could also see this first apriority in dialogue with Pierre Bourdieu’s (highly relational) concept of habitus. They are not the same, yet they point at common ‘problems’ and complement each other remarkably well.
4. For scholars who do not read German, you shall find this in Simmel (2009, p. 42). The translation is, however, misleading, as *Vergesellschaftung* has been translated as ‘social interaction’ instead of sociation (or association).
5. It is fundamental to notice here that Simmel discarded the ‘alter ego’ and opted for a ‘you’—with entirely different implications. Years later, Martin Buber would elaborate further on this topic (Buber [1923 1971]).

6. And as we know from Durkheim and Weber, he was not alone there.
7. Here the parallels with Bourdieu's work are remarkable. Especially if we concentrate on the concept of habitus, and particularly if we take Bourdieu's *Pascalian Meditations* (2000) into account.
8. Please compare with the German original: '(W)elches deshalb die Formen sind, die das entstandene Bewusstsein—die Gesellschaft als eine Wissenstatsache—tragen muss, dies kann man wohl die Erkenntnistheorie der Gesellschaft nennen' (GSG 11, p. 47, my emphasis). And he added immediately: 'Ich versuche im folgenden, einige dieser, als apriorisch wirkenden Bedingungen oder Formen der **Vergesellschaftung**—die freilich nicht wie die Kantischen Kategorien mit *einem* Worte benennbar sind—als Beispiel solcher Untersuchung zu skizzieren' (GSG 11 1992, p. 47, my emphasis). As you shall see, here again, the concept of *Vergesellschaftung* has been changed in the English translation to 'social interaction.' The original term, however, is *Vergesellschaftung*; i.e. association.
9. Thus, he argued: 'If every grateful action, which lingers on from good turns received in the past, were suddenly eliminated, society (at least as we know it) would break apart' (Simmel 1950, p. 389). Or: 'Without the phenomenon we call faithfulness, society could simply not exist, as it does, for any length of time' (Simmel 1950, p. 379).

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Switchings Among Netdoms: The Relational Sociology of Harrison C. White

Jorge Fontdevila

I INTRODUCTION

Harrison C. White—one of the most influential scholars in the fields of organizational, economic, and mathematical sociology—has produced an extraordinary array of seminal papers and books throughout his career, considering topics from arts to markets, including *Anatomy of Kinship* (1963), *Careers and Creativity* (1993), *Identity and Control* (2008, 1992a), and *Markets from Networks* (2002). He is a founding force behind the *relational turn* of American sociology (Azarian 2005; Breiger 2005; Maclean and Olds 2001). In the 1990s, White turned to language and its reflexive dimensions—*indexicality*, *metapragmatics*, *heteroglossia*—to understand the phenomenological production of social ties and their relational concatenations in modern organizations.

White asks the fundamental question of how social formations emerge. He recognizes that strict network analysis—for example, of structural equivalence and blockmodels—may be necessary but not sufficient to answer this question. Formal network analysis captures poorly the shifting meanings and switching contexts that characterize and bound social ties. The problem becomes evident in complex human organization when the same individual can activate or deactivate different types of social tie with another—enabling specialization by task and rank in the same population. For instance, someone can switch from job supervisor to niece of another individual, thereby juggling contrasting and nesting sets of expectations and obligations. So, to theorize emergence, White emphasizes the significance of phenomenological contexts—cast in framing stories and linguistic registers—that actively produce the meanings of social ties. He turns to language pragmatics and adopts Peirce’s semiotic model of indexical and reflexive language as the most rigorous approach to understand

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context production in social life. White's goal is to incorporate and formalize social spread and scope into discourse and reflexive language.

White first defines *networks* as social spaces with broader temporal relational extensions than any smaller abstraction of momentary dyads, and *domains* as the lifeworlds constituting the phenomenological contents and horizons of those relational spaces. Networks and domains—*netdoms*—merge in *type of tie*, delivering a set of *stories* and sense of temporality to the relationship. He then postulates a relational mechanism—*switching*—that is central to reflexive meaning-making and that bridges the analytical abstractions of network and domain out of the stochastic turbulence of social life. Switching or changing of context—for instance, from mother to worker—is key to his model. In White's words:

I claim that all scopes and scales of social process induce themselves in some fashion as the following: Identities trigger out of events—that is to say, out of switches in surroundings—seeking control over uncertainty and thus over fellow identities. Identities build and articulate ties to other identities in network-domains, netdoms for short. However, netdoms themselves remain subject to interruption from further switching with attendant netdoms. Thus, the world comes from identities attempting control within their relationships to other identities. In their search for control, identities switch from netdom to netdom, and each switching is at once a decoupling *from* somewhere and an embedding *into* somewhere. (2008, 2)

Thus, *identities*—as sources of action triggered by stochastic process in social life—seek *control* to reduce uncertainty by relentlessly switching netdoms—decoupling from and coupling to other identities. In the process, they produce enough phenomenological contrast among ties to spark meanings that become interpreted through emplotment in stories. I develop these original ideas throughout this chapter. First, I introduce White's relational, cultural, and linguistic turns shaping his theory of *story* as phenomenology of network tie. Then I lay out his theoretical edifice of analytical tools and relational mechanisms built around identity and control. Finally, I turn to his later developments on reflexive indexicality in language based on Peircean semiotics to theorize the creative production of stories and meaning through switching contexts.

2 THE RELATIONAL TURN

Philosophers of science have argued that if indeed we have access to the world, true epistemological access may just be to the relations among things and not to the things themselves (Kuhlmann 2010, 2012). For instance, reflecting on quantum “weird” phenomena (e.g. entanglement, quantum vacuum) and other conundrums, they posit that we may never know the real nature or substance of fundamental things (e.g. particles, fields) but only how things

change and structurally relate to each other. This profound epistemic structural or relational realism has an even stronger ontological version called ontic structural or relational realism. The latter denies the existence of *relata* altogether and contends that relations is all that there is. In this light, the metaphysical question as to which—relations or *relata*—are more fundamental in nature is perhaps unknowable. What the historical record shows, however, is that scientific theories that posit formal relations among things without making strong assumptions about the nature of those things tend to be more parsimonious and successful (Cruikshank 2013; Ladyman 2014; Votsis 2000).¹

In the larger context of these epistemic debates on the primacy of relations versus *relata*, White pioneered a relational turn in the social sciences of the 1960s and 1970s that has produced some of the most influential formal tools to date in social network analysis, including *vacancy chains* (absences channeling organizational mobility), *structural equivalence* and *blockmodels* (positions in structurally similar tie sets), and *kinship* and *producer markets* modeling (White and Breiger 1975; Granovetter 1973; White 1963, 1970, 1981; White et al. 1976; Boorman and White 1976; White and Heil 1976; Lorrain and White 1971).

White, claiming direct descent from Nadel's (1957) structural theories, responded to prevailing mid-twentieth century functionalist or atomistic metatheoretical approaches to order and action—which he perceived as essentializing folk constructs of “society” and “person,” respectively—and turned to the concrete level of social actors' interactions, their relationships, structural holes, and direct/indirect concatenations.² White aimed at an “epistemology of middling level, in between individualism and cultural wholism [*sic*]” (White 1992a, xii), and recommended that we “abandon both the Talcott Parsons attempt to derive social order from values guiding individual persons, and the view common in economic theory of social order emerging from preexisting individuals' efforts to achieve their idiosyncratic wants and interests” (White 1992a, 9). More boldly, he claimed that “my theory aims not just to sidestep the ‘structure and agency’ problem, but to build on grounds of concepts that eliminate that problem” (White 2008, 15).

2.1 *Polymerizing Gels and Goos*

Against holism and atomism, White thus proposed a relational ontology that incorporates stochastic process and recognizes that in social life “there is no tidy atom and no embracing world, only complex striations, long strings repeating as in a polymer goo, or in a mineral before it hardens” (White 1992a, 4). Social organization—the main object of sociological theorizing according to White—is typically “messy and refractory, a shambles rather than a crystal” (White 2008, 18), and social orders are always nonlinear, provisional, local ensembles in the midst of turbulence, and grasped through imagery of polymerizing gels in phase transitions (the “polymer gel” metaphor replacing that of rigid “structure”). In his own words,

We are creatures living within social goos, shards, and rubbery gels made up by and of ourselves. We, like gels, may dissolve into a different order under some heat. Even the frozen shards exhibit only limited orderliness, and even then an orderliness lacking in homogeneity. (White 1992a, 337–338)³

Although “in the beginning there is the relation” (Donati 2011, 17), White’s relational sociology based on the primacy of self-organizing ensembles of rapidly polymerizing networks of relations radically moves beyond the dyadic relation—which he considers as reductionist as atomism. White underscores how direct and indirect chains of “ties and their stories are generated in an endogenous process without need for the analyst to call on attributes or ideology” (White 2008, 22; Baldassarri and Bearman 2007; Bearman 1993; Padgett and Ansell 1993). In this view, social topologies emerging from multiple relational bonds are more significant to social life than the single dyadic bond, much like DNA’s complex temporal-spatial switchings are crucial to gene transregulation, or proteins’ 3D molecular shapes are more relevant to cells’ metabolic communications than the single covalent bond.⁴

Moreover, rather than focusing on how isolated dyads resolve their double contingency,⁵ White emphasizes how navigating social life entails reflexive juggling of expectation sets across multiple contingencies of shifting network configurations, including ties’ relentless couplings and decouplings—for example, second-order observations of rapidly changing network times and shapes, multiple actors taking into account changing tie positions and expectations located several nodes removed from their direct dyadic relationships. Thus, interactions between direct or co-present ties are rarely conducted in true dyadic isolation but always reflexively monitored and anchored in patterns and perceptions of each other’s indirect relations. Put differently, actors are not just interacting with one another but with their mutual networks such that “one man’s tie to another is always contingent on the ties each has to still others, and thence to latter’s ties to others at a further remove” (White 1968, 15). As discussed in Section 5. Switchings among Netdoms, this multiple contingency is crucial to understanding linguistic indexicality, since participants perform reflexively not only to co-present ties but via them to absent and indirect ties as well—for example, deferential demeanor in addressing a direct superordinate with the view to indirectly and reflexively target the latter’s “not present” higher-ups (Fontdevila and White 2013).

In short, emergent topologies among sets of relations configure “reflexive” arrangements that are highly consequential for action in that, as Crossley (2010, 14) puts it, “different patterns of connection generate different opportunities, constraints and dynamics for those connected in them.” Some of these relational patterns may partly congeal into feedback loops, positive or negative, resulting in control systems among relations, such as path dependencies, technological or arms races, poverty traps, social dilemmas, among others. As discussed in Section 4.4. Disciplines and Networks, White (2008, 63) explores control orders in the midst of turbulence through the concept of *disciplines*. His goal is to uncover underlying mechanisms that explain both change and predictability in concrete social organization, and “seek principles of social process which account for chaos and normality together” (White 1992a, 4).

2.2 *The New York School*

The relational turn in American sociology—in particular the field of social network analysis—came of age in the 1990s, fueled by advances in computational and complexity sciences (Burt 1995; Emirbayer 1997; Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994; Fuchs 2001; Tilly 1998; Wasserman and Faust 1994; Watts 1999; White 1992a). Relational thinking, in arguing that fluid configurations of social relations enabled as well as constrained human action, appeared to be the best candidate to move beyond the rigid antinomies of structure and agency.⁶ Moreover, the digital revolution, together with relentless globalization, was causing sociology to lose sight of its object “society” as geographically bound within the territoriality of the nation-state—much like the discipline of cultural anthropology had already lost its object of isolated tribal life due to postcolonial change. Mounting scholarship on global networks addressed the limitations of a social science confined to the nation-state (Appadurai 1996; Beck 1992; Castells 2000; Giddens 1999; Sassen 1991).

A particularly effervescent period of relational thinking in the social sciences—identified as the New York School of relational analysis by Mische (2011)—developed in the mid-1990s across this global city’s top universities and research centers. Leading relational scholars—notably Harrison White and Charles Tilly—had grown increasingly dissatisfied with the highly formalized and technical applications of social network analysis. Then in 1997, relational scholar Mustafa Emirbayer published his seminal “Manifesto for a Relational Sociology,” providing a cohesive referent to an already existing city-wide network of workshops, mini-conferences, dissertation committees, and informal study groups of faculty and graduate students (Mische 2011, 81; Emirbayer 1997). A primary goal of all these efforts was to reformulate and update the theoretical stalemate of formal network analysis in light of recent developments in comparative-historical and cultural sociology.

Furthermore, the rising tides of poststructuralist thought and other cultural and linguistic turns in the social sciences were weighing heavily on relational scholars who began to reconceptualize social network relations as more complex phenomena than simple conduits of informational or cultural flows. Instead of solid bridges, social ties and their networks were increasingly viewed as constituted in “time” by interpretive processes of reflexive meaning-making and second-order observations (Fuchs 2001; Mische 2011; Mohr 1998; Podolny 2001; Pachucki and Breiger 2010 for a review). Instead of just pipes and conduits, social network tie configurations and shapes were increasingly seen as lenses or prisms “splitting out and inducing differentiation among actors” and through which action was interpretively refracted (Podolny 2001, 35). In short, once again the seemingly irreducible or intractable question of meaning in social action (*verstehen*) was defiantly not going away. Meaning matters.⁷ It was during this 1990s productive period of relational thinking in New York City that White turned to discourse and language in context to explore the interpretive underpinnings and phenomenology of the social tie.

3 TIES AND STORIES

White had grown critical of the general direction taken by the social sciences—particularly formal and reductionist approaches to social network analysis—and as a corrective, in 1992 he published his magnum opus *Identity & Control: A Structural Theory of Social Action* (see also the 2008 edition). In this groundbreaking book, White develops *story* as the subjective and phenomenological dimension of network tie.⁸ He contends that “networks are phenomenological realities as well as measurement constructs” and opposes the simplistic view of social networks as “physical monads” and “lines” in Cartesian space (White 1992a, 65). As he writes,

An apparently simple pair-tie can be seen to be a considerable social accomplishment ... There also must be ambivalence and complexity built into a tie, since it is a dynamic structure of interaction in control attempts. It is this structure which is being summed up as a “tie,” and interpreted in stories, both by its members and by onlookers. (White 1992a, 68–69, 2008, 25)

For White, the tie or relationship is the basic unit of the social, and a story consists of a series of periodic reports, accounts, updates variably linked through plotment that provide a characteristic sense of temporality to that social tie—a history. Through stories, network ties are reshaped and reinterpreted by actors in ongoing interactions and control efforts. Ties become phenomenological constructs that are not fixed but an accomplishment in time. As discussed in Section 5.3. Switching as Reflexive Metacommunication, sets of stories are told and retold in speech registers and sublanguages appropriate for a particular type of tie. Moreover, “stories come from and become a medium for control efforts: that is the core” (White 1992a, 68). I will also turn to these control efforts that produce stories in more depth in Section 4.3. Control from Footing.

3.1 Phenomenology of Ties

In a more formal structuralist period of the 1970s, White and collaborators had stated that “the cultural and social-psychological meanings of actual ties are largely bypassed ... We focus instead on interpreting the patterns among types of tie” (White et al. 1976, 734; White 1970). However, this assertion was a stance against reified culture concepts of “norms and values” à la Parsons, and so it is worth noting that as early as 1960 White was well aware of the importance of the phenomenology of ties to understand social organization, expressing concerns about the co-constitutive nature of objective structures and actors’ perceptions and experiences of them:

We do not assume that the [manager’s] perceptions ... are accurate reflections of the patterns which would be noted by an omniscient observer. We do assume that

a manager's own behavior is determined by his set of perceptions, as brought to his conscious attention, in part, by cues from the actions of others. We do assert that from contrasting the perceptions of different managers one can in principle infer both their attitudes toward their relations and much of the actual (i.e. the overall objective) pattern of relation itself. (White 1960, 16)

In fact, White's innovative concept of *catnet* (category-networks)—or sets of individuals who are interconnected and “alike in some respect, from someone's point of view”—should be viewed as an early exercise on the need to include phenomenological and cultural dimensions to network structure ([1965] 2008, 4). As he puts it in his early lectures, “a net continues indefinitely: its structure is essentially local, a matter of pair relations. Yet there must be a common culture to define a type of relation sharply and clearly, if there is to be a net defined by the presence or absence of that relation between pairs of persons” ([1965] 2008, 2). Similarly, in his conceptualization of *frame* as folk theories used by people to categorize their indirect relations—for instance, a kinship group with names for indirect relations—White also states that “people develop culture in part to meet their needs to visualize, operate in and modify the social structure to which they belong” ([1965] 2008, 11).

By 1981, White applies mathematical parametrization to formalize production markets embeddedness based on the phenomenology of perception and mutual signaling (White 1981, 2002 for full systematic development). He argues that producers' phenomenological perceptions of each other within certain *market profiles* are the prime mechanism that stabilizes markets—as opposed to law-like price mechanisms of supply and demand. In White's own words, “I argue that the key fact is that producers watch each other within a market” (1981, 518). So, to reduce market uncertainty of supplier (upstream) and buyer (downstream) chains, producers orient themselves to each other and rank value their production schedules according to relative quality and volume (Knorr-Cetina 2004 for a critique; Lazega 2013 for White's market phenomenology and its significance in bringing back culture to American structural sociology).

White's theory of *market profiles*—including mutual perception and signaling—should be seen as a special case of his broader concept of *comparability* of ties. Thus, in complex social worlds, actors reduce uncertainty by assessing and comparing the course of action taken by other actors who are more or less structurally equivalent.⁹ As discussed in Section 4.4. Disciplines and Networks, however, comparability often leads to competition, and eventual ranking and status distinction among an initial set of structurally equivalent actors (White 1992a, 13). In sum, White has argued for phenomenology, culture, and perception of ties in formal analysis of networks—from *catnets* to *netdoms*—since the 1960s, if not earlier.

3.2 *Cultural and Linguistic Turns*

By the early 1990s, the inexorable unfolding of a cultural turn in sociology was taking hold—a turn that eventually changed the Culture Section of the American Sociological Association from a relatively marginal section in the early 1990s to one of the largest sections by the mid-2000s (Mische 2011, 81). As mentioned above, disappointed by formal network analysis’ blind spot on meaning, White—like other scholars of the period—fully embraced the view that “networks and culture are mutually constitutive and so deserve deeper analytical consideration in light of one another” (Pachucki and Breiger 2010, 209; for neo-institutional traditions that turned early to culture see Fligstein 1997; Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Thornton and Ocasio 1999). And yet, White soon realized—unlike other sociologists of the period who, to theorize culture, turned to cognition, toolkits, repertoires, Durkheim’s classificatory rituals, or Saussurean-based poststructuralist derivatives—that to fully grasp culture it was first necessary to rigorously explore the semiotics of language pragmatics in context.

Early influences on White’s (1994) evolving views on language came from M.A.K. Halliday on choice grammar and speech registers (1985), John Gumperz on contextualization (1982), and William Labov on sublanguage varieties (1972). Linguistic anthropologist Michael Silverstein (1976, 1993), however, occupies center stage in shaping White’s pragmatic turn to language and culture. Silverstein is key in bringing Peircean semiotics via Jakobson (1960) to modern linguistic anthropology. In a seminal paper on language and culture, he famously proclaimed that “we need invoke ‘symbolism’ for a certain modality of speech alone; the vast residue of language is culture, and culture is pragmatic” (Silverstein 1976, 54). By the 1990s, the discipline of linguistic anthropology was applying a pragmatist model of language and culture based on Peirce’s—as opposed to Saussure’s—semiotic theory with a focus on creative indexes over symbols.¹⁰ In contrast, much of sociology and the humanities still needed (and arguably still need!) to engage with semiosis mediation rigorously, problematize symbolic models of culture that ultimately derive from Saussure, and radically contextualize cultural practices as indexically created through reflexive language (what Silverstein has called the *indexical order* of cultural practice, 2003, 2004, 621, 623; Mertz 2007).¹¹

Embracing Peircean pragmatics on language and culture, White understood that language was not simply about reference or symbolic representation but primarily about the capacity to create social context through its reflexive indexicalities, that ultimately “events of language use mediate human sociality,” and that it was through language pragmatics that the cultural could be revealed in the production of social ties and their stories. Put differently, he recognized that language was mostly about “keeping relationships going” rather than information or symbolic transactions. In an early statement reflecting how his perspective on language and networks had been “reopened by sociolinguistic results of the past 15 years,” he expressed that the “pragmatics of socio-cultural action replaces the semantics of reference as central ... grammaticalization

replaces grammar ... [and] multilingualism describes a socio-cultural battlefield in a political economy rather than merely an objective mapping of ingrained habits” (White 1994, 1–2).

These crucial changes—from semantics to pragmatics (language as reflexive context), from grammar to grammaticalization (language as historical process), from monolingualism to multilingualism (language as interplay of sublanguages)—constitute the fundamental dimensions of White’s sociolinguistic turn. In short, to grasp how ties and their stories are co-constituted by culture and networks, White turns to *reflexive indexicality* as the key mechanism linking meaning-making to social action, and proclaims that “meanings make sense as indexical expressions of context” (White 2008, 337). I develop in depth White’s theoretical work on indexical language in Section 5. Switching among Netdoms after first introducing the fundamentals of his relational sociology in the following section.

4 IDENTITY AND CONTROL

As mentioned already, in 1992, White published *Identity and Control* with the goal of seeking a “social grammar for culture” (1992a, 2008 for the revised rewrite; 1992b, 210) In an impressive labor of synthesis, and drawing on a lifetime of knowledge, White conceptualizes an innovative relational sociology that is based on three primitives—*identity*, *control*, *switching*—and two master principles—*self-similarity*, *dispersion*—of social organization. Though criticized for its obscure style and prose, *Identity and Control* is, simply put, a masterpiece of intellectual ingenuity that never ceases to stretch our reimaginations of social life.

4.1 *Self-similarity and Dispersion*

White sets out to build a parsimonious social science based on simple principles of social process that can explain both change and regularity. From complexity science, he takes the concept of scale-invariance or *self-similarity* as the first principle of social organization, “according to which the same dynamic processes apply over and over again across different sizes and scopes” (1992a, 5). Complementing the principle of self-similarity, he postulates the related principle of *dispersion*, also crucial dimension to all social formations. This second principle reflects White’s view of social life as nonlinear with phase transitions, and his reluctance to reduce social process to linearity and normal curves in that “it is not averages which are crucial, but rather spreads across locale and degrees of social connections” (1992a, 5). White’s comparability idea of structurally equivalent actors derives from this dispersion principle (see market profiles in Section 3.1. Phenomenology of Ties).

In addition to these two master principles, White’s analytical edifice also contains three simple primitives: *identity*, *control*, *switching*. I will leave the third primitive—*switching*—for the next section on switching netdoms.¹² Self-similarity and dispersion together are principle sources of identities and control in a turbulent world, which in turn are the sources of social organization.

4.2 *Identities from Turbulence*

Identity—the first primitive—is White’s answer to the metatheoretical question of social action. For White, identity “is any source of action not explicable from biophysical regularities and to which observers can attribute meaning” (1992a, 6). Here he asserts once again an antireductionist stance by highlighting the emergence of phenomenological experience and meaning to explain social reality. By “observers” he means the need of a “point of view” in the process of identity emergence, whether by reflexive self-observation or third parties. In his view, “identity becomes a point of reference from which information can be processed, evaluated” (White 2008, 1).

Moreover, identities—individual or collective (e.g. groups, institutions, nations)—are triggered by historical contingency at different scales of magnitude. Identities are like events, unfolding in time and unique to specific socio-historical accidents and topologies (1992a, 76).¹³ Once in existence—decoupled from their environments—identities respond in turn through control efforts to endure (see Section 4.3. Control from Footing). They have to contend with immediate uncertainty triggered by networks of other identities, which in turn spark controlling dynamics of further decoupling from or embeddings to other networks. So, first there is non-agential action out of stochastic process and then, once in existence, identities as meaning *attractors* seek control to reduce uncertainty. The process is recursive and scale free.

In contrast to passive differentiation, the imagery of decoupling from networks is an active one in White’s model. For instance, identities in early societies, once decoupled from local kinship networks, sought control at larger complexity scales (e.g. organized complex chiefdoms), rather than being differentiated by functional needs, say, of demographic pressures behind their backs. However, identities are not pure decision-making entities in the “rational choice” sense either. They are sources of action whose bounded rationalities are partly shaped *ex post facto* because their “goals and preferences, being so changeable, are not causes, but rather ... spun after the fact as part of accounting for what has already happened” (1992a, 8, 2008, 135). For White, “rational choice does not drive social action, but neither is it epiphenomenal” in the sense that it is a “special case of meaning, a case of limited scope” that may constitute a *style* (2008, 135, 140; more on style in Section 6.3. Styles through Reflexive Poetics). Finally, identities’ relentless decouplings and embedding among netdoms increase in complexity as formations develop in ever-wider historical path dependencies.¹⁴

4.3 *Control from Footing*

Control—the second primitive—is White’s response to the metatheoretical question of order. It should not be understood just as “domination over other identities. Before anything else, control is about finding footings among other identities. Such footing is a position that entails a stance, which brings orientation in relation to other identities” (White 2008, 1).¹⁵ *Footing* is a “search for

perdurance, but what that entails varies—from sheer survival to imposing one’s will; attempts at control thus are not limited to coercion or domination efforts” (Godart and White 2010, 570). Moreover, securing lasting footing involves not just means-ends orientations but a moral stance as well. To stabilize standpoints and orientations, footings must be ambivalent and highly reflexive, involving future anticipation as well as present response efforts (White 2008, 1–2; Fontdevila and White 2013).

Thus, identities emerge out of turbulence—including mutual control efforts—and control is any reflexive effort by identities to reduce uncertainty.¹⁶ There are three uncertainty sources in this stochastic process: *contingency*, *ambiguity*, and *ambage*. Besides contingency, unpredictable and external to the system, two control strategies and their combinations—often involving trade-offs in extreme situations—keep identities open to unblocking and getting “fresh action”: cultural uncertainty or *ambiguity* (for example, sustaining ambivalence within a tie) and social uncertainty or *ambage* (for example, using direct ties to influence indirect ties) (White 2008, 57, 1992a, 102; see White et al. 2013 for further elaboration). So, identities are triggered by contingencies, but once emerged they create further contingencies for other identities, increasing in turn ambage and ambiguity levels within their relations (2008, 302).

Finally, identities can show sensibilities or peculiar ways of controlling and reducing uncertainty across different scales that may endure and define them as a *style* (2008, 112). These enduring features across netdoms—an identity’s footing operandi, ways of acting and perceiving, its style—are still profoundly relational in origin, developing in constellations of relationships with other identities.¹⁷ I further develop style as metapragmatic and poetic control efforts below, in Section 6. Grammars as Style.

4.4 *Disciplines and Networks*

Two other analytical tools to theorize questions of order are essential in White’s theory: *disciplines* and *networks*. As mentioned already, order does not emerge from value consensus, functional integration, or individuals entering contracts—rather, order is in origin profoundly relational for White. Thus, in the beginning, there is the social vertebrate or mammalian *pecking order*—a ranking hierarchy. In Enlightenment myth parlance, the “state of nature” of isolated individuals does not lead to the social “contract” because it is already to begin with a social “pecking order” (1992a, 25–26). The latter is the primordial unit of social order for White, at its core relational, hierarchical, and based on transitive valuation comparability.

Disciplines are the next level up of social order at the human level. In White’s own words, “human social orders derive ultimately from pecking orders in flocks of vertebrates, but respond to subtler irritants from their social and ecological environment” (1992a, 16), so that “continuing struggles for control would, given the behavioral plasticity latent in human cognitive and

manipulative capacities, break open the linear dominance ordering and generate wider social spaces” (1992a, 25). As a consequence, identities and their ties eventually get constrained in different disciplines according to tasks, at first largely oriented to work (e.g. hunting parties). These task-oriented social formations impose a kind of discipline to their ties, which White conceptualizes as *social molecules*. In his words,

A molecule is a spatio-temporal context which captures atoms from and using their own interactions. Each molecule continuously reproduces itself sited among whatever welter of outside influences obtain. The atoms are thereby embedded into a new level of action, the molecule, although still subject to polarization toward other molecules and atoms and thereby to some larger field of context. (White 1992a, 22)

Disciplines are thus self-reproducing social molecules of constituent identities that create a “new identity” at a different scale of self-similarity. They are elementary units of social order that emerge out of recurring efforts to get tasks done in social life. They are “very different from networks with their flexible set of stories” but are as important as networks (White 2008, 8).

In White’s typology of social molecules, getting tasks done among identities settle into at least three types of discipline: (1) *interfaces* (for instance, a production market profile where identities monitor each other horizontally on vertical paths of upstream and downstream flows), (2) *arenas* (for instance, identities ordered in status rankings, like a caste system, according to insider versus outsider valuations), and (3) *councils* (for instance, a decision-making group where identities are organized according to dominant and subordinate hierarchies).

Based on research (Argyle 1975; Bales 1970) that finds that communications in small group dynamics are evaluated along three dimensions—instrumental, friendly/hostile, and dominant/submissive—White posits that each discipline species above is characterized by a distinctive *valuation ordering*. Each valuation ordering enables comparability within and between disciplines, respectively—*quality* (interfaces), *purity* (arenas), *prestige* (councils) (1992a, 30). Note that in making these three valuation orderings central to social organization, White is also making the phenomenology of value central to social action. Moreover, note resonances with Weber’s three power orders distributed according to class/market (interfaces), status/caste (arenas), and party/political (councils). In fact, like Weber’s analytical ideal types, White asserts that social “molecules are analytical constructs. Exemplars of social molecules always come mixed with and colored by other such within larger social organization” (1992a, 60).

In addition to disciplines, social formations also consist of *social networks*—which we recall are more shambles and polymeric goos than tidy crystals. A network tie is a “failed discipline” in that it incorporates much more ambiguity and flexibility to sustain itself than the constraining ties of disciplines which get tasks done (1992a, 17). A network tie is a flexible tie that develops from

“dynamics from control attempts around a dyad” (2008, 26). Networks exist in spaces between disciplines or connecting disciplines—which in turn become identities—at different scales (like networks linking firms to government, for example). Often, in between spaces where disciplines fail to sustain themselves—identified by White as the index space of “black holes”—*catnets* or categories of networks (see Section 3.1. Phenomenology of Ties) as residual processes of direct and indirect ties can form when “as the density of ties among a subset of persons reaches some threshold value, the subset will come to regard itself as having an identity” (1992a, 62).

Transitive orders of dominance—typical within disciplines—often break-down in networks through liminalities, *ambiguities*, or *ambage* (see Section 4.3. Control from Footing). These latter are considered by White as “two sorts of ‘temperatures,’ or disorders” used by identities to get fresh action. As Leifer (1991a, b) shows in his characterization of expert chess players sustaining ambiguity, a player’s ability to make sense of the game is frequently not determined by the capacity to “see many moves ahead” but by the ability to sustain uncertainty in the relationship itself. In this line, White asserts that reaching through network ties to get robust action entails “keeping the state of interaction hard to assess through making very many possible evolutions continue to seem possible ... which prevents anyone from seeing clearly an outcome that would end the social tie” (White 2008, 288). In other words, “any such ties are stable only through being ambivalent and ambiguous at any particular instant and in any tangible action” (1992a, 86; Fontdevila and White 2013; Bothner et al. 2010 for robust action).

Together, *networks* and *disciplines* are the two building blocks to understand that “social processes and structure are traces from successions of control efforts” (1992a, 9, 2008, 7). Other patternings of social orders at different complexity levels—*institutions*, *rhetorics*, and *regimes*—are derivative of these.¹⁸ To recap, social order for White is local and provisional, bounded by phase transitions, and in the midst of turbulence and disorder—at the edge of chaos (Fontdevila et al. 2011). As he puts it, “social organization is like some impacted, mineralized goo, some amazing swirl of local nuclei and long strands of order among disorder” (2008, 346).

4.5 *Language from Social Molecules*

Before moving to reflexive language and netdom switching in the next section, it is important to explain White’s theory of the origin of language as emerging in *disciplines* or social molecules, that is, in work-oriented tasks à la Halliday (White 2008, 3; for Halliday’s influence see 1985). As he writes,

Across social molecules, over time, some elaboration of signals and communication beyond animal level would build up. Gestures would come to be chained together in sequences of response that creatures would use repeatedly ... there would be further elaboration of signaling. With stories, control struggles would

take new forms and partners. More elaborate loops of interactions can be established. Some sort of language would eventuate as an aspect and by-product of pushings and shovings for control. (White 1992a, 25)

According to White, “communication remains central” in social organization and “talk comes first. Talk comes before persons. Talk comes with the emerging human-ness of groups of *Homo sapiens*” (1995a, 1037). His explanation of the origins of speech registers and signaling is worth reproducing here. Thus, in order to avoid costly delays from competitive fights and injuries, packs of vertebrates solved intra-species comparability by being naturally selected for transitive dominance of pecking order across every domain of activity—“sex, food, resting site, first to the alpha male, then ... no talk needed” (1995a, 1037). However, in the evolutionary or historical scale, even greater fitness or subsistence, respectively, was achieved by establishing subsystem boundaries along specializations of “task and caste and locale and breeding.” This is the strategy pursued by ant societies for millions of years, with pheromone chemical “signaling” as the key mechanism that demarcates such caste and task boundaries.

Eventually, “over thousands of years, one vertebrate species (two, if you include *Neanderthal*) worked out specialization with talking, not pheromones. Like the ants, early human talkers may have switched only rarely, perhaps in earliest mass ceremonials. At some point came frequent switching, perhaps situated around sleep patterns, and no longer necessarily in lockstep” (White 1995a, 1037–38). Following Durkheim’s primordial switches between sacred and profane domains, White asserts that “sociocultural reality was constructed only when there was switching back and forth between at least two domains, everyday and ceremonial, with their continuing networks” (1995a, 1035). In his words,

Humans, unlike ants, switch back and forth between specialized domains of joint activity, and talk develops along with and sustains this differentiation. Talk and its languages are shaped primarily by this switching. Switches in talk between one and another domain are at the same time switches in which particular social ties of different sorts are being activated and deactivated. (White 1995b, 1)

In other words, specialization of task is key for complex organization, but among humans—because, unlike ants, humans are not genetically selected for caste or task—complex specialization could only emerge after the capacity to switch speech registers across disciplines developed, and thus “social process even thousands of years ago could develop only in co-constitution with full-fledged language” (2008, xxi). Speech registers are communicative devices (equivalent to pheromones mechanisms for ants) that enable specialized subsystem boundaries to emerge among human individuals who—unlike ants—perform multiple tasks and roles across domains. As discussed in Section 6. Grammar as Style, language’s capacity to switch registers across domains and

networks is based on its reflexive and indexical functions via processes of grammaticalization.

Finally, White claims that it is the patterning of accounts and reports of a tie into rich story lines that is the distinctive characteristic of human organization. Most concepts discussed above—control, identities, disciplines, pecking orders, valuations, ties—could apply to other social species beside humans (e.g. wolves, primates, ants) in various stages of development. They all involve communication “but at a simple level that need not rise above the pheromone level of an ant society” (2008, 31). However,

it is stories which set human social action apart. Without stories, and thence networks emerging out of mere collection of ties, social action would have a monotone quality; there would not be all the “colors” that humans observe and use in social settings. (White 1992a, 67, see footnote 6)

5 SWITCHINGS AMONG NETDOMS

Switching—the third primitive—is, I argue, White’s answer to the metatheoretical question of meaning in social action (2008, 18). Influenced by Gibson’s (1979) visual perception theory of contrasting *affordances*, White extrapolates to phenomenological sociocultural contrast and states that “switchings [among netdoms] are the vehicles of meaning for identity and control” (2008, 17) and “meaning emerges for humans only with switching, as from one netdom to another. Switching is central to this theory and will appear again and again at different scopes and levels” (2008, 12). Switching is the reflexive mechanism that captures meaning-making in context—structured in stories—by identities as they seek footing across scale-free netdoms (e.g. from intimate tie to workplace to voting booth).

White adapts the concept of switching from sociolinguistic research which shows that instances of code-switching in speech (e.g. diglossia, multilingualism, language contact) are metapragmatic devices used by speakers to create cultural context and identity affiliation, and express rhetorical meaning and illocutionary force—what is accomplished in saying something (Bailey 2000; more on metapragmatics in Section 5.2. Context from Reflexive and Indexical Language). As he puts it, “I in part imitate the sociolinguists who, at least since classic studies of code switchings in diglossia (Fishman 1972; Gumperz 1982) have made switchings central” (1995b, 31). White expands the concept beyond speakers’ face-to-face dyads “on the fringes of culture and language” to argue that switchings also activate and deactivate netdom spatial ties and topologies of various affiliations.¹⁹ Moreover, he expands it to capture switchings of everyday styles and occupational registers within a single language, and not just whole code switches. In this way, identities’ netdom decouplings and embeddings are always framed through switchings of various speech registers and sublanguage choices which creatively shape new ties and stories.²⁰

5.1 *Stories in Context*

Switching by identities across netdoms at different scales is also key to “get fresh action” and cut through the “Sargasso Sea of social obligation” that had temporarily solved the problem of order. In fact, “structure and fresh action each presupposes the other, while countering it” (2008, 279). For White, “any social formation whatever, complex or not, tends to settle into blocking action over time” (1992a, 255), and so decoupling by netdom switchings “provides the lubrication that permits self-similarity of social organization across scopes and levels” (2008, 280). White explains that getting action requires ingenuities of decoupling—which imply embeddings somewhere else—that typically cut across different scales, mixing various contexts of disciplines, crosscutting existing specializations, and are indirect and often delayed. In contrast to getting action which involves significant unintentional effects, “more direct and timely efforts are better described as control” (2008, 283).²¹ In any case, whether it is about control, or getting or blocking action, White realizes that the effects of a switching depend on the larger meaning brought about by context of the switching in that “for example, a council discipline is a prime way to embed action and make it effective, and yet it is also a species of discipline with which to obfuscate action. Which effect predominates depends upon ‘context,’ upon the environing networks of disciplines” (2008, 290).

Switchings of decouplings and embeddings imply communication with other identities, and repeated communications above chance in new contexts settle into stories. Relations require accountings which yield stories and new identities. Stories structure switchings into accounts and “serve to soothe identities’ irreducible searches for control” of ties that can be “of contention as well as of cooperation and of complementarity” (2008, 37). Any switching—whether toward getting action or to secure footing for control—brings about new contexts that “color” a tie into new reflexive accounts in stories. Consequently, to understand phenomenological experience of ties—operationalized as story—and their changing hues due to netdom switchings, a rigorous exploration of context in shaping stories is key. White recognizes this and states that “context is crucial in this explanation I have developed for social life as middle-range order” (2008, 335). As mentioned already, White turns to reflexive indexicality to understand the pragmatic mechanisms that create socio-cultural context. He understands that netdom switchings and contexts are co-constitutive via language’s reflexive capacities. Thus, “meanings make sense only as indexical expressions of context ... meaning seems, therefore, not to be selected by context, but rather to be generated in it” (2008, 337).

5.2 *Context from Reflexive and Indexical Language*

Before discussing further White’s socio-linguistic theory, it is important to briefly introduce reflexivity and indexicality of language. At least three perspectives explain signification or semiosis in social life. One perspective claims that

signification occurs when signs “correspond” to their denotational objects—a semantic or referential theory of meaning. Signification occurs from another perspective when signs “relate” to each other via rules of contrasts within a sign-system—a structuralist or self-referential theory of meaning. Finally, a third perspective argues that signification occurs when signs “produce” interactional effects or changes on sign users—a pragmatic or indexical theory of meaning. Though all three modes of signification variably coexist, according to Silverstein (1976), it is the indexical mode that has the capacity to anchor the other two—referential and self-referential modes—in real and practical contexts of use, providing the necessary redundancies and informational cues to interpret and decode messages (Peirce 1931; see note 10).

Indexical signs signify by virtue of their spatio-temporal contiguity with the contexts they stand for or create. From switching spatial or temporal shifters (e.g. this, that, now), personal pronouns (e.g. I, you, they), verb tenses—to switchings of professional registers, humor styles, tones and prosodic rhythms, and so on—indexes anchor the linguistic code in real contexts of use. They are more or less grammaticalized elements or strategies that are used reflexively to lay out the contextual parameters in which extralinguistic interactions take place, signaling or creating the very nature or footings of the social relationships involved in an encounter. For example, co-workers switching from casual slang to formal register signal to each other that their professional context and tie are now being activated. So, indexes render language fully operational in communicative practice (Fontdevila and White 2013).²²

Language is unique in its reflexive capacity. Silverstein (1976, 1993)—based on Jakobson’s (1960) insights on the ubiquitous metalingual function of language (language about language, about the linguistic code)—claims that the reflexive capacities of language are essentially metapragmatic. In other words, most metalinguistic activities are not about semantic understanding (e.g. glossing) but primarily about the appropriate pragmatic use of language in interaction (Silverstein 1976, 1993). So, in examples such as “don’t you dare use those words and tone with me!” or “Oh, don’t call me Sir, you can call me by my first name,” note that language is used to talk about language but mainly to redefine the relative interactional footings of speakers in the interaction. With variable levels of conscious awareness, we always use language metapragmatically—that is reflexively—to negotiate our social ties appropriately. In sum, speakers do not passively decode their ongoing utterances against a backdrop of culturally reified contexts but rather reflexively use their own verbal interactions as metapragmatic indexes to organize and create their switching interpretive contexts (Duranti and Goodwin 1992).

Moreover, communication is always metacommunication—of framings at various levels and metalevels rooted in different netdoms that sustain ambiguity (for fresh action) and are grasped via abductive inference of speakers’ hard phenomenological work in the contexts in which they are produced.²³ According to Bateson (1955, 188), “any message, which either explicitly or implicitly defines a frame, *ipso facto* gives the receiver instructions or aids in his

attempt to understand the messages included within the frame.” In this sense, linguistic and paralinguistic messages frame communication, that is, they are context-markers that give cues or instructions to the addressee to discern at what metalevel of abstraction the message should be decoded to be understood—for example, changing a remark’s meaning into its ironic opposite through tone emphasis or simply winking, or using hyperbole to signal respect, “could you please pass me the salt, that would be awesome.” And this is done via contextualizing indexes or cues, such as voice tone, shifters, discourse markers, pronouns of address, code or register switching in talk, and so forth (Gumperz 1982; Lucy 1993; Goffman 1974, 1981). Note that meaning emerges in the switch from one to another metalevel.

In all cases, the interpretation of the meaning of the message—and hence of the type of social tie producing it—is conveyed through indexicalities and contextualizing cues that are inferred—always incompletely—via hard phenomenological work of abductive reasoning. In short, socio-cultural contexts are never separate from talk. Meaning is context-dependent but speaking itself is what creates the context shaping speakers’ relationships. Moreover, the process occurs in real-time performance and so “the mechanisms by which relational information is signaled ... are inherently ambiguous, i.e., subject to multiple interpretations. In conversation, such ambiguities are negotiated in the course of the interaction” (Gumperz 1982, 208; Gal 2013). Communication in social life is then about managing these metacommunicative indexicalities, which typically entail great ambiguity and openness because they are anchored in myriad netdom switchings across different times and spreads. Meaning in language, rather than residing in semantics, is an interactional accomplishment that emerges reflexively between grammars and participants’ phenomenological hard work at framing nested levels in speech situations (Duranti 2003; Mertz 2007; Garfinkel 1967).

5.3 *Switching as Reflexive Metacommunication*

White’s (1992a, 1994, 1995a, b, c, d, 2008) contribution to sociological concerns about language is twofold: On one hand, to incorporate indexical and reflexive meaning into formal theory and methodology of social networks, and on the other, to bring spatio-temporal scope into linguistics in order to explain, among other things, grammar as a function of socio-historical struggles over control. First, he follows Halliday’s vision that speech registers and meanings originate from switches among alternative options inextricably linked to social activities and functional settings (Halliday 1985; Swales 1990 for discourse communities). In his own words, “the linguist Halliday has long insisted that different domains are realized in distinctive registers of speech, and he led me to wonder how to search talk for reliable cues ... and measures of ties of distinct types” (1995c, 2).

White asserts that language’s reflexivity in netdom switchings is essentially about managing ambiguity (1995a, 1048). But ambiguity should not be removed methodologically as measurement error but integrated into the

analytical model via appropriate functions and parameters—choices among story sets of ties are inherently fuzzy. For this purpose, he argues that the Bayesian theory of statistical inference provides a fruitful way to operationalize netdom switchings as interactive selections among alternative sets of stories as options at switchings—with resolution a *Bayesian fork* (White 1995a, 1048–1049, 1995c, 14; Berk et al. 1992; Western 1995).

In White's view, language is always discursively interanimated by both social networks and cultural domains, even though these “are but abstractions ... from the sociocultural goop of human life” (1995a, 1038). Language's reflexivity is attained through myriad switchings, offering opportunity as well as constraint, that are as indexical as localized in social space. Switches in talk between domains are at the same time switches by which network ties of different sorts are activated and deactivated. Language originates in reflexive transitions among domains that are bound up with transitions among networks—switches among netdoms. Language is always discourse—that is, language in social context—used at first to coordinate work but mainly to establish and reproduce social relationships of all sorts. Thus, “the reflexivity of discourse is the stuff of social networks” (1995c, 1). Discourse grows out of the interplay of sublanguages across different networks and domains, and sublanguages expressed through stories provide distinctions to socio-cultural times and spaces—much like vision enables us to perceive physical space. As White explains,

To me, social is analogue to spatial, whereas cultural derives more especially from our perceptions of process in time, with switches among network-domains triggering recognition of identities and types of ties. This all plays out primarily in talk from various sublanguages, which themselves appear, in distinctive registers of speech, only along with distinct interactional domains. (White 1995c, 34)

Moreover, observed in successive snapshots, netdom switches appear like “zaps” between TV channels or “Schutzian shocks” in phenomenological jargon (Schutz 1970). White agrees with Silverstein that what we experience as orderly discourse would be chaotic were it not for continuous reflexive metadiscursive hard work (Silverstein 1979, 1993). However, contrary to Silverstein's “heroics of indexicality” apparently replicated in every face-to-face situation, White maintains that phenomenological repair and metapragmatic work need not be in “myopic messiness of dyads” but rather channeled by broader social impositions and spatio-temporal patterns (White 1995b, 4). That is, the metapragmatics of netdom switching is a profoundly social rather than cognitive activity—dyadic or face-to-face interaction still a euphemism for the cognitive. Thus, the social comes first, with specializations of “work” and “rank” (as primordial speech registers). Only afterwards do enough power and complexity develop so that speech forms sustain indexicality through switchings.

Note that White here goes beyond debates that explain the referential from the indexical (semantics from pragmatics) since he attempts to explain the indexical from the relational via switching (pragmatics from social scope). In his own words, “networks and domains in their interpenetration as network-domains

allow one to locate social chains and waves of interpretive consequence, to which dyadic analysis—or purely cultural and cognitive interpretation, or purely social network connectivity—is blind” (White 1995b, 8). To trace such “interpretive resonances at various removes” requires characterizing structural equivalent paths and other polymerizing shapes of netdoms. Moreover, netdom switches are never about isolated intentionality but about the realization among all implicated identities that a netdom change is about to occur or is underway. In this connection, sets of stories—multiple alternative accounts—are always being juggled among identities of a type of tie until they encounter “temporary resolutions at disjunctions.” At these switching forks, a new set of stories is negotiated “from which the next phase of reality constructing takes off” (White 1995c, 14–15).

So, in their switchings to secure footing, identities reconfigure netdoms by establishing or breaking ties with other identities, and in the process, they spark meanings that “coalesce into stories” (Godart and White 2010, 572). Stories relate meanings and events into reflexive and transposable indexical emplotments—from simple heuristics or “rules of thumb” to complex biographical or historical narratives. Stories deliver a characteristic sense of continuity and lived temporality to relationship ties, which otherwise would switch on and off in everyday disjointed snapshots. In this sense, narrative is the site where subjective experience of phenomenological “shock”—new times, new contexts, new trajectories—triggered by netdom switchings is “edited out” from the weavings of the social in order to preserve identities’ ontological continuity (White 1992a, 1993). Any netdom switching requires accountings of narrative to rationalize shifting or stochastic temporalities and directions, but it also creates novel sets of stories and identities held in play over varying durations that will shape the next Bayesian fork resolution. Thus, switching mechanisms with all their indexical and reflexive machineries allude to more constitutive and forward-driven understandings of meaning-making via stories than earlier accounts of story as mere “after the fact” phenomenology of social turbulence (see Calhoun 1993, 317 for a critique of this earlier view).

5.4 *Publics*

After explaining the reflexivity of netdom switchings, White introduces one more analytical tool defined as a special kind of netdom, “in the sense that zero is a very special number,” called a *public* (White 1995a, 1054). Publics are not audiences—since they include the watcher and the watched—but interstitial social spaces between more specialized netdoms that provide social scaffoldings for managing uncertainties in netdom switching. Publics are made of minimally recognizable identities maximally decontextualized from their narratives and story sets—decoupled from their usual embeddedness in temporalities and specializations. Publics appear maximally connected because—with stories and histories temporarily suppressed—they cannot call attention to any particular network or domain.

Publics can be ritualized and durable to varying degrees—such as *ceremonial*, *carnival*, *assembly*, *rally*, and *salon*—but all involve some sort of liminality, permitting complex, uncertain transitions in social identities and institutional trajectories. Publics ease transitions and ambiguity of netdom switchings, facilitating further differentiation into types of ties and domains.²⁴ In what seems his most functionalist argument to date, White maintains that a certain kind of public—so-called *free-floating conversation*—develops late in modernity, perhaps from the *salon* kind, in connection to the crucial need to smooth transitions across increasing proliferation of specialized netdoms.

Thus, in a society with few domains—following Durkheim, the primordial switches were between domains of profane and sacred, everyday life and ceremonial—little energy is needed to move across domains simply organized via calendar and custom. However, with increasing complexity, purposeless conversation emerges as flexible, functional mechanism to move between netdoms. White uses Goffman's (1981) model of modern conversation to characterize conversational publics as *Goffmanian publics*—a “transparent” phenomenological cocoon or bubble surrounding conversationalists that briefly, possibly for moments, removes them from instrumental tasks, leaving the right to talk as an end in itself. In short, Goffmanian publics buffer the ambiguities lurking behind complex netdom transitions (see Mische and White 1998 for *situations* bringing further stochastic process to publics and netdom switchings; Mische 2008 for an application to Brazil's contentious politics).

6 GRAMMARS AS STYLE

Finally, White elaborates a theory of grammar based on identities' struggles for control.²⁵ For him, grammars build around a limited set of referential or indexical items, a semi-closed class of surface categories—deixis, shifters, suffixes, verb forms, syntax orders, conjunctions, pronouns, relativizers, and so on—that, more than open classes of lexemes and vocabularies, express historical struggles over discourses and styles that become congealed in a language. This semi-closed class of grammatical elements becomes ubiquitous across all netdom contexts—they are used over and over, whether in different clause complexes, genres, registers, and so forth. In fact, no clear distinction exists between vocabulary and grammar except that the latter is used repeatedly across netdoms.

White states that grammatical elements—often lexemes bleached of their referential meaning—are like a “horizontal” counterpoint to the deep reach of indexicalities across the relentless flux of events. They are transposable across netdoms and so accommodate well the unending flux of netdom switching events. As he puts it, grammatical transposable elements, such as deictic expressions (I am here now, etc.) for example, “have evolved exactly to support coherence of discourse across switches in netdoms by providing terms that everyone can and does use to maintain footings with others through changes in netdoms” (2008, 13). For him, language starts analytically with grammar. Grammar is logically primordial to social organization because grammar is a set

of “forced” choices, and open-ended lexemes come along later—first social organization, then grammar, then lexicality. Eventually netdom specialization brings complexity to language, merging sublanguages and registers by new subpopulations and tasks, but the core of language is that it should be transposable across netdoms, “like a suitcase” (White 1995d).

6.1 *Grammaticalization Through Domination*

Countering developmental theories of grammar as semantic routinization (Hopper and Traugott 1993), White sees grammaticalization as cumulative traces of historical discontinuities and struggles among netdoms for identity and control, and grammatical rules as the historical expression of these cumulative patterns, in turn shaping further netdom switching possibilities. Like Bourdieu’s (1977) political economy of linguistic capitals, White sees domination as “the root process in what is specifically social” (White 1995b, 10) and so, far from egalitarian and universal patternings, netdom switchings are seized and shaped according to positions in struggles over semiotic and material control. Language—which is always dynamic discourse of various sublanguages, styles, and registers—is laden at all scales with struggles for domination and identity (see Lodge 1993 for the contentious origins of French grammar). Grammars may result from routinization, but by domination rather than innocent habituation, over choices of switchings among unequal networks and domains (Fontdevila and White 2013, 164).²⁶

White looks to insights from the socio-linguistics of pidgins and creoles as models for localized grammaticalization processes intrinsically embedded in domination relations, and adapts them to any situation where actors fluent in different sublanguages and indexical systems must interact in a common lingua franca—so not only trade posts and plantations but any multi-ethnic job place, including modern organizations traversed by global networks of transactions and peoples. This helps understand how grammaticalization—for example of social deixis in the modern corporation—comes about according to nested levels of registers and linguistic capitals that interact through netdom interfaces and switchings of—in creole socio-linguistic jargon—transposed “lexifier acrolects,” “mesolects,” and foundational “basilects” (Bailey and Maynor 1987; Holm 1988; Hymes 1971; Sankoff and Brown 1976; Gibson 2005, 2008 for empirical applications). White and Godart (2010, 273) lay out the groundwork to study grammaticalization processes of deictics—for example, in business talk of the modern corporation—stating that,

Within your part of a firm, say a big New York bank, one has come to speak in the style which is at home there. Speaking with another firm, by contrast, could instead be analogous to using a different, coarser and more formal idiom, much as in the Djirbal tribe of Australian Aborigines a man switches to a special mother-in-law language when speaking to affines. That may also be true of occasional encounters with very high bosses, CEOs, or with remote or recondite and background departments of your own firm.

6.2 *Grammar from Heteroglossic Voicing*

To further explore grammaticalization, White follows the Bakhtin tradition of literary studies which rejected the Saussurean notion of grammar as an abstract semiotic system removed from practice. This Russian school strongly opposed the isolated monologic utterance and its passive reception, and instead put forth the idea that linguistic utterances are organized dialogically. Far from being an abstract and self-contained medium, language is typically embedded in an intricate social matrix where the production of any single utterance is already a juxtaposition of multiple “voices” or different points of view drawn from—invoking—different and alternative culturally and socially lived spheres.

This heterogeneous voicing or genre heteroglossia is expressed through a speaker’s utterance by the interpenetration of several social “consciousnesses,” none of which objectifies each other but rather coexist in a kind of rich heteroglossic dialogue that is oriented toward various addressees or audiences (Bakhtin 1981).²⁷ Both the complete sentence and the lexicon as linguistic units of thought lack real communicative expression per se, since only the utterance form is constituted with the practical understanding of the other(s) in the horizon and hence can elicit an active communicative response—it has a certain anticipated *addressivity*. For the Bakhtin tradition, the utterance is the actual unit of speech communication, capable of coordinating addresser and addressee in order to accomplish the tasks of the social. White, who often criticizes sociolinguistics for not capturing social-spatial extension simultaneously with reflexive indexicality, insists that to be fully operational, multiple voicing or heteroglossia must be embedded not in layers of creative phenomenological “blendings” but rather in tangible and reflexive netdom “switchings.”

Significantly for this Russian tradition, grammar and style, though analytically distinct, cannot be reduced to one another and ought to be organically combined in their study. In their view, any grammatical choice is ultimately a stylistic act. In turn, any stylistic act is influenced or regulated by the repertoire of patterns that have assumed grammatical shape and function in the language over tumultuous periods of time. Moreover, change in language occurs always at the boundaries between grammar and style. These are boundaries that are fluid and ambiguous “because of the very mode of existence of language, in which, simultaneously, some forms are undergoing grammaticalization while others are undergoing degrammaticalization” in the selective choice of particular styles and genres appropriate to the social situation (Volosinov 1973, 126).

Thus, linguistic elements are constantly changing according to styles—they shift from lexical to grammatical then lexical again, and so on. From this perspective, for instance, the syntax of a language—of subject and verb order, for example—is a fundamental stylistic act—a status index in processes of linguistic standardization which provides linguistic capital—changing its meaning via myriad stylistic switches across netdoms of various historical spreads and times. Pronoun forms of address also become grammaticalized via styles of prestige, hierarchies, and social distance. Moreover, prototypical types of reporting in

language—direct and indirect reported speech—can be stylistically and indexically manipulated to infiltrate the reported event and achieve a variety of social ends. Only by analyzing the utterance as an expressive form of speech genre varieties, which converge and diverge in their grammars and styles according to the pragmatics of social life, can the whole of the language phenomenon be understood.

6.3 *Styles Through Reflexive Poetics*

The legacy of the Bakhtin School, with its emphasis on reflexive devices such as reported speech, is evident in a body of research known as performance-based studies and ethnopoetics (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Bauman 1982; Briggs 1988; Fine 1984; Limon and Young 1986; Stoeltje and Bauman 1988). These studies take seriously Jakobson's insights on the poetic function of language as also being pervasive in everyday talk. While the metalingual function treats the linguistic code as its own referent, the poetic function manipulates the formal features of the code to call attention to its own stylistic organization and aesthetically persuasive possibilities. For example, in ordinary language, we say "innocent bystander" rather than "uninvolved onlooker" because its rhythmic pattern is more aesthetically pleasing (Fiske 1990, 36).

For these schools, the enactment of the poetic function during a linguistic performance, far from epiphenomenal and derivative, is a highly reflexive mode of communication among relationships that is constitutive of what makes ordinary language functional in social life. According to Bauman and Briggs, "performance is seen as a specially marked, artful way of speaking that sets up or represents a special interpretive frame within which the act of speaking is to be understood" (1990, 73). They mention that this interpretive frame includes cues, mannerisms, or subtle "keys" that mark shiftings in performances, such as voice modulation, posture, gesture, side remarks, and also the dynamic interaction that takes place between performers and audiences, among other things. Moreover, through creative poetic play of figurative and metaphorical speech, quotation, proverbs, riddles, jokes, rhymes, insults, greetings, gossip, innuendo, irony, and various oratorical and rhetorical genres, as well as many other formal features of ordinary conversation, utterances can reframe the meaningful context of a social relation, and index "metamessages" that may be quite tangential to the utterance's actual referential content.

In White's model, styles are "syncopated complexities" that distinguish identities or sets of identities across turbulent netdoms (Godart and White 2010; White et al. 2007a, b; Corona and Godart 2009). Styles emerge from identities at different scales as ongoing sensibility "that somehow continues its rhythm and harmony despite stochastic variance in particular notes and phrases" (White et al. 2007b, 197). A style is analogous to an identity—a by-product of turbulence that seeks control to reduce uncertainty—but it is more of a formal "envelope" that "distinguishes itself from stories and rhetorics because it does not refer to specific contents but rather to specific patterns or matrices of

perceptions, appreciations, and actions” (White 2008, 119). A style is thus a “fifth,” more sophisticated, meta-sense of identity (see note 13).

In this connection, Fontdevila and White (2013) have argued that the poetic function of language is crucial in the production of dominant interactional styles that secure durable footing among certain social ties. Thus, the creative and poetic play exercised by some identities within relational configurations on figurative and metaphorical speech, cadence and tempo, heroic or humor key, proverbs and riddles, and various oratorical and rhetorical genres gives them a stronger “stylistic” edge. In other words, crafty use of the poetic function gives identities an idiosyncratic “syncopated” sensibility in talk that may have the persuasive ability to secure stronger footings across different netdoms. Moreover, given that stylistics and grammars are intertwined, and that any stylistic performance has grammatical consequence, we argue that stylistic control of a language is ultimately also about its grammatical control and congealment.

7 CONCLUSION

Harrison C. White has built a monumental theoretical model to explain how social formations emerge. It analytically begins with identities triggered by stochastic process at any scale—from individuals to empires. Once decoupled from their environments, identities seek footings in control efforts to reduce uncertainty. In the process, they self-organize in disciplined molecules to accomplish vital tasks and secure perduration. Signaling and comparability are key. Increased complexity triggers further control efforts. So, identities across molecules—in turn identities at other scales—polymerize ever-more intricate network topologies by reflexive switchings of decouplings and couplings which are scale free. Specialization ensues. The entire process is fractal and recursive.

Sociocultural and biological systems are—unlike inorganic systems—high informational systems with stochastic and path-dependent histories (Prevosti 1994; Krakauer 2011). These systems require communications among their component parts to self-organize. But sociocultural systems are not simply a more elaborate version of biological systems. Whereas biological systems accumulate historical information in *genomes* primarily through random variation and natural selection, social systems of humans accumulate historical information in *cultures* primarily through the semiotic system of language. It is language that unleashes the next emergent leap in complexity. In this light, the Peircean semiotic turn to understand a natural language is imperative. White recognizes this and turns to reflexive language to lay solid foundations to his *identity and control*. As he puts it, “polymer molecules don’t tell stories about their encounters or strategize in those encounters. Human molecules do, but in ways shaped by their social gel” (1992b, 211).

All informational systems need messaging signals to communicate and coordinate their component parts in relations of control—in biological organisms, hormones, among others; in superorganisms like social insects, pheromones.

According to White, basic signaling by task and rank is accomplished in human social organization through speech registers and sublanguages. Through its context-making and indexical devices, a speech register communicates the type of tie associated to a particular netdom, including its purpose, tasks, and ranks. Now, what is significant about human complex organization is that different tasks are performed by the same biophysical identities switching across different netdoms, and hence, switching registers to signal and contextualize the boundaries of such netdom switches is crucial—a register switch signals the activation or deactivation of a particular type of tie within a relationship, from co-worker to friend for the same biophysical tie, for example. A full language emerges out of the interplay of sublanguages across netdom switchings with a grammar—a semi-closed set of indexical and referential choices transposable across netdoms—that integrates such switchings in socio-temporal space. But grammars are also the by-products of sublanguage switches in larger contexts of historical domination by which some linguistic styles and their interactions become more hegemonic than others. Switching is thus essential to social organization in White’s model. It is worth quoting White’s explanation of the origin of language at length,

Network populations build among disciplines, which presuppose a set of valuations that mediate their embeddings ... And this implies at least a language of practice, a parole, in which a set of valuations gets expressed across some more-or-less definite population. But language appears only when there are multiple populations. Language presupposes interaction among distinct network populations; so language is a cumulative by-product of boundaries and switchings ... Language is the integration of distinct functional dialects. Such integration comes only from control struggles across wide fronts of interaction with other like populations ... In short, language comes in only with meta-language. (2008, 342–343)

All communication is metacommunication, as we know since Bateson (1955), and thus any message provides context-markers to the addressee on how to decode it—tone to decode the opposite meaning of a remark in irony, for example. The capacity to read metacommunicative devices during interaction is actually the capacity to understand the meaning of that interaction—the phenomenological question “what is going on?” Thus, meaning is accomplished via indexical switches across metacommunicative levels. Speech registers are always expressed in the form of story lines that act as metacommunicative markers to frame the nature of the social tie. Stories constitute the tie. As White indicates, “as the network evolves through situations, a set of stories comes, overtime, to characterize that type of tie ... A network with its story-set filters perceptions of participants” (2008, 340). Stories are indexical framing devices of a tie that define its purpose and its social times as by-product—for example, a story told in professional register by two co-workers not only instructs on what to do but frames their communication as work related with all social times associated. Therefore, metapragmatic awareness of a story’s indexical devices—context markers—is key to create and sustain type of netdom tie.

To recap, analytically speaking, network is the polymerizing topology, domain the phenomenological experience, and switching the reflexive indexicality that brings them together in a concrete netdom by activating or deactivating ties. To illustrate how this works we can think of an employee who, as subordinate, has a network tie to his boss and both speak work-register accordingly—this is their work netdom. It so happens that his boss is his younger sister-in-law, so they switch to family-register, signaling different hierarchies during lunch or other breaks at work—this is their family netdom. Note that different sets of stories told in each netdom—work or family—will shape metapragmatically the nature of their relationship differently, even though their biophysical identities have not changed. So, registers—family vernacular or work professional, for example—expressed through different sets of stories are kept in suspension until there is a particular resolution or Bayesian fork (the switch) that metapragmatically changes the nature of their relationship—including their network topologies. Here we have the same biophysical entities embedded in two different netdoms, with different reaches, topological shapes, phenomenologies, ambiguities, ambage, perceptions of social times, and so forth. The challenges of formalizing such complexities of juggling, switching, and invoking different netdoms by the same or different biophysical ties are staggering.

Thus, I will conclude with a paramount question: Has White solved Nadel's paradox?²⁸ I strongly argue that he has gotten closer than anyone else. That is his genius. Many attempts have been made to solve the paradox but either *context* or *mathematics* gets lost in the process. White keeps them both in focus. In an attempt to formalize discourse and market networks, White (2000a, 130) recognizes that “actual modeling of reflexive indexing will prove the most demanding mathematically.” In other words, the challenge in social science is still parameterization and measurement without bleaching meaning (White 2000b, 1997). Elias ([1939] 1994), for instance, demonstrates extraordinary insight in relationally bridging socio-genesis and psycho-genesis—network and meaning—through *figurations* but without the formalizing.

Ultimately, for sociology to remain recognizable and useful, it may always require some sort of *idiographic* narrative explanation that concerns the struggles and motivations of actual historical peoples, as Brint (1992) via Weber reminds White. In the meantime, given that White's model is, in my view, work in progress that still needs a considerable amount of *mechanisms precision* and *scope conditions* specification, I suggest that a productive direction in formalization would be to relate and find translation mechanisms between his identity and control model and emergentist systemism à la Bunge (Wan 2011; Bunge 2000), but of course, that in itself is a grand *switching* for another social time and netdom!

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NOTES

1. From a Popperian “problem-solving perspective,” this relational epistemic debate could be recast in the language of methodological nominalism versus essentialism (Cruikshank 2013, 82).
2. Earlier relational influences are found in Simmel, who defines society as a “number of individuals connected by interaction ... It is not a ‘substance,’ nothing concrete, but an *event*: It is the function of receiving and affecting the fate and development of one individual by the other” (Simmel [1917] 1950, 10, 11; emphasis in the original). Other relational threads are found in Marx ([1859] 1978) with *relations of production*, and Elias ([1939] 1994) with *figurations*.
3. White’s captivating space-time stretching metaphors on the nature of the social as polymerizing striations or phase-transition gels can arguably be traced to his original training in solid state physics, including holding a Ph.D. in theoretical physics from MIT (Azarian 2005).
4. It should be noted that White’s theory includes the two understandings of “relations” circulating in relational sociology, that is, relations as concrete ties among actors (relationships) as well as relative positions in social space (see Crossley 2013 for reconciliation of these two conceptualizations).
5. Double contingency refers to the basic problem that underlies every social encounter among humans, i.e., alter and ego experience each other as “black boxes”—I do not know what the other is going to do, but I do know that she does not know what I am going to do. This circularity—that both know that both know that one could also act differently—creates a fundamental indeterminacy in social relations (Fontdevila et al. 2011).
6. For recent state-of-the-art theoretical reflections on relational sociology and applications see the two editions by Powell and Dépelteau (2013a, b).
7. For recurrent fractal cycles of meaning versus structure in sociology see Abbott (2001). For recent debates on the tension between *verstehen* versus scientific explanation in social science see Watts (2014, 2017) and critique by Turco and Zuckerman (2017). For meaning and social networks see *Poetics* special issue edited by Kirchner and Mohr (2010). For formal models to study culture see *Poetics* special issue edited by Mohr (2000); for network methods to study meaning also see Mohr (1998).
8. See Somers (1992, 1994, 1996) for the paradigmatic shift from representational to ontological understandings of *narrativity* taking place in the social sciences of the 1980s to contextualize White’s theoretical incorporation of *story* as phenomenological accomplishment of social tie.
9. Structural equivalence is another of White’s pioneering analytical concepts that provides a formal relational explanation to actors’ similar standpoints and valuations when structurally embedded in similar sets of ties (Lorrain and White 1971; Boorman and White 1976; White et al. 1976).
10. A turning point in the understanding of language’s reflexive capacity to constitute culture in context occurred when Peirce (1931) foregrounded the indexical dimension of the linguistic sign. Indexes, in contrast to symbols, are signs or aspects of signs that do not represent but point to the world to create or reproduce the social contexts in which they are uttered. For Peirce, semiotic mediation—counter to Saussure’s signifier/signified dichotomy of oppositions—is trichotomous in essence, including a sign-vehicle (representamen), an object

for which the sign stands, and a cognitive relation (interpretant) created by the sign-vehicle in its standing relationship to the object. A sign can relate to an object by similarity or analogy (icon), arbitrary rule (symbol), or spatio-temporal contiguity (index). This latter capacity—indexicality—is crucial to understanding the constitutive and contextual functions of language in socio-cultural action (Fontdevila 2010; more on indexicality later).

11. For recent directions in linguistic anthropology on indexical orders and global practices see Jacquemet (2013, 2005) on *transidioma*, Blommaert (2013) on *superdiversity*, and Heller (2011) on *post-nationalism*. For recent theoretical debates in sociolinguistics see Coupland (2016).
12. In the 2008 revised edition of *Identity and Control: How Social Formations Emerge*, White adds *switching* as the third primitive (2008, 18), an indication that by the 2008 rewrite he had been immersed in the study of language—switching as reflexive indexicality—to theorize the contextual underpinnings of network ties and stories.
13. White distinguishes at least four layers or senses of identity that build complexity upon each other: (1) securing footing, (2) social face in task-oriented groups, (3) integration across social settings and positions, and (4) ex-post biographical account or narrative identity (2008, 10–11, 1992a, 312–314, 1993, 48–50). Of these, the third and fourth levels are distinctively human in that they involve complex network phenomenology. A fifth metalevel identity of modern personhood as “style” is also proposed in his later work (2008, 18, 112).
14. It is important to note that “person” is just one type of identity among others that develops “under special social circumstances, which come late historically” (1992a, 8). In fact, White’s concept of identity constitutes a corrective to rational choice theory, “which takes identity for granted by ignoring the nesting of contexts and thereby tries to explain away control. Rational choice builds on a myth of a person as some preexisting entity” (1992a, 8). Similarly, he claims that “[functional] structuralism ... takes control for granted and tries to explain away identity” (1992a, 9).
15. Here White seems to adapt *footing* as control efforts among identities from Goffman’s (1981, 128) *footing* as metacommunicative shifting alignments among speakers in participation frameworks. Moreover, White’s notion that identities secure positions that “entail a stance” also resonates with Goffman’s notion of the self as a “stance-taking entity” emerging in struggles of identification and opposition to social organization (1961, 320). Needless to say, Goffman in turn was heavily influenced by Bateson’s cybernetic theories of metacommunication and framing in social life (Goffman 1974, 40; Bateson 1955).
16. It is important to distinguish White’s concept of identity from poststructuralist or postmodernist concerns with identity. They relate to different ontological types of identity. For the post schools, identity is typically a discursive “social fiction” that masks relations of power. For White, identity is a primitive of his theory triggered by stochastic uncertainty of many sorts, power relations being one among others. White’s project is about finding testable principles of social organization more fundamental than the derivatives of class, race, and so on. He challenges sociologies that naively theorize race, class, gender, and so forth as organizing principles, and that often end up reifying these categories with the result that their emancipatory goals become self-defeating. In contrast, White

- seeks deeper analytical tools to explain identity politics and other constructs, such as category-networks (catnets) based on structural equivalence and indirect ties, among others (White 1992a, 60–64; White et al. 1976; White [1965] 2008; Santoro 2008; for White and poststructuralism see Seeley 2014).
17. White clarifies that his concept of *style* should not be confounded with Bourdieu's *habitus* or *field*. All three concepts “invoke orderliness of perception and action” but styles are much more stochastic, open to innovation, and scale free across a “whole range of contexts and social formations” than habitus or fields (2008, 114).
 18. Beyond this basic level of identities' recurring interactions to accomplish tasks or disciplines, White's theoretical model also includes control at larger scales: *institutions*, *rhetorics*, and *control regimes*. These provide frameworks for mobilization and coordination of identities across wider domains of action than disciplines, including historical path dependencies of the *longue durée* (White 2008, 171, 220, 1992a, 116; White et al. 2007a; Corona and Godart 2009; White et al. 2007b; Mohr and White 2008). Rhetorics, for instance, are to institutions what stories are to ties. Rhetorics are folk commonsense understandings jointly held by identities interacting in connected networks as institutions. Stories draw on background rhetorics to express and constitute their relational ties. In turn, rhetorics “play out through stories” (Godart and White 2010, 580; Fontdevila and White 2013, 168 for rhetorics through heteroglossia).
 19. White was strongly influenced by Gal (1979), among other diglossia scholars, who found that among ethnic Hungarians, language choice of Hungarian versus German was better predicted by their differential “peasant” network density than by their peasant versus working-class status. Thus, for example, two same-generation, working-class, ethnically identified Hungarians (Janos and Sandor) but with different levels of “peasantness” of their networks showed opposite switching dynamics in their use of German versus Hungarian across all domains. In short, network members exerted more social control (even away from face-to-face interactions) over linguistic choices and self-presentations than abstractions such as worker status and social class (also see Milroy and Milroy 1992).
 20. In this sense, no language is ever monolithic and all languages are defined by a certain *structured variability* which is never randomly distributed but rather systematic and socially conditioned. Furthermore, even in simpler hunter-gatherer societies the isomorphism between “one language-one culture” breaks down in many instances when multilingualism itself becomes an identity marker of lineage and kinship affiliations. Thus, aboriginal Australians were known to frequently speak three or more languages, to the point that a child's mother and father would usually speak different languages (but understand each other's), while grandparents, aunts, and uncles would typically speak a number of other languages (see Dixon 1972; also Urban 1991 for a similar phenomenon of indigenous multilingualism in native South America).
 21. To bring up the potential chaotic effects and unintended consequences of getting fresh action in larger social formations (e.g. media floods of information, inflationary fiscal flows, new cohorts, splits in an existing age grade), White claims that getting action is never a rational course of action that can be targeted as in simpler form of control by identities, “but rather annealing, intentional but indirect and opportunistic. *Annealing* is a term from metallurgy. To anneal is to heat and thus shake the mineral inside, hard but more or less at random, and

then to cool and encourage the resumption of normality with attendant hopes that the new formation will have more desirable properties. A mineral is a complicated mess with crystal bits and gels twisted together in historically unique configurations. Social formations of institutions, classes, and the like seem analogous ... the annealing metaphor should be restricted to where the agency concerns population rather than disciplines and the like” (2008, 325–326).

22. Indexes are classified according to the degree to which their pragmatic use “presupposes” or “creates” the extralinguistic context that is being singled out (Silverstein 1976). Many languages, like Javanese, include complex deference and status indexes that “create” status differences by stylistic switches of lexical and grammatical choices (Brown and Gilman 1960 for Tu/Vous pronouns of address; Irvine 1985; Uhlenbeck 1970). An extreme case of “presupposing” indexicality that signals context without changing referential content exists among some Australian aboriginal languages where a complete switch in vocabulary takes place when speakers are within earshot of their mother-in-law or equivalent affines. Such “mother-in-law” language, which simply points to the presence of an “affine” audience in the surroundings, is semantically identical to the standard lexicon but serves as a kind of “affinal taboo” index within the speech situation (Dixon 1972).
23. Abductive inference refers to forms of cognitive inference by which deductive rules and formal principles become reflexively linked to local features of interactive settings that are known inductively from everyday life experience (Peirce 1931). In this sense, effective communication does not proceed only by following automatic rules of grammar and conversational turn-taking but by inductive knowledge of the practical meanings of a situation. In everyday life, these multiple contrasting levels of abstraction (deductive and inductive) become integrated and negotiated by abductive inference in the performance of speech.
24. According to White, “any network-domain is only concerned in the switch to or from public, rather than in negotiation of switching to and from any whole set of other particular network-domains. The greater the number of distinct network-domains, the greater is the easing by publics of switches. In mathematical idiom, the argument is that it is easier to evolve a mere $2n$ ways to enter and exit a common public state from n distinctive network-domains than it is to evolve the much larger (n times $n - 1$) number of ways to switch from one to another of the network-domains” (White 1995a, 1056).
25. White explicitly aligns with Halliday’s theory of “choice” grammar (as opposed to “chain” or structuralist grammars à la Chomsky) by stating that “grammar emerges from choice forks both within and across network-domains switches” (1995c, 17) and that “the Bayesian fork combines what Halliday analytically distinguishes as choice ... Choice when from closed small set interacts with other such choice system to induce the evolution of a grammar of some sort, the process [is] called grammaticalization” (1995c, 20).
26. In this sense, standard national grammars with their “naturalized” symbolic-referential codes and systems of representation are “indexes” that point to wider historical struggles and social distinctions (Fontdevila and White 2013). For instance, grammaticalization of unmarked masculine forms, as feminist scholarship has shown, has more to do with indexing historical struggles of patriarchal domination and resistance than with “truer” ways to carve out the world.

27. For Bakhtin, the novel, a historically late form of literary production that incorporates a multiplicity of genres—voices—in its composition, is considered to be the quintessential expression of the modern consciousness.
28. “Nadel’s paradox” refers to the intractable difficulties of formalizing network structures in isolation from the subjective and cultural understandings that shape and change them in real time. DiMaggio (1992, 119–120) has articulated the paradox as: “A satisfactory approach to social structure requires simultaneous attention to both cultural and relational aspects of role-related behavior. Yet cultural aspects are qualitative and particular, pushing researchers toward taxonomic specificity, whereas concrete social relations lend themselves to analysis by formal and highly abstract methods.” Also see White (2008, 369).

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Relationalism and Social Networks

Emily Erikson

Social network analysis is a methodology designed for the study of social relations, and relationalism is a theoretical framework based on the primacy of relations rather than actors. Clearly, what we have here is a match made in heaven! The elective affinities between these two schools of thought are strong and together they present an extremely promising framework for exploring the tangled, dynamic complexities that constitute social life. Yet, the embrace between the two has been somewhat half-hearted on both sides. And indeed, there are conceptual inconsistencies between relationalism and social network analysis that pose challenging theoretical problems with the potential to undermine the coherence of such a combined approach and have led researchers on both sides of the equation to shy away from each other. In the following, I consider some of the issues raised by combining relationalism and social network analysis, the latter of which carries its own theoretical baggage. It is consistent with the theoretical frameworks of both relationalism and social networks to suggest that the process of bridging across distinct actors, and all the inconsistencies and differences that are uncovered in such a process, is what makes relationships generative. The process of addressing or attempting to reconcile those differences produces new, potentially innovative combinations of elements and negotiated settlements. Thus, working through the inconsistencies raised by a relational network analysis may be the one of the more fruitful paths for further development of both relational theory and social networks analysis in the social sciences. Ultimately, I would argue that relationalism can be entirely consistent with social network analysis. It just suggests a certain type of networks analysis, one that is dynamic, open to contingency, and concerned

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with the cultural, social, and historical context of social structural patterns. Luckily, network science, in and outside of the field of sociology, has been moving quickly toward evolving, rather than static, conceptualizations of social networks and developing new methods that can be fruitfully applied to further the aims of relational research.

While this volume presents many different definitions of relationalism, I want to quickly outline my perspective on what is a vast and contended area of theoretical inquiry before addressing the links to social network analysis. My understanding of relationalism is that its origin lies in the pragmatist philosophical tradition and their reaction to Kant and his influence. Thus, I see Charles Peirce, in particular, but also John Dewey, Jane Addams, George Herbert Mead, and William James as important early thinkers in this tradition. While these thinkers were in many respects forging ahead on a path begun by Kant, they were also working to dismantle central elements of his thought. In particular, they were attacking the notion of the *a priori*, the idea that consciousness predates existence, and the belief in a strict dichotomy between the material and the ideal, which Kant arguably inherited from Descartes. One of the strategies used by the pragmatists to dismantle the dualism between the material and the ideal was to challenge the idea that consciousness exists prior to material existence—or indeed any such notion of the *a priori*. Instead of prior to, consciousness for the pragmatists arose from experience, meaning also that consciousness was not distinct from experience, as conceived by Kant, but part of experience. For example, in his essay “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” (1878), Peirce argued that the beliefs we hold about the world follow from thought, which follows from doubt, which follows from the experience. Following Peirce, reason is produced through experience—which is a direct contradiction to Kant’s position that reason is prior to experience and is necessary as a foundation through which the experience of the world is possible. Mead further developed this line of opposition to Kant by arguing that consciousness, and particularly self-consciousness, is the product of experiencing a social environment (Mead 1934, 186–191). Mead particularly destabilized the notion of the self as an enduring monolithic entity that encounters the world, and instead produced an image of the identity and self-consciousness as emergent properties that result from grappling with the complex dynamics of the lived world.

This line of critique has been central to the relational movement in social thought. A rallying point has been Mustafa Emirbayer’s call to “reject the notion that one can posit discrete pre-given units such as the individual or society as ultimate starting points of sociological research” (Emirbayer 1997, 287). In this way, “relational sociologists treat social phenomena as processes, constituted by flows of action or interaction, which operate immanently to the life of individuals” (Powell and Dépelteau 2013, 2). One focus of relationalism has therefore been to show that the self—or the modern social theoretical equivalent, the actor—is constructed through the shifting web of relations and the dynamic flux of social environments. Margaret Somers, a central voice of

relationalism, has argued that social scientists, and particularly scholars of identity, should be analyzing the social constitution of identity through the analyses of external narratives (Somers 1994, 606). Similarly, Harrison White has argued that “identities spring up out of efforts at control in turbulent contexts” (White 2008, 1). Indeed, for relationalists, the active force does not reside in the actor at all, instead it is the relations between actors that temporarily coalesce into the units that we recognize as actors, such as individuals, communities, organizations, groups, and nation-states—among other social entities.

It is here that we can begin to see the enormous potential that social network analysis holds for pursuing a relational research agenda. This agenda may be causal or descriptive. If social entities are the product of relations, then a means for studying the interactions, transactions, exchange, predispositions, and affectual relations is necessary for understanding how the social objects that populate the world are produced. A relationalist ontology could also make an even more far-reaching claim. If relations between social actors are responsible for the actions, intents, and dispositions of the actors, then social scientists interested in outcomes would be best served by focusing their attention on where the actions that are generative of actors lie in the relationship. In this sense, actors are just a temporary lens for perceiving, but also frequently obscuring, what is the real causal nexus: the intersecting pattern of relations. If relationalists are correct, for example, this implies that causal arguments based in individual units of analysis such as individuals, organizations, or nations are misleading. One might then suggest that researchers could instead use relations as units of analysis; however, given the relational framework, this also does not quite go far enough. The problem here is that a method that compares units, even relations, as if they are independent is also problematic. A relationalist ontology suggests that units are not independent—indeed, they are mutually constitutive. There is even less reason to imagine that relationships are independent than actors, and we should not compare relations as though they are independent in order to conduct, for example, a statistical analysis of predictors of tie formation. And even using more advanced techniques for controlling for the interdependencies between relations or actors falls short of carrying through the theoretical commitments of relational sociology, which instead calls for a type of analysis that is not controlling for relational interlinkages but instead is explicitly focused on analyzing the interlinkages and their effects. The analysis of interlinkages is of course one of the distinctive contributions of social networks to methods in the social sciences. And this analysis may also be performed in a descriptive mode that allows relationalists to directly observe the changing pattern of relationships that for many do not just produce but in fact constitute social life.

It must first be acknowledged that social network research captures an even more diverse field than relational sociology. Many people think of social networks as a method, but the field of social networks is better understood as a research area that encompasses different but related methodological approaches, at least two different theoretical orientations, and a focus on a

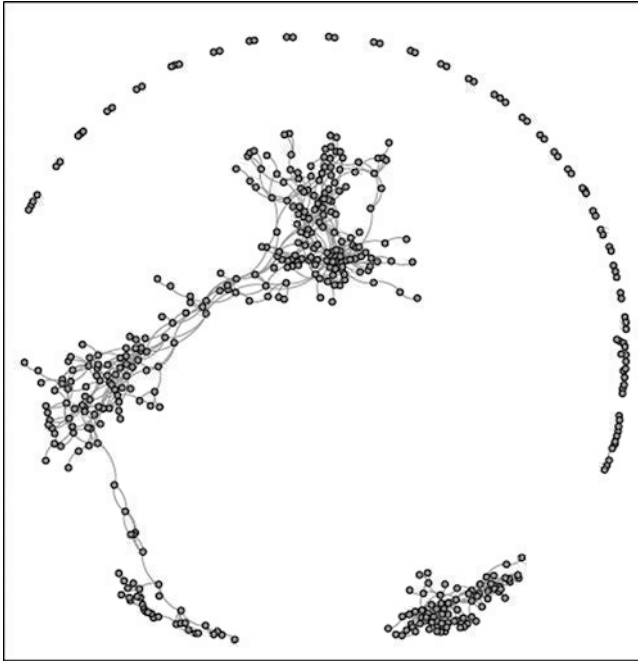


Fig. 13.1 Network of captain-to-captain ties

particular empirical object: the social network. A social network is a set of relations that link actors. The relations and the actors they connect can be represented as a matrix, a list of relations, or as a network visualization. Figure 13.1 represents a social network of information transferred between captains of East India Company ships in an overseas trade network of the seventeenth century (Erikson and Samila 2016).

In this network, the nodes represent captains and the arcs linking the nodes represent observable instances in which information about ports was transferred between captains. The arcs are directed, meaning that they represent the direction of the flow of information between captains. Whereas in many network visualizations arrows express the direction of the tie, in this visualization, which was created using *Gephi*, the curvature of the line represents the direction, where flow goes clockwise.

In some ways, this is a quintessential social network. It captures informal and transient ties between actors that would be difficult to map out or analyze with another method. In other ways, this network is unusual. It captures transactions rather than relationships. Meaning more precisely, the network ties indicate a transfer of information between actors, not a fixed relationship in which one actor identifies the other as friend, partner, confidante, or such-like. Those transactions may be indicative of more enduring relationships between the captains, but this is an empirically undetermined question.

Informal relations between individuals are the bread and butter of social networks and a core substantive concern in social network research. They have been central to social network research since Mark Granovetter's pioneering work on the importance of weak ties (1973). Social network analysis, however, is more than capable of handling strong ties, weak ties, transactions, dispositions, kinship ties, and many other types of permanent, semi-permanent, and fleeting ties between alters. Network analysis is also able to analyze different types of networks at the same time using multiplex methods.

Networks, however, do not have to link individuals. Extremely interesting social network research has been produced on dolphins, wolves, and tree networks, among others, and a large proportion of research in the field has been devoted to networks of organizations. The restriction that does apply is that the actors and ties must be social in nature. Thus, the analysis of computer networks, which is a very developed field, does not fit the bill. This does not mean, however, that very useful techniques cannot be pulled from the field of computer science and applied to social networks. And indeed, much of the progress of in the last decade of social network research has come from borrowing and applying the sophisticated methods developed in chemistry, computer science, physics, and epidemiology.

Where the purpose of social network analysis was originally a method through which to describe social structure itself, the intent has evolved over time to encompass describing structures, understanding the role of relations in social processes, and understanding the role of the structure of relations in social processes. These are distinct because relationships can be analyzed without reference to the larger structure within which they sit. The field has persuasively established that (1) the existence of relationships has a distinct impact on many social processes of interest to social sciences, and (2) the structure of those relationships also has a distinct and unique impact on social processes of interest. To these ends, the methods of social network research have included clustering analysis, blockmodeling, visualization techniques, community detection algorithms, mathematical modeling, computational modeling, triadic analysis, exponential random graph modeling, and more recently, directed acyclic graph analysis, as well as a host of other more general statistical and qualitative methods of research.

These methods are diverse and come not only from different traditions but also from entirely distinct disciplines. Despite this diversity, social network analysis should not be thought of as merely a grab bag of methods. There are many strong social network theorists and two distinct theoretical traditions (Erikson 2013). One is relationalism. The other, formalism, has arguably had an even more powerful, though perhaps less clearly articulated, impact on social network analysis. Formalism can be dated back to the early work of Georg Simmel, one of the primogenitors of social network research. Georg Simmel's work as an urban scholar is widely known and has a long history in sociology. Less well known to date has been Simmel's legacy as a neo-Kantian philosopher and the impact of this philosophical heritage on his approach to

social forms. In his early work, Simmel was explicitly attempting to expand Kant's work into the realm of the social sciences. Where Kant asked "How is Nature Possible?" Simmel wondered, "How is Society Possible?" (Simmel 2009, 40). For Kant, the answer was that there were certain essential structures of reason—such as conceptions of time, space, and causality—that are prior to our experience of the world and, indeed, make that experience possible. Simmel posited in his essay that social forms make society possible.

Social forms, for Simmel, are "conditions which reside a priori in the elements themselves, through which they combine in reality, into the synthesis, society" (Simmel 1972, 8). Simmel further elaborated on the connection between social forms and Kant's critical faculties in writing, "the sociological a-priorities are likely to have the same twofold significance as those which make nature possible. On the one hand, they more or less completely determine the actual process of sociation as functions or energies of psychological processes. On the other hand, they are the ideational, logical presuppositions for the perfect society" (1972, 9). Thus, these social forms are not produced by social experience, but instead they give form to social experience. Simmel's social forms include, among others, superordination, subordination, competition, the division of labor, parties, and the act of representing others (i.e. political representation or principal-agent relations).

The idea of social forms is appealing for social network researchers because it provides a powerful and relatively clear way of conceiving of how social network configurations affect social outcomes. Simmel himself provided many early examples of the impact of purely formal structures of relations between individuals, that is, social network patterns. The most famous example is of the triad. As Simmel pointed out, the shift from a dyad, a relationship between two people, to a triad, a relationship between three people, fundamentally changes both the nature of relationships between those actors and the potential for what kinds of patterns of social organization may occur. The dyad contains two possibilities: connection and disconnection. The linked dyad is inherently an intimate connection, since each dyadic actor has only one other link; so, they are tightly bound to their partner. The addition of one new individual, which is the transformation from a dyad to a triad, alters the essential nature of the relationships between individuals. In a fully linked triad, one in which all actors have relationships with all other actors in the triad, the intimacy of the relationship decreases and a sense of belonging to a group is created. These changes occur because actors are not entirely dependent upon one other individual in order to retain a relationship, intimacy decreases, and the existence of the group can withstand the loss of one individual. This condition has the larger, powerful implication that the group has a life that exists outside of the impact of any one actor.

Most interesting, however, is the possibility for social organization and strategy that emerge with the creation of a triad. Actors now have the structural possibility of forming ties with two disconnected individuals, giving them a strategic advantage over both—they can act as a broker between the two,

gaining resources through the act of linking and transferring otherwise isolated individuals, and play the two off against each other by, for example, threatening to form an exclusive tie with either one. Simmel referred to this as the strategy of the laughing third, *tertius gaudens*.

This aspect of Simmel's thought has been interpreted as part of his larger emphasis on how the number of actors involved in a social process can fundamentally alter its essential nature. Any network researcher, however, will immediately perceive that it is not the number but the way in which the number allows for new structural configurations between the actors that is doing the active work in these examples. It is the alternation of ties with the absence of ties that produces a context for strategic action and organizational hierarchy within even this extremely small group structure.

Social network research has embraced this insight and developed a formal means of evaluating the group structure of triadic configurations with the triadic census.

Figure 13.2 presents the sixteen possible configurations in a directed graph of three actors. The circles represent actors and the arrows represent directed relationships between actors. Thus, resources or affect may pass from one

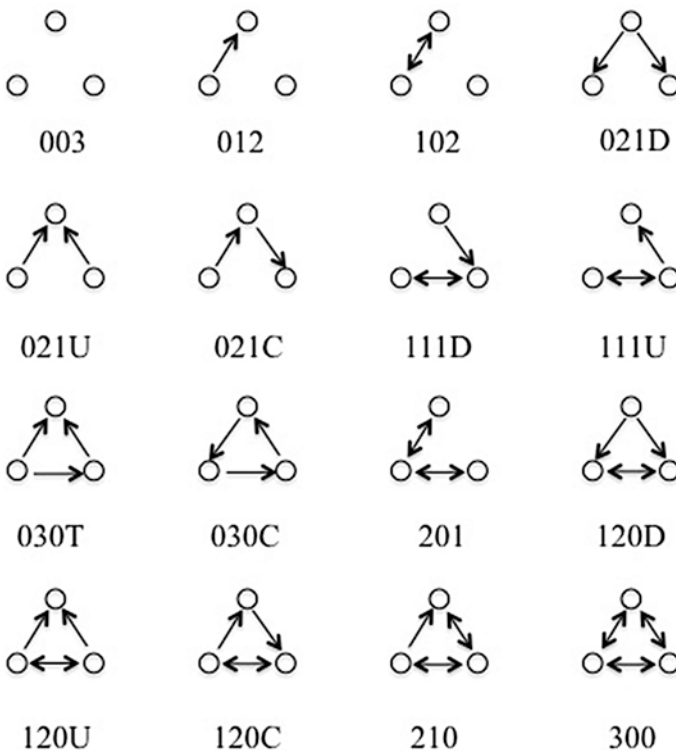


Fig. 13.2 Directed triadic configurations

person to the other in a reciprocated or unreciprocated flow. As is evident, just these simple conditions produce a relatively rich array of social possibilities. And researchers have associated different triadic configurations with different local relational types. For example, transitivity in social networks is a property in which friends like their friend's friends. It is linked to a theory of cognitive dissonance, when individuals try to minimize the disagreements within the set of their close acquaintances (Festinger 1957; Davis 1979). Transitivity is present in and linked to the triadic patterns 030T, 120D, 120U, and 300. Triads 120C and 201 contain transitive patterns but also have intransitive relational patterns within the network of three. Calculating triadic censuses with this theory in mind then can lead to conclusions about relational patterns, the strength of friendships, and the cognitive factors that weigh on relational decisions—quite a lot to extract from the formal properties of a network. And the triadic census is only the start of the different formal relational patterns that can be identified with the tools of network analysis.

For Simmel, however, the triadic configurations are not just markers of different relational types—they give form to relations. In doing so they create subjective states for the actors participating in those social relations. For example, the restless shifting and transient interactions of people in metropolitan areas create intelligent, rational, blasé, and calculative individuals. The objective conditions of the number of relationships experienced by individuals create these subjective states and characteristics. This relationship is, in many ways, a researcher's dream come true, because observable external states can be used to reveal the hidden subjective states of individuals. And this idea—that structure shapes content and the social structure of relationships determines the fundamental characteristics of a society—was embraced by early social network theorists.

This idea also, at first glance, appears to fit entirely with a strong program of relationalism. Here we have a concrete means by which relations determine actors, their subjectivities, and their actions. If the goal of relationalism is to dissolve actors into relations, then this is a potentially excellent path to follow. Yet, the problem is the very concreteness of the relations and their patterns. Relationalism is not only about dissolving actors. Relational theorists have been most explicit that they are critiquing the very notion of the *a priori* as well as the idea of a strict dichotomy between the material and ideal (Emirbayer 1997, 287; Somers 1994, 605, 621, 628, 2008, 205, 1998, 751; White 2008, 1; Powell and Dépelteau 2013). Fixed and determinate social objects are anathema to the creative and dynamic flux that makes up a relational ontology. And the idea that social forms exist in a different space than the interactions they make possible is also problematic. These aspects of relationalism render a wholehearted embrace of much formal social network analysis a challenging and potentially off-putting project for relational sociology.

In theorizing social forms, Simmel explicitly transposed the ideal *a priori* of Kant into the realm of the social. Within his framework, these should be understood as concrete, crystalline structures that have a determinative impact on

social life. Simmel took a different line in his turn to vitalism, but this later work had much less of an impact on research in social network analysis. The social forms are a social *a priori*, and network analysts have understood them in that sense. Thus, social network researchers have produced methods for identifying different relational configurations, with the idea that they will have the same impact across contexts. A prominent example of this is the research on structural holes. Structural holes are in some ways a generalization of the brokerage advantage of Simmel's laughing third. The structural hole concept is based on a measure of relational dependence, which weighs the dependency of individuals on their alters against the connectedness of their alters' connections to each other (Burt 1995). In practice, the measure is similar to but more complex than ego network density—in other words, the number of ties within one individual's circle of acquaintances relative to the possible number of ties within the actor's circle of friends. A similar idea is captured by the clustering coefficient (Watts and Strogatz 1998).

Researchers using the structural holes concept put a high value on low ego density because occupying this type of structural position places individuals in an advantaged location from which they can control the flow of resources and information between others in their network—or even possibly piece bits of existing information together into new ways, thus serving as a source of innovation (Burt 2004). While the universality of the impact of structural holes has been challenged, the impetus behind the research was to reveal the impact of structure by demonstrating the consistent “vision advantage” that accrues to individuals who occupy positions characterized by low local density. The success of this research program, which has been very generative, rests largely on the strength of the universality of the link between structural holes and innovation, which is understood to work across contexts. The concept of structural holes is not an isolated incidence in network analysis; brokerage positions, centrality, density, weak ties, and strong ties have all been attributed with generalizable properties throughout the literature. Indeed, the powerful appeal of network research often lies in the idea that it is possible to pull abstract configurations out of messy contingent circumstances in order to get to the heart of what social processes are driving outcomes. The problem of course is that instead of essentializing individuals and falsely treating them as fixed entities, the strong formalism of social network analysis can be guilty of universalizing relational patterns as fixed, pre-given entities. Here we have a direct contradiction with the central tenets of relationalism. And this contradiction, I would argue, is the core of the tension that has arisen between social network research and a relational sociology.

The tension is not a submerged or hypothetical problem. It has been articulated on a number of occasions in various ways, as criticism of the atheoretical nature of network analysis (Burt 1980; Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994; Granovetter 1979; Mitchell 1979; Rogers 1987), but also more recently in a focused critique of the neglect of problems of culture and meaning (Fuhse 2009; Fuhse and Mützel 2011; Mische 2011; Pachucki and Breiger 2010; McLean 2016).

Fortunately, there are paths forward for pursuing a relational social network analysis.

Two important issues that immediately stand out and have long served as rallying cries for relational theorists that are also invested in the tremendous potential network analysis holds for advancing a relational perspective are the twin concerns of context and content. Following Simmel, a lot of formal network analysis has tried to find structural constants. Simmel suggested this approach when he wrote, “In sociology, the object abstracted from reality may be examined in regard to laws entirely inhering in the objective nature of the elements. These laws must be sharply distinguished from any spatio-temporal realization” (1972, 28–9). Early social network analysis and structural theory was mainly focused on establishing a universal principle that patterns of social networks consistently mattered. This principle is clearly not inconsistent with relationalism. The danger arises when there is an attempt to link a specific network pattern with a consistent outcome—that is, a universal law. To take a more established example, Ivan Chase’s work on dominance hierarchies in animal behavior was very influential for early network researchers because he demonstrated that dominance hierarchies emerge from and are based on interactional patterns—not the attributes of those interacting (1980). So far, this is consistent with relationalism. The contingencies of interactions are centrally responsible for things that we perceive as durable structures. However, Chase’s work was also received in a way that lent itself to the assumption that social interactions universally lead to dominance hierarchies. There was certainly a strong emphasis on status-ranking in social network research in the closing decades of the twentieth century. Some form of social organization is necessary to group life, but cooperative relations are an alternative to dominance hierarchies that are also observed among animals. Yet, cooperative relations are less likely to emerge under common laboratory conditions in which animals compete for resources, are forcibly grouped and regrouped, and lack the freedom to exit from the setting (Estevez et al. 2007). Thus, conditions in many experiments can lead to situations in which dominance relations are more likely than cooperation, which is an important fact that may be ignored if the context of the laboratory is taken for granted.

Relationalism explicitly recognizes the importance of context and consistently works to bring it into the analysis—the underlying assumption being that relationships are not fixed and isolated determinative forms but instead fit into a more complex set of larger circumstance that shape the impact of as well as the structure of relations. The real problem is to draw boundaries on the relevant context. Historical network research provides an excellent example of successful relational work by embedding network structures into specific socio-economic and cultural circumstances, such as moments of imperial and national development and global trade settings (Adams 1996; Barkey 2008; Bearman 1993; Erikson 2013; Gould 1995; Somers 1993). For example, network research on state development has revealed consistent support for the importance of associational networks in the state formation process. There is evidence

that associational ties were crucial to state development in the Meiji Empire (Ikegami 2005), the British Empire (Olson 1992), and Switzerland (Wimmer 2011). These case studies are in part so impressive because they not only show that associational ties were important but also detail which groups were linked and how relations between these specific groups contributed to the unique trajectory of state formation in their respective areas. Thus, the emphasis on the importance of the networks in the works is not easily separated from a detailed investigation of the empirical framework.

We can see in work showing that informal ties between congressmen in the early history of the United States depended upon the widespread custom of bipartisan co-residence at boarding houses in Washington DC (Parigi and Bergemann 2016) that crucial contextual details about local culture play incredibly important roles in stories such as these. In more contemporary circumstances, it has been demonstrated that both the structure and outcome of network ties are powerfully affected by the resource levels of a community (Desmond 2012). Differences in organizational task and topic studied in classroom settings alter network effects (McFarland 2001). And larger social and cultural orientations to legal institutions impact network structure and function (Kirk and Papachristos 2011).

There are also specific methodological advances that have been designed in order to allow network researchers to incorporate context. I do not recommend these methods as a substitute for attention to culture and history—but I do recommend that relational sociologists take advantage of new methods of multilevel network analysis. Much the same as multilevel statistical analysis, multilevel network analysis allows for social networks between individuals to be embedded within networks of links between higher levels of social organization, civic action groups, organizations, or even states, among others. Multilevel modeling recently applied to the networks of elite French cancer researchers has shown that productivity and productive strategies are simultaneously linked to position in a network, position in an organization, and the organization's position in the larger inter-organizational network (Lazega et al. 2008). Emannelle Lazega and Tom Snijders have published an entire volume devoted to the description of various techniques of multilevel network modeling, which all hold significant potential for researchers attempting to include context in their work—as would be consistent with a relationalist perspective (Lazega and Snijders 2015).

Relationalists—and others—have also long bemoaned the tendency in social network analysis to treat all ties as exactly the same: binary objects with two states, on or off (Zuckerman 2008). This tendency again has roots in Simmel's legacy, as he hoped to bracket out structural from cultural forms with the intention of identifying social configurations that produced consistent outcomes across different cultural circumstances—a little like clear pipes that could be filled with different colored liquids. The configuration of the pipes does the important work, even if the contents produce superficial differences in their appearance. But even in Simmel, we can see a tension between the effect of the

social form and the affective contents of that form. For example, *tertius gaudens*, the laughing third that profits from the disconnect between friends has a structural equivalent in *tertius iungens*, the one who joins. The *tertius iungens* attempts to bridge parties in order to facilitate the flow of information between them and is also associated with the innovation that results from bridging disconnected areas of knowledge. The *tertius iungens*, however, is attempting to bring parties closer together, in the way that a mediator may provide a non-partisan link across warring parties (Obstfeld 2005). The form is the same, but the intent of the parties and effect of relationships are different—with consequential impacts on the nature of the relationship and very possibly the rate and quality of innovation that results from such partnerships. In this case, the contents of the ties—rather than their form—shape outcomes in distinctive and important ways, suggesting that form is not so easily divided from contents.

The sensitivity of relationalists to the contents of ties clearly improves analysis in such circumstances. Social network research has shown the central relevance of relational contents in settings that range from Renaissance political patronage systems to Brazilian youth activist meetings (McLean 2007; Mische 2009). This orientation is consistent with the core tenets of relationalism because it dissolves what they see as an artificial boundary between an abstract notion of structure (e.g. social forms) and the messy and meaning-laden realities of everyday interactions. For relationalists, it is not just that the contents of ties should be studied as well as the structure of ties—it is that the contents are the ties, creating and sustaining relationships and through their intricacies and biases also shaping the structure of ties and the outcomes they produce. This means that, for example, a friendship does not call forth a certain set of interactions. Instead, a repeated exchange of acts of kindness, consideration, and respect make up that thing which we refer to—in an overly reified manner—as a friendship.

Here again there is a specific branch of network methodology that is still advancing but can provide researchers with concrete methods for dealing with distinct relational types. Networks with multiple relational types are called multiplex networks. Blockmodeling was for many years the primary technique for dealing with multiplexity, and early papers such as John Padgett and Christopher Ansell's work on the rise of the Medici have long since established that the layering of different types of ties can be crucial to understanding important historical processes. This perspective and an array of analytical strategies are also on display in John Padgett and Walter Powell's more recent book *The Emergence of Markets and Organizations* (2012). Multiplexity has been incorporated into advanced techniques for community detection (Mucha et al. 2010), triadic analysis (Cozzo et al. 2015), and a host of other sophisticated techniques by researchers working across disciplines.

Beyond these established calls for more contents and context, I would also suggest that relationalists should focus more on interactions than relationships when conducting social network analysis. This raises the question of how we

conceptualize and operationalize ties. Discerning what constitutes a tie in social network research is a much more difficult and involved task than is recognized by people outside of the field. In the past, ties were often constructed from questionnaires asking individuals about their relationships. But we have a choice of conceptualizing ties as fixed psychological dispositions to others (such as a marriage, a friendship, or a family tie) or as interactions (such as sending an email, loaning some money, sharing a room, or engaging in some light conversation). What is at stake is an underlying presumption as to whether the relationships shape the interactions or the interactions produce and shape the relationships. Given the strong turn away from fixed *a priori* elements in relationalism, I would argue that it is important to embrace a conceptualization of ties based in the messy realities of everyday interactions. And there is clear support of this position in the relational literature. For example, Jan Fuhse emphasizes the actions taken by individuals in his description of how patterns of social activity emerge over time: “social structures result from this doing rather than from individual dispositions and attributes” (Fuhse 2009, 187). Indeed, relationalists may think of social structures as merely a different way of referring to the cumulation of past actions, not as something that is in fact meaningfully different or which stands apart from these empirical phenomena.

In practice, this approach to conceptualizing ties has two implications for research design. The first is that it greatly behooves relational network researchers to gather behavioral data on actual interactions. This means moving away from surveys and name generators and moving toward archival or observational data. There have always been tremendous amounts of data on interactions sitting in the historical record. Family histories, financial records, credit arrangements, and citation patterns are all both abundant and important records of interactions and exchanges between individuals in many different cultures and contexts, and make up only a small number of examples of the kinds of interactional data that can be produced from inventive use of archives and commercial and state documentation. These types of records have been supplemented with an almost overwhelming bounty of data on online interactions. And researchers have not neglected the opportunity of putting new mobile technologies to work in tracking physical interactions in real-time. All of these data, and indeed the very nature of interactions, which are fleeting and temporally situated, suggest the second implication, which is that relationalists should embrace a dynamic approach to network analysis. This, of course, is more easily said than done as it is much simpler to identify a structural pattern in a stable network than to pull regularities out of a complex and shifting mass of interdependencies. On top of which, dynamic networks raise difficult questions about the nature of ties that many people grapple with on a regular basis and that have indeed plagued humanity for some time—such as how do you know when a friendship is over? Or when does love begin?

Despite the complexities, there has been significant work in advancing techniques to manage continuously evolving networks. Ronald Breiger, Kathleen Carley, and Philippa Pattison produced an edited volume that contains both

helpful reviews and introductions to new techniques and advances (2003). The spread of sentiment over time has been modeled by James Fowler and Nicholas Christakis (2008), visualization techniques for dynamic networks have been explored by Jim Moody, Daniel McFarland, and Skye Bender-Moll (2005), while Gueorgi Kossinets and Duncan Watts have addressed quantitative approaches to evolving network structures (2006). Computational modeling of networks also holds tremendous potential for piecing out the impact of and regularities in interactional patterns as they unfold over time. And these works are but a small sample of the progress that has been made in this area over the last fifteen years or so.

Implicit in these suggestions is, I hope, the larger recommendation that relational researchers do not give up on using the most sophisticated tools of network analysis. This is an area where relationalist network analysis has failed to live up to its full potential. While a significant literature of relational work has employed advanced techniques of network modeling, there is a tendency for relationalists to avoid deploying the full battery of network analytical techniques or to treat networks as more of an analytical concept than a methodological tool. I would encourage relational researchers to embrace the new techniques in network science. Indeed, the influx of dynamic data has led to a convergence with relational approaches, as researchers are very much knee-deep in vast reams of temporally shifting, layered, and contingent interactional data. Thus, embracing the advance guard of these techniques can only help a relationalist agenda.

Finally, I want to make a strong plea for relationalists to keep the importance of structure and pattern in mind. There is a tendency in relationalism, as I have argued elsewhere (Erikson 2017), to focus energies on dissolving the actor into its constituent parts of relations. While I certainly do not object to this goal, I fear that too much focus on the individual will shift attention away from one of the truly innovative and important contributions that have been made by network theorists over time (which is of course also one that underscores the central importance of actors and their intentions in social processes): that the patterns of ties, or the network structure of relations, between actors has an independent effect on social outcomes that we as researchers need to take into account. If relationalists focus too much on how relations construct individual actors, we miss the bigger social outcomes that take place at the level of the collectivity and that very much rely on relations and their structure. This includes everything from neighborhood segregation, political polarization, market volatility, and crime waves to world trade patterns and disease outbreaks. Social networks affect these important outcomes. To properly understand how they do so, we need to avoid treating them as static, reified objects, an approach that does not reflect the reality of networks as they exist in time. Relational theory gives us a framework from which to approach this task. It has the potential not just to benefit from the field of social networks but to help advance the field as well

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Is Niklas Luhmann a Relational Sociologist?

Jean-Sébastien Guy

A recently released review of German sociologist Niklas Luhmann’s *Theory of Society* opens with this line: “Who now reads Luhmann?” (Khan 2014, 49). It is true that, outside of Germany at least, Luhmann (1927–1997) remains largely unknown throughout the social sciences, despite a massive intellectual output (about seventy books and close to five hundred articles—Moeller 2012, 126). If this is infuriating news to you, you can take comfort in the fact that at least some relational sociologists have taken interest in the subject (Donati 2011, 2015; Fuhse 2013, 2015a, b; White et al. 2007; White 2008; see also Fuchs 2001). However, relational sociology as a theoretical approach is still in search of its own identity (Prandini 2015). It is therefore unclear whether or not, or in what sense exactly, Luhmann can be admitted as a relational sociologist himself.

In light of these facts, this chapter explores the interconnections between relational sociology and Luhmann’s systems theory. For more openness, it considers different definitions of relational sociology at the same time (Sect. 2), but it also reports on the works of the authors inside relational sociology who have engaged Luhmann’s ideas (Sect. 3). First, it seems necessary, for the benefit of the average (i.e. non-initiated) reader, to begin with a presentation of Luhmann’s theory (Sect. 1).

I NIKLAS LUHMANN’S SYSTEMS THEORY

This section provides an overview of Luhmann’s theory. This is a difficult exercise, not only because of Luhmann’s well-known tendency to produce thick books and dense articles but also because of his iconoclast nature as a sociologist and a theorist (Knodt 1995, xvi). Unlike Marx, Luhmann is not interested

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in class structure, class exploitation and the critique of ideology. Unlike Durkheim, he is not interested in collective representations and group solidarity (or the lack thereof). Unlike Weber, Luhmann is not interested in actors, the meanings they ascribe to their actions and the historical consequences following from them. Without exaggerating, we could say that Luhmann's theory is unique in sociology (Fuchs 1999).

If this sounds impressive (or pompous), there is also a downside. This originality implies that Luhmann deviates from what other sociologists take as normal practices. One could say that Luhmann is not a team player. Rather than sticking to the old tricks of the discipline, Luhmann wants to create a whole new sociology which would be radically constructivist, antihumanist and antiregionalist (i.e. avoiding methodological nationalism) (Luhmann 2006, 238; see also Knodt 1995). This makes his theory difficult to approach for those already committed to sociology in its mainstream version (Khan 2014).

Two concepts in particular illustrate how Luhmann diverges from the rest of sociology in general. The first concept is autopoiesis, which Luhmann borrows from Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1980, 1987). The concept was originally devised to account for life as a natural phenomenon. It describes the way living organisms function: they literally produce themselves out of their own internal operations. For Luhmann, the same holds true for social systems (1990, 1995, 2013a). To marry autopoiesis with the concept of social system, Luhmann had to adapt the latter in strategic ways. He abandoned the classical definition of a system as a "whole made out of parts." For him, a system is made out of operations that only exist as passing events. A system involves multiple operations at the same time, yet these operations are not like Lego blocks that could be taken apart and reassembled to create a different shape. Lego blocks have a lasting existence; operations do not. Autopoiesis entails that a system produces itself the operations which in turn produce the same system or prolong it in time. Thus, a system is like a self-sustaining chain or cascade of events. What is important is not for the system to be copied (reproduced) as it is from one moment to the next, as if the system had to be protected against change. What matters is to maintain the capacity to continue generating more events, so that the system as a chain of operations never comes to a dead-end: "For a theory of autopoietic systems [...] the pre-eminent question is: How does one get from one elemental event to the next? Here, the basic problem lies not in *repetition* but in *connectivity*" (Luhmann 1995, 36).

The second concept is functional differentiation. Like Durkheim and Parsons before him, Luhmann sees contemporary modern society as an increasingly differentiated one (although this is not rigorously a quantitative issue, for there are different modes of differentiation—see Waters 1994, 308–309). The whole system of society appears as decomposed or recomposed into a series of autonomous subsystems (Luhmann 1982, 1989, 2013b). For example, in pre-modern society, political institutions and religious institutions tend to fuse together, so that religious leaders are in a position to exercise political power directly. By contrast, in modern society, there tends to be a

separation between Church and State. This is not to say that religious leaders can no longer take position in political debates but that the channels for exercising political influence take on an institutional form of their own, notably through national elections and party alliances. The same goes for politics and intimate relationships or religion and art: on one side, marriage is no longer a mechanism to seal political unions between families or clans; on the other, art is now practiced for its own sake rather than for the glory of God. In sum, Luhmann describes the different subsystems of modern society in functional terms: politics, love, religion and art are as many functional subsystems, and so are economy, law, education, science and so forth.

This goes against classical Marxist theories, but it also goes against classical functionalist theories. Classical Marxist theories explain that today's system of society is dominated by capitalism or the economic sector. Luhmann argues that, while the economy has evolved into an autonomous system or subsystem, it does not dominate the rest of society. He is not suggesting that there are no economic problems in the world today but that modern society is lacking one systemic centre, which makes for a much more disorganized and unpredictable world. The many different functional subsystems irritate each other, but none of them controls directly what is happening in the other subsystems.

In classical functionalist theories, the concept of function is offered as *explanans*. Functions are meant to provide an explanation for something else observed in reality (numerous Marxist theories offer similar explanations). Luhmann breaks up with this tradition by turning functions into *explanandum*. For him, not all social systems are necessarily functional. It is only modern society that has become a system differentiated into many functional subsystems after a series of historical transformations like the actual separation of Church and State. That these subsystems are functional does not mean that there are more rational or efficient. It only means that they owe their identity to specific functions or problems. For instance, political activities revolve around political problems and nothing else. Accordingly, political activities ignore scientific problems, to use but one example, since this is not their focus. This does not make modern society morally superior or a more advanced system. Nevertheless, functional differentiation must be included in the description of modern society.

It only seems tautological to say that “political activities revolve around political problems” or that “scientific activities revolve around scientific problems” if one feels so confident that one can already determine what the said problems “really are” (King 1993, 233). But such knowledge cannot precede the aforementioned social activities. The only scientific problems that society is aware of are the problems defined by scientists in the course of their activities. One cannot simply proclaim that “this is the case” and expect everybody else to automatically accept this statement as undeniable. To propose a new scientific problem, one must join the other individuals already engaged in the project of determining scientific problems. One can only “reach” them (and the rest of society) by “jumping” into the middle of their conversation. However, by the

time one makes finally an entrance on stage, one finds out that social activities have already taken on a certain organizational shape or a certain evolutionary trajectory. This is not to say that one is prevented from interacting with others but that social interactions are submitted to certain conditions as a consequence of past developments. In this case, any attempts made at proposing a new problem in science must be articulated in relation with the previous scientific developments. The same goes for political problems and political developments, as well as for all the other functional subsystems of modern society.

This is precisely what the concept of autopoiesis entails: operational closure (Luhmann 2013a). The operations inside a system must relate to the other operations previously produced by the same system. In a normal conversation, for example, what is uttered in the present must refer back to what has been uttered previously so as to build on it. If not, the conversation merely unfolds randomly and it is simply not possible to elaborate on any topic. Operational closure reveals another important feature of social systems: since there is an inside, there ought to be an outside as well. While closed on themselves, social systems nonetheless exist in a wider environment. The environment marks off a limit: it falls beyond the system's control. Indeed, a system can only control itself. At the same time, the system is exposed to whatever is happening in its environment. It even depends on its environment to produce its operation. This is not a matter of negotiation between two parties with opposite interests. Minimally, the production of operations inside a system must be compatible with the conditions prevailing in the environment. The system itself is not responsible for these conditions being present or available to a sufficient degree. Nevertheless, if the environmental conditions allow it, a system will develop eventually. This requires that a principle of selection is established against the chaos of the environment. In itself, the concept of environment suggests an absence of order or that anything goes. For a system to emerge, conditions must be set up and successfully enforced, so that *not everything* will do anymore. Connections are made between events so that whatever follows from a first event is no longer abandoned to chance alone.

Concepts such as chaos, order and chance are not absolute but relative only. What is order from the perspective of one system is chaos from another's. This is the *difference* that an autopoietic system *makes*. Reality is multiplied with each new system coming into existence, for each system offers a different perspective on reality. The goal for any autopoietic system is to achieve enough consistency by way of self-conditioning. The word "goal" is not the right one though, for there is no intention or planning involved (no teleology). In the time dimension, a distinction simply arises between what happens and what does not. What does not happen remains inconsequential for the subsequent phases. Everything is contingent, yet not everything gets to be realized as a system's operation.

If we pause to consider Luhmann's entire oeuvre, we realize that the difference system/environment is much more prominent than the concept of autopoiesis. Indeed, Luhmann began his academic career in the 1960s, yet he

did not discuss the concept of autopoiesis until the 1980s. Before Luhmann finally redefined social systems as autopoietic systems, he was already interested in closely related concepts such as complexity and self-reference.

The concept of complexity is useful in operationalizing the difference system/environment. A system's environment is always more complex than the system. The latter must constitute itself *against* the complexity in its environment but also *despite* its own internal complexity. This reminds us that the production of operation *inside* the system is a process involving both the system *and* the environment. The operation is an integral part of the system because it connects with other operations produced by the system. Operation connects with other operations in the same system as opposed to other operations in the environment or in other systems. Still, the environment makes a contribution because not everything is controlled by the system. The reader must keep in mind that what Luhmann calls a system is not like a machine or a physical object cut off from anything else around it but a self-sustaining chain of events (like, say, the "cycle of violence," for instance). The system does not owe this self-sustaining power only to itself. It also owes it to the ecological niche that it occupies in the environment.

Because of the system's partial dependence on its environment, the production of operations is never without risk. The system produces itself by producing events, but the events produced by the system are sometimes surprising to the system itself(!). Luhmann speaks of self-reference to describe notably how social systems continue to evolve by constantly reacting to themselves. For example, a love relationship draws the lovers' attention on themselves so that they continue interacting with each other by addressing and discussing the relationships that they are in. Thus, social systems operate self-referentially by using their outputs as their own inputs. In this way, the functioning of social systems lead to the formation of structures which can be described as "eigenbehaviors" (von Foerster 2003). In short, what Luhmann calls a system designates a portion of the universe where events no longer occur purely randomly. A system therefore introduces an asymmetry in the topography of the universe.

Nevertheless, the concept of autopoiesis really represented a landmark in Luhmann's lifework as it enabled him to substitute the concept of communication for the concept of action (Stichweh 2000). Luhmann specifies that social systems do not produce action but communication. For action to take place, only one individual is needed, whereas in the case of communication, a minimum of two individuals is required. For example, it is not enough for me to say or write something for a communication to occur from beginning to end. This is necessary but not sufficient. In addition, there must be another person to take up my cues. This other person is not under my control. It is up to her to decide what to do next. One way or another, she has the opportunity to adjust her behavior in light of my own. What results out of this is not a shared understanding but an autocatalytic reaction (Luhmann 1995, 120). By coordinating myself with the other person, every little thing she might do gives me a chance to react back and vice versa. The overall process feeds on itself. This process is none other than the social system building on itself as it continues to extend in time.

Each operation inside a system stands out as an event in itself. If we count one event for each communication, then each event turns out to be a composite of multiple micro-events. These micro-events are unevenly distributed between two persons or two parties. This is why the operations that go on inside a social system (and that keep the system going on) cannot be reduced to the actions of specific individuals or actors. The idea is simple, yet crucial: I cannot choose to communicate all by myself in the same way that I can choose to pick up an apple and eat it. There is a multitude of things that I can do on my own, but none of them will turn into communication as long as there is no one else around to pick up on it. The other person does not necessarily need to agree with me; the process of communication does not require that she reacts in a predetermined manner. What is required is that she takes my course of action as a basis for her own course of action—only then does communication really begin. Accordingly, communication does not follow from my personal desire or intention to express or share something (or to dominate). It is not what I mean to say or do that matters but what others make of my behavior in relation to theirs. This may include certain aspects of my behavior of which I was not aware or that I never intended to display.

The idea that social systems can be defined as autopoietic systems rests on the concept of communication understood as something fundamentally different than action. Through communication, independent courses of action get intertwined and turn into one single stream (one story, you might say). No one ends up telling the other what to do. At all times, each individual continues to make her own decision. However, together with the other person(s), each individual participates in the creation of a situation that almost automatically becomes bigger than any of them. Each individual contributes to the current situation, yet none of them can manage it unilaterally (by controlling the other individuals involved in that situation and also by controlling the overall meaning ascribed to the situation as a whole). Even normal conversations bring about too many topics to handle at the same time, so that participants must continuously abandon or leave unexamined most of the things that they verbalize.

Finally, just as Luhmann's systems theory does not begin with the concept of autopoiesis, it does not end or culminate with it either. At the turn of the 1990s, Luhmann became increasingly fascinated with the ideas of George Spencer Brown (or Spencer-Brown) who published a book entitled *Laws of Form* (1969). The book was meant as a treaty of logics. It could have been subtitled *Doctor Strangeloop or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Paradox*. It gave Luhmann another chance to reassert his focus on self-reference, complexity and the difference system/environment.

The connection with Spencer-Brown's ideas revolves around the concept of observation. Luhmann explains that social systems are capable of producing observation through their operations of communication. Even though social systems are clearly different from persons and organisms, it is nonetheless legitimate to speak of them as observers. Social systems not only observe their environments but also, and perhaps more importantly, themselves. As operations

of communication lead to more operations of communication, a social system reaches a point where operations of communication can be used to reflect on past operations of communication. Through this reflective strategy, a system generates a description of itself. Once the description is released in the course of communication, the social system reaches a new point in its evolution inasmuch as subsequent operations benefit from a tighter focus thanks to the system's newly found unity.

In *Laws of Form*, Spencer Brown makes similar suggestions regarding observers. Luhmann mainly concentrates on Spencer Brown's concept of re-entry (2002). The constitution of self-referential systems presents a paradox. On one hand, there is a difference between the system and its environment. On the other hand, this difference finds its way back into the system itself as one side of the difference. In other words, Luhmann asserts that the difference system/environment re-enters itself and that it must do so. But this arrangement keeps the system in a state of confusion or indeterminacy: is there one difference or two? Are the two differences the same one or are they distinct? Which one comes first and which one comes next? What is reality (arising in the first place) and what is the representation of that reality (coming secondarily)? Unexpectedly, Luhmann embraces this indeterminacy—at least, he seeks to harness the consequences arising from the concept of re-entry. The latter establishes that (a) social systems are irreducibly complex and for this reason they always remain partially indeterminate, (b) social systems are sensitive to their own state, that is, they are pressed by their own indeterminacy to continue producing more operations in an effort to determine what is in need of further determination, (c) the counterpart to the paradoxical nature of re-entry is time: time is created within systems, or alongside to them, as they continue to react to their internal state by producing operations after operations.

2 IS LUHMANN A RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGIST?

In this section, I ask if we can admit Niklas Luhmann as a relational sociologist. To circumscribe how relational sociology might be defined, I will use multiple criteria:

1. Mustafa Emirbayer (1997) defines relational sociology, and more broadly relationalism as a way of thinking, in opposition with substantialism. The latter is the belief that objects in reality exist independently of each other, whereas relationalism insists that they are in relation with each other. Because objects (or social phenomena) intersect together, they must be analysed dynamically: as the relations between objects change, so too the objects themselves. Objects are in a state of flux. Accordingly, relationalism privileges processes over substances.
2. Additionally, Emirbayer (ibid.) sees relational sociology as replacing the concepts of self-action and inter-action with that of trans-action (all three concepts are borrowed from John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley).

An example of self-action in sociology is a system (say, “capitalism”) undergoing a transformation as a result of its own internal logic. This approach admits no relation at all. Inter-action refers to all the cases where various social variables (like education and income) are reacting to each other (higher level of education means higher level of income). Inter-action leads to a form of substantialism when variables are reified as if they were entities imbued with an existence of their own. By opposition, the concept of trans-action allows us to imagine different social actors who mutually define each other. Actors partake in a common process, although they do not disappear in it as with the concept of self-action. Not only are actors in relation with each other, but this relation is not merely analytical: it signals a concrete social activity unfolding in time.

3. François Dépelteau (2008) reproduces the distinction between self-action, inter-action and trans-action when he talks about determinism, co-determinism and relationalism. There is determinism when actors’ behaviors are caused by social structures following a top-down logic. These structures may be nowhere to be seen and yet it is argued that actors do not determine their behaviors by themselves. There is co-determinism when actors are given a little freedom vis-à-vis structures. The latter certainly influence what actors can do, except that now actors are granted the power to change structures (this is the position defended by critical realists such as Margaret Archer). Finally, Dépelteau speaks of relationalism when social structures are replaced with relations between actors. Actors may still experience a constraint, but this constraint is not derived from social structures—conceived as invisible forces or as entities separated from actors—but from the other actors in the same situation. In place of structure, Dépelteau prefers to speak of social fields to underline the regularities arising in social life (Dépelteau 2013).
4. Elsewhere, François Dépelteau, this time with Christopher Powell, asserts that relational sociology avoids both determinism and voluntarism or objectivism and subjectivism (Dépelteau and Powell 2013). The two authors write: “The voluntaristic thinkers see human beings as autonomous individuals who are basically driven by their own personal properties and forces. The deterministic ones perceive individuals as being surrounded by external, constraining, or enabling social entities (‘the society,’ ‘the system,’ social structures, etc.) that determine their opportunities throughout their life” (2013, xv). They add that “relation sociology leads to observation of concrete and specific relations between social actors, more than observation of relations between variables for instance. For relational sociologists, ‘figuration,’ ‘fields,’ ‘networks,’ or ‘social worlds’ are made and reconstructed by relations between actors” (2013, xv–xvi).

How should we categorize Luhmann’s systems theory in light of the above remarks? At the least, we can say that Luhmann and relational sociology have something in common, namely that they share the same enemies. Conversely, Luhmann himself is not the enemy of relational sociology.

However, the fact that Luhmann does not place the concept of relation squarely at the centre of his theory is conspicuous. To be fair, he has something to say about relations. He explains that a system must not be defined in opposition to its elements. Rather a system is distinguished from its environment on one hand, whereas elements are distinguished from their relations on the other (Luhmann 1995, 20–23). The difference elements/relations duplicates the difference system/environment. For any element, there is a multiplicity of relations with other elements. Since the goal is to ensure the reproduction of the system, these relations must be regulated. The system continues to differentiate itself from its environment as long as the elements produced in the system maintain a relation with the other elements in that system. Hence, the concept of relation in Luhmann's theory is used to reintroduce complexity as an underlying theme. However, it does not refer to a relation between social actors.

To make the matter worse, relational sociologists are highly suspicious of the concept of system. Dépelteau and Powell associate it with determinism and seek to avoid it. But Luhmann reveals that there are three distinct conceptions of the system: closed, open or self-referential (Luhmann 1995, 6–9, 2013a, 28). Closed systems are wholes made out of parts standing as self-contained objects. Open systems imply the existence of an environment feeding inputs to the systems which then release outputs in return. Luhmann agrees that these first two conceptions entail a form of determinism or substantialism. Yet, he feels unburdened by this and simply embraces the third conception. Like open systems, self-referential systems exist in a wider environment, except that they have no direct exchanges with them. What is recognized as a unit (here, an input) by a self-referential system is a creation of that system. It has no unity on its own outside the system. In that sense, there are no ready-made inputs stored in the environment waiting to be taken up by the system. There is something coming from the environment, but it is only “noise.” That noise is essential to the system, although it does not determine how the system reacts to it. It is up to the system to turn this noise into opportunities for evolution by linking it with internal possibilities. In the end, even though the concept of self-reference may be reminiscent of self-action, it is clear that Luhmann wants us to think about systems in terms of processes.

But how are we to account for the processes in social systems if we cannot link them back to social actors and their trans-actions? To clarify this issue, consider the example of divorce. Luhmann would not focus on the fate of the specific persons involved in this process. He would examine divorce as a recurring social event and he would want to determine how it changes over time. Certainly, there can be no divorce without married couples. It does not follow, however, that the phenomenon at hand ought to be restricted to the two individuals immediately involved. This is not to say that we must include more actors: lawyers, judges, children and so on. The point here is to apply the principles of *population thinking* (DeLanda 2002, 58–59, 2006, 16–17).

First, as multiple applications for divorce are being processed simultaneously, one must describe the differences or heterogeneity among all these cases. Second, as more applications get processed, one must observe how this heterogeneity is

changing under the impact of all the decisions made up to this point. These decisions not only affect the concerned parties but can also create precedents which may affect subsequent cases. In this perspective, we can observe how the resolution of one divorce is likely to influence the resolution of other divorces, thus altering the composition of the entire population in the long term. This is not only an observation made by researchers otherwise removed from the process under the study. It is the process itself that draws attention to cases elsewhere in an effort to learn from them and imitate successful strategies.

Needless to say, even whole “populations” of divorces(!) still depend on human beings for them to occur at all. That said, at the population’s level, divorcing is not tied to anybody in particular (unlike, say, “Canadian history” or “Canadian values” which must be logically tied to Canadians). The interface between individuals and processes is ecological in nature: social processes continue to go on, and to evolve, as long as individuals continue to come around. “Coming around” does not necessarily imply “staying put.” Individuals can come and go without disrupting social processes provided other individuals relay them with sufficient frequency. This is not true of all social occurrences, of course. If I have a conversation with a dear friend, that conversation is over after we leave each other. If my friend dies, our friendship dies with him. But conversely, cases like these should not lead us to conclude that no social process can ever “escape” social actors.

We can imagine social processes and social actors as crossing each other orthogonally (at right angle). It is not necessary for the same actors to continue pursuing the same objectives for the same social process to continue unfolding in time. For the same social process to extend indefinitely, a chain can be created between actors so that one actor can leave the scene to be replaced with another actor without delay. *Soldiers* die on the battlefield, but the *war* still goes on as new recruits are sent to the front. In Luhmann’s theory, the same applies for art, law, science, religion, etc. Each of these systems (or subsystems) is like a process that has been going on for many centuries already, a process that does not progress toward an ultimate end (like equilibrium), but that perpetually transforms itself to survive both the passage of time and the passing of social actors.

Time is the core idea, once again. For Luhmann, social systems are not contained in the minds of social actors like ideology must be. Instead, they are contained in time. More precisely, social systems are in motion: they have a momentum carrying them forwards. Each communication is pointing towards the next moment, stretching towards it. Accordingly, it is not enough to locate social systems in time. They do have a “position” in time (specific events correspond to specific dates on a calendar), but there is more: they also have speed and that speed can change. If we envision all the operations making up one social system at one moment, we cannot say that all these operations are caused by one set of ideas, beliefs or interests contained in the mind of social actors. These would be forces acting atemporally, that is, irrespective of the events that have been accumulating in the system. But the system’s operations are not “acted up” by causes external to them. They show the system in its

instantaneous state as it is “taken away” by its own activities: the tangent, the slope of the curve at that one point on a graph. The system does not determine these operations from the outside, nor do they determine the system. It is the system that determines itself through them.

By rejecting determinism and voluntarism and by promoting trans-action instead of self-action or inter-action, relational sociologists seek to recapture social life as inherently dynamic. Luhmann promotes the same vision: social systems are always-in-the-making, continuously remaking themselves. Even if the word “system” might turn off a lot of relational sociologists, they would be well advised to treat Luhmann as a powerful ally. One remaining source of confusion, though, is the fact that Luhmann combats substantialism without actually embracing relationalism. He certainly stresses that social life is processual, except that for him social processes are not necessarily relational (see the comments made by Jan Fuhse in Dépelteau and Fuhse 2015, 45).

3 ARE RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGISTS LUHMANNIAN?

In this last section, the compatibility between Luhmann’s theory and relational sociology is re-examined through the different ways in which relational sociologists have engaged Luhmann’s ideas in their works. Attention is devoted to four thinkers: Stephan Fuchs, Harrison C. White, Jan A. Fuhse and Pierpaolo Donati.

Stephan Fuchs is not a self-declared relational sociologist, even though he is acquainted with the members of the New York School of relational sociology (Fuhse 2015b, 22; Mische 2011). Nevertheless, in his book *Against Essentialism* (2001), Fuchs shows convincingly that Luhmann analyses social systems like others analyse social networks. Fuchs is referring to Harrison White, a core member of the New York School. Both systems theory and networks theory define a constructivist approach to social phenomena. Fuchs himself applies this approach to operationalize a series of intellectual conundrums. His main strategy is to replace conceptual universal dichotomies with as many continuums, so as to allow for empirical local variations. As a matter of fact, solutions given to intellectual conundrums do vary from one context to the other. Fuchs identifies the parameters around which these contexts vary themselves. In this way, he ties the ideas circulating at the level of cultural discourse back to the conditions prevailing at the level of social organization.

Consider, for example, the debate regarding value-neutrality in science. Some say that value-neutrality is both desirable and achievable. Others proclaim that it is not only impossible but even dangerous, as it blinds us to our own biases. Fuchs does not take a position himself, but he observes that the two options reflect, and coincide with, different degrees of institutionalization. The position favorable to value-neutrality is indicative of a strong network with massive resources. That the network is strong implies that social activities and social interactions are highly codified (in terms of roles and responsibilities, division of labour and hierarchies, routines and rituals, etc.), so much so that they comprise a very stable social world with few internal conflicts. For the actors living or

working in this world, it is obvious that scientific research is an objective endeavour that goes on “undisturbed” by prejudices or emotions since it appears to them as inherently impersonal. For them, scientific research is associated with physical laboratories and technical instruments or even repetitive manual work—all things that neither prejudices nor emotions can really disrupt.

The other position corresponds to a network that lacks the organizational capacity to support a phenomenological world with the same consistency or thickness. Not only are resources missing (no actual workspace, no specialized tools, no certified positions, etc.), but the codification of social conducts does not run as deep (indeed, it is this lower level of codification that accounts for the lower level of resources). This not only makes for a world where actors are more likely to diverge and disagree with each other but also a world where actors are left to their own devices to settle any dispute that may erupt between them. As a result, actors easily convince themselves that value-neutrality in science can only be a mirage or a lie, as their daily experience tells them that the course of social activities is irregular to the point that differences between individuals, and the difference that individuals can make, cannot be ignored or underestimated.

Harrison White has confirmed the family resemblance that Fuchs notes between his theory and Luhmann’s. In a number of passages throughout in his magnum opus *Identity and Control* (2008), White speaks positively about Luhmann, albeit more often than not with some reservations (for a deeper discussion of this, see White et al. 2007). Even though they use different vocabularies, White and Luhmann share the same intuition: that social reality is made out of transitory patterns arising under conditions of uncertainty. The role of sociology is to study organized activities in the human world. These activities are sustained by the organizing efforts conducted from within the same activities. In other words, collective activities do not come in a ready-made form. Not only can they take on different aspects—from loose alliances to rigid hierarchies, from informal gatherings to liturgical rituals, and so forth—but additionally, whatever form an activity displays must be appreciated in contrast with the total absence of organization. The latter is not the same as a total absence of matter: a material is available for the formation of patterns, except that the material itself is formless.

In place of systems, White speaks of networks and identities (2008). Networks exist in a population, and they always mesh with other networks. This creates a sort of pressure inside networks as they are at risk of being absorbed by other networks. Identities take shape as efforts are deployed to manage these tensions and achieve “footing.” An identity corresponds not only to one network (or network of networks) but also to one story. It is the story of the network, the story-in-the-making that is the essence of the network itself. It offers an account and a framework for the relations or ties making up the network. More precisely, White explains that identities are faced with the challenge of having to stabilize themselves across multiple contexts (Azarian 2005). There are numerous contexts because there are numerous identities coexisting together. Identities cannot remove themselves from this chaos.

They must learn to “ride the wave” by playing the different contexts against one another and find a balance between them. Accordingly, identities are constantly switching across contexts, as if each network was cutting across the other networks. In a way, identities take advantage of the opportunities provided by the difference between contexts to counteract that very difference. That is, they find ways to resist certain networks by allying themselves with other networks. In sum, identities are constantly pushing and pulling each other.

In a recent article, though, White severely criticized Luhmann (Fontdevila et al. 2011), rejecting both the concept of autopoiesis and the concept of functional differentiation. For Luhmann, the many systems of modern society establish as many parallel worlds (science, art, law, politics, religion, etc.). In White’s opinion, networks cannot be sealed off from each other. The problem is that Luhmann’s depiction of modern society neutralizes the central idea that systems/networks live an existence in suspension between order and disorder, that they are never completely ordered nor disordered. Luhmann’s emphasis on operational closure goes against White’s concept of switching. For example, in Luhmann’s theory, the political system and the scientific system never interact directly with each other. One can observe the other but not in the same way that the other observes itself. The point of view of science on politics is not the same as that of politics on itself. The two systems never blend together; on the contrary, White’s concept of switching implies that networks are always leaking into one another, for identities only maintain themselves by working against this tendency. For many of the same reasons, White dismisses Luhmann’s theory of communication in favour of a theory of language. White contends that communication is closely bound to the concept of binary code—each social system must be given a unique code so as to guarantee its autopoiesis—whereas language offers more possibilities (see also Fontdevila and White 2013).

One of White’s close associates, Jan A. Fuhse, came to Luhmann’s defense nonetheless. He shows that one can use Luhmann’s theory of communication without giving priority to functional differentiation (Fuhse 2013, 2015a, b), arguing that Luhmann’s theory is well suited to model the social dynamics subtending the creation of ties within networks. Notably, the process of communication accounts for the stabilization of cultural expectations framing interpersonal relationships. In that sense, Fuhse reminds us that what Luhmann designates as a system refers to an ongoing process, as explained in the previous sections, and not necessarily to a self-contained domain of action defined abstractly. However, unlike the sort of population thinking advocated earlier, Fuhse likes to keep things personal, so to speak, by concentrating on cases like love and friendship. At the same time, though, Fuhse still maintains a distinction between communication and consciousness, or between social systems and psychic systems, just like Luhmann does in his original theory, so that the process of communication does fall not directly under the control of specific individuals.

Let me finish with Pierpaolo Donati. Although Donati engages Luhmann’s theory on numerous occasions, he is dismissive of it (Donati 2011). For

instance, he examines closely Luhmann's typology of system differentiation (segmentation, stratification and functional differentiation) but only so as to sketch out a new form of differentiation (relational differentiation) (see also Donati 2013). When approaching relational sociology, Donati relies on the contribution made by Margaret Archer within critical realism (Donati 2015). Hence, he conceives social structures in terms of emergence made possible by interactions between individuals. Even though individuals end up being constrained by structures, they remain nonetheless capable of changing them by taking action through their relations with others or by acting with the help of others on their mutual relations. Donati's great ambition for relational sociology is to uncover or recover the human aspects in society by returning to the relations behind social structures (Donati 2013, 20). In light of this project, Donati rejects Luhmann's theory as naïve functionalism. He writes:

The problem is that functionalism leads to non-functionalism, just as mathematics in economics leads to us to acknowledge the existence of what in the economic system is not amenable to mathematical quantification. In exactly the same way, systemic-functional analysis cannot cope with the non-functional. How could Luhmann explain free giving, any gratuitous act, or the refusal of communication, the implosion of meaning, the need for justice, the utopia of many social movements and their dynamics? How is it possible, whilst remaining on the terrain of self-referential functionalism to explain human creativity, the onset of combinatory synergy, the outbreak of new meaning of things? Are these only new connections activated by causal variability? (Donati 2011, 145)

Donati touches on many different issues here, but overall, I would posit that he simply misunderstands or misrepresents Luhmann's theory. Luhmann conceptualizes functions as *explanandum*, not as *explanans*. For him, there are no functional needs or imperatives that all social systems ought to fulfill simply to maintain their existence. Social systems cannot constitute themselves unless complexity is reduced somehow, but this can only occur by way of selection, so that the process is inescapably contingent. Complexity must be reduced, but there is always more than one way to do this. Hence, Luhmann's conceptual apparatus constantly alerts us to *other possibilities*. Even Luhmann's theory is based on contingency: there is no necessity behind it. No one is compelled to study sociology and to develop a sociological theory. One is free to do many other things! (On the other hand, though, sociological theory should not be confused with what it is not: those of us who set out to develop a theory find themselves bound by their own decision.) Contra Donati, I would argue that Luhmann is very attentive to "human creativity, onset of combinatory energy and outbreak of new meanings"—in sum, what is unpredictable in life—since his theory systematically makes room for *more things*. Indeed, Luhmann explains that the condition for observing *anything* is that we do not observe *everything* simultaneously. For this reason, whenever we observe *something*, we should keep in mind that we could still observe *something else*, even though we cannot observe it (or conceive it) at the same moment in time (Luhmann 2002).

4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that one can legitimately read Luhmann's theory through the lenses of relational sociology. That is, Luhmann lashes out at substantialism (or essentialism, as Stephan Fuchs has it) as much as relational sociologists do (if we agree on the tentative definitions offered by Mustafa Emirbayer, François Dépelteau and Chris Powell). The social systems that Luhmann describes for us are not static structures but dynamic processes. However, whereas relational sociologists conceive the opposite of substantialism to be relationalism, Luhmann seems to have something different in mind, since the chains of communication occurring within social systems are not rigorously understood in terms of relations (or trans-action) between individuals as social actors. Perhaps for this reason, some relational sociologists (such as Pierpaolo Donati and Harrison White) have been critical of Luhmann's theory. Nevertheless, when hearing the question "who now reads Luhmann?" other relational sociologists should know (following Jan Fuhse's example) that it would be in their interest to be able to answer back: "I do!"

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SECTION C

Power Relations, Inequalities
and Conflicts

Charles Tilly and Relational Sociology

Chares Demetriou

Charles Tilly (1929–2008) did not set out to develop relational sociology as such. Nor was he concerned with developing general theories of power or conflict. He consistently aimed, rather, at developing more focused and historically grounded theories, often about how political contention is produced. Relationalism is nevertheless a conceptual pivot in his rich and multifaceted body of work, while power and conflict are less prominent theoretically but ubiquitous empirically. Pivotal though it is, however, relationalism is for Tilly not some golden dust that coats all things sociological, be they ontological or epistemological. It has a crucial role in apprehending and explaining social phenomena, but this is neither an exhaustive nor an omniscient role. In fact, if an epistemological concept can be deemed prime in Tilly's work, or at least his later work, this is the concept of process, and not all processes are relational in his view. Nevertheless, while Tilly's work does not aim to develop general relational sociology, it does greatly expand and deepen our understanding of how social relations work to produce a wide array of important social phenomena, including social trust, durable inequality, and contentious politics.

In this chapter I aim to unpack the above assessment of Tilly's work. In so doing I will not review his entire oeuvre—it is too large to comfortably fit into a book chapter in any case—or the secondary literature covering his work. I will focus, rather, on the work he published during the last decade of his life. It is in these writings, numerous themselves, that his relational and processual sociology developed most distinctly, making them arguably the culmination of his life's work. I share Tilly's view, at any rate, that the development of his work had been without ruptures—the metamorphosis from structuralism to relationalism notwithstanding—and that his most important later-day ideas are

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rooted in his earlier work. As Krinsky and Mische (2013) demonstrate, significant aspects of his eventual central ideas (on relational agency, emergentism, contingency, and other) appear in his entire oeuvre, while it is evident to any reader of his writings that substantive analyses from his earlier work inform his later work. Below I start with a brief overview of Tilly's meta-sociology before turning to his substantive theories.

1 PROCESS, TRANSACTIONS, AND THEIR EPISTEMOLOGY

Tilly wrote extensively about how to do sociology writ large. But it must be noted at the outset that his writings approach epistemology from an angle that avoids some of the concerns other sociologists have. Above all, his writings do not cover the connection between the sociological enterprise and politics/power. Thus, neither reflective sociology nor public sociology, nor any other brand of politicized sociology preoccupies them. Nevertheless, the epistemological stand they do advance is bold. As a matter of fact, they propose a new paradigm about how to do sociology.

In Tilly's view, the major existing epistemological directions in the social sciences are amiss. On the one hand, positivism sets unrealistic goals and ends up being pretentious; on the other, postmodernism, at least in its epistemological skepticism version, leads to research paralysis (Tilly 2002, Chap. 2, 2008a, Chap. 1). In between these extremes there is room, Tilly argues, for a rigorous yet epistemologically modest sociology, one in quest not of idiography, covering laws, or necessary and sufficient conditions, but of causal analogies explaining how social phenomena emerge. His starting point, therefore, is that sociology must capture and explain the dynamic emergentism characterizing social reality. He argues that the pivotal concept with which to do so is that of social process, whereby the aim becomes to explain how social processes emerge out of other social processes. More specifically, the tasks are to apprehend and name various social processes and to examine their workings and interconnections.

Tilly calls the constitutive processes "mechanisms," and it is perhaps around this label that his approach is best known. But it should be stressed that choosing from the labels "process" and "mechanism" is arbitrary in the face of a given form of social dynamics; what social dynamics may be labeled "process" in one epistemological context may be labeled "mechanism" in another. Ontologically speaking, processes and mechanisms are the same kind of social dynamics and are labeled differently only at the level of epistemology (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 214).

Tilly's relationalism comes to the fore especially in connection to social mechanisms/processes, for he holds that the most important of them are relational. He defines a mechanism (and by extension a process) as "a delimited class of events and occurrences that alter connections among social units" (McAdam et al. 2001, 24).¹ In this definition a mechanism/process is relational inasmuch as the produced alteration is of social relations. Consider for

example the mechanisms/processes *brokerage* and *co-optation*: *brokerage* refers to “production of a new connection between previously unconnected or weakly connected sites”; *co-optation* refers to “incorporation of a previously excluded political actor into some center of power” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 215). Clearly, each of these mechanism/processes stands for relational change. But it is important that Tilly allows also for the search of cognitive mechanisms/processes and for incorporating them in explanations. A cognitive mechanism/process refers to alterations in collective cognitive states and is therefore intercorporeal. One example is *polarization*, a mechanism/process referring to “increasing ideological distance between political actors or coalitions” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 217).²

Yet Tilly considers the distinction between relational and cognitive mechanisms/processes to be rough (McAdam et al. 2001, 25–6). In truth, he leaves things unclear on two accounts. First, it is unclear whether or not the alteration produced and the events producing the alteration *both* need to be relational or cognitive in order for the mechanism/process to be relational or cognitive, respectively (for an elaboration, see Alimi et al. 2015, 29–30). Second, it transpires in Tilly’s work that the type of mechanism/process cannot always be called. Several of the mechanism/processes identified by Tilly stand for complicated changes resisting ready classification. It may be, then, that some of them combine relational and cognitive change. The mechanism/process *boundary formation* is a case in point. Referring to the creation of us/them distinction, it betrays both cognitive and relational elements: for Tilly holds that a boundary operates when distinctive relations exist within each of the two sides of the boundary, distinctive relations exist across the zone between the two sides, and shared understandings of the zone itself exist within each side; hence boundaries form as perceptions and social relations change in tandem (Tilly 2005a, 7–9, Chap. 9; Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 215). Another example is the mechanism/process *identity shift*, referring to “emergence of new collective answers to the questions ‘Who are you?’, ‘Who are we?’, and ‘Who are they?’” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 216). This, too, appears to be an amalgamated mechanism/process because, as Tilly writes, “collective identities always form as combinations of relations with others, representations of those relations, and shared understandings of those relations” (2002, 10 and Chap. 4).

Despite its rough spots, the mechanism/process approach allows Tilly to position himself distinctly with respect to central epistemological debates. For one, he takes a realist stand by suggesting that the explanation must refer to specified occurrences within what is to be explained. Thus, the account of the unfolding of mechanisms/processes is both a description of what happens and an explanation of it—unlike, say, with the covering law approach or with analytical approaches avoiding relative truth claims. This realist stand is buttressed by attributing reality and gravity to relations: “transactions, interactions, social ties, and conversations constitute the central stuff of social life” (Tilly 2002, 72).³ In fact, Tilly maintains that acknowledging the reality and gravity of social

relations smooths out theoretical puzzles, such as the so-called micro–macro problem; for as transactions crystalize into ties and as the latter concatenate into variable structures, relations provide an ontology that holds from micro to macro (Tilly 2002, Chap. 6).

What is more, Tilly takes a stand on where the efficacy of an explanation resides. As he favors explanations appealing to social relations, he rejects those appealing to autonomous social systems (holism) or to individual mental states (phenomenological individualism and methodological individualism) (Tilly 1998, 16–20, 2002, 72–3, 2005a, Chaps. 2 and 3). The preponderance of agency is for him relational work—transactions that are not reducible to intentions, rationalities, or ideas. Such relational agency—not Tilly’s term—does relate to mental states, as they intertwine with transactions. But it relates most distinctly to incremental, unanticipated, and loop effects, including effects from subtly negotiated interaction. Mechanism/processes represent consequential configurations emerging out of manifold relational work. Accordingly, they can be treated as key devices for explanation and comparison.

It can be seen, then, that the reality of relations does not negate the reality of other ontologies. Also real for Tilly are social constructions and social structures. In fact, his career development from structuralism to relationalism has been a response to the general turn towards social constructivism. As he puts it, “structural realism stands as the thesis, social construction as the antithesis—the seductive plumed tapir—and relational realism as the hoped-for synthesis” (2002, 5). His synthetic relational take, while not reducing everything to social relations, argues that various commonly presumed independent ontologies converge in social relations. For him, for example, much about culture resides in relations, as does much about collective identities (Tilly 2005a, Chap. 1).

The next section will illustrate at length how social relations, rather than actors’ accounts or consciousness, provide for Tilly the most adequate basis for causal explanation; it will be seen, for example, that a cultural form such as repertoires of contention is not autonomous but rather embedded in social relations, and must therefore be explained by appealing to social relations. But here it is useful to preview this illustration with a quick reference to one of Tilly’s least “academic” books, *Why* (2006a). This book is a provisional exploration of how people go about giving reasons—reasons ranging from accounts of one’s tardiness for an appointment to accounts of a monumental event such as the attacks on 9/11. Tilly maps out four types of reason-giving—conventions, stories, codes, and technical accounts—but insists that their content varies depending on the relationship between giver and receiver. He argues, in fact, that reason-giving has effects on its relational context just as it is affected by it: effects confirming an existing relation, repairing that relation, claiming a new relation, or denying a relational claim (Tilly 2006a, 15). Reason-giving is therefore relational through and through for Tilly, as are contentious politics phenomena and more.

2 PROCESSES AND TRANSACTIONS IN CONTENTIOUS POLITICS AND BEYOND

2.1 *From Social Movements and Revolutions to Contentious Politics*

Nowhere has Tilly's work left its mark more distinctly than on the study of contentious politics. But, actually, this is an understatement, for it was Tilly's contributions that delineated contentious politics as a coherent field of study to begin with, when it did not exist as such before. This is not to suggest that political contention had not been studied prior to Tilly; obviously, it had been studied copiously and widely. But the sociologists, political scientists, and historians studying political contention had employed a series of compartmentalized perspectives and concerns in their endeavors. The value of Tilly's work is that it coalesces on a program enveloping these areas of scholarship and their most important insight. Rather than reproducing intellectually unjustifiable, though institutionally entrenched, academic disjunctions, it abolishes them. This requires not only the ability to see pass the myriad esoteric debates compartmentalizing the social sciences and history, but also the ability to synthesize the salient theses of these debates through novel conceptual lenses.

One of Tilly's key techniques of substantive analysis follows directly from the requirements of the program of studying contentious politics. The technique uses the ladder of conceptual abstraction in a double move: first move up to a more abstract and novel concept and then move down through an original way. The first move, that is, is to apprehend wide-ranging phenomena through novel and broad categories claiming internal causal coherence. The second move is to break down these categories in nonconventional analytical distinctions aiming to sustain wide-ranging empirical comparison and to thereby develop theory-building. This is not a technique peculiar to Tilly, of course, but he mastered it with path-breaking results. It allowed him not only to reinvent the contours of political and historical sociology but also to chart new ground in how to analyze and compare within these fields.

To redefine the main, overarching subject of inquiry is the imperative point of departure. What is contentious politics, then? Tilly builds his answer on relational premises. "Contentious politics," he writes, "involves interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interests, in which governments appear either as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties" (2008b, 5). Claim making within contentious politics is therefore interactive, and the key feature of the interaction is contention, with other interaction characteristics left open; interactions can therefore have performative as well as verbal characteristics, strategic as well as expressive ones, extensive as well as intensive, and so on. But for Tilly claim making within contentious politics is always collective in addition to interactive: it implies coordinated action in support of the claims. It is obviously political as well, since agents of government are direct or indirect parts of it by definition. As he sums it up, "Contentious politics thus brings together three familiar features of social life: contention, collective action, and politics" (2008b, 5).

If the concept of contentious politics climbs up the ladder of abstraction, whence does it so? What have been the conventional species of which the concept claims to be a genus? The reply includes the following: protest cycles, strike waves, social movements, ethnic conflict, revolutions, insurrections, riots, civil war, and terrorism. These are conventional concepts with numerous respective adherents, research traditions, and discourses. And one could add more concepts, of equal or lesser academic standing, to this list. But while Tilly moves these concepts up the ladder of abstraction to render them “contentious politics,” the resultant broader category makes space also for those in-category forms that remain unlabeled in the literature, even un-delineated. For example, think of the category-defying “Tithe War” in Ireland, a stream of activism in 1831 and 1832 against tithe payments which included such acts as homicide, burning of property, robbery, illegal meetings, illegal notices, and cattle maiming, as well as dealing with repression by the authorities (Tilly 2008b, 171). Indeed, at the end of the day what Tilly’s move towards empirical inclusiveness aims at is not so much the dissolution of conventional academic fissures as the clear-up of the fog that obscures broad comparison. But it is crucial to understand that, far from suggesting the comparison of apples and oranges, Tilly suggests that the various manifestations of contentious politics are comparable to each other precisely because they are similar in an important dimension: the recurring forces generating them.

The program on contentious politics rests on the proposition that a set of primarily social mechanisms/processes generate the entire range of contentious politics phenomena. Tilly was in a position to assert that his wealth of research on various forms of contentious politics and in different historical contexts provides preliminary yet strong support to this proposition. But as a programmatic thesis—a direction for ongoing and future research—the proposition is a cautious one: “it wagers,” Tilly wrote with McAdam and Tarrow, “that we can learn more about all of [the different forms of contention] by comparing their dynamics than by looking at each on its own” (McAdam et al. 2001, 4). Apprehended and labeled, the dynamics of contention are conceptualized as such mechanisms/processes as *diffusion*, *coalition formation*, *co-optation*, *identity shift*, and so on (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, Appendix B). They are to recur in episodes of contentious politics, though any given episode is likely to feature only some of them. Tilly therefore holds that the ways mechanisms/processes combine to produce contentious politics vary and that the progression of scientific explanation of contentious politics must be derived from the account of this variation.

Now, which way to climb down the ladder of abstraction, if not from the beaten paths that would take one back to where one started? Tilly climbs down following different directions that, as we will see, allow him to take various stands on concepts and corresponding denoted phenomena. This varied positioning may in fact lead the careless reader of Tilly to think that the author does not sort out systematically the conventional categories under contentious politics; after all, he does uphold some oft-used categories, such as social

movements and revolutions, but discards other, such as riots and terrorism. Yet he is revealed a consistent theoretician once a distinction made by him is registered. This is the distinction between concepts entailing causal coherence and concepts featuring symbolic coherence.

Concepts entailing causal coherence are the ones denoting phenomena determined by forces which are, more or less, internally pervasive and externally exclusive (2006b, 48). While Tilly does not elaborate on it much, the idea of causal coherence holds whether it is viewed from a positivist angle or not: with positivist lenses, concepts with causal coherence would denote phenomena determined by *sui generis* laws or corresponding to a particular set of necessary and sufficient conditions; with non-positivists lenses, concepts with causal coherence would denote phenomena requiring near-idiography or assumptions leaning towards idiography. As it will be seen, Tilly's brand of epistemology, seeking causal analogies in the form of mechanisms/processes, also lends itself to the idea of causal coherence—hence Tilly is “betting” that “contentious politics” will prove to be a concept entailing causal coherence.⁴

On their part, concepts featuring symbolic coherence are concepts having social careers. That is, among social actors, some putative meaning is attached to these concepts and the use of their labels activates responses (Tilly 2006b, 48, 158, 2008b, 16). Tilly does not go into detail here either, leaving one to wonder how exactly he understands coherence; from the examples he provides, in fact, one may glean that the actors' activated responses need not be consistent in any way or shape. But the point remains that it is the label referring to a concept, more than the phenomena denoted by the concept, that sustains the signification web underpinning (apparent) conceptual existence. It could be added that the two dimensions—causal coherence and symbolic coherence—are independent from each other and so on principle can combine to produce four types of concepts (a concept with both symbolic and causal coherence, a concept with symbolic coherence but not causal coherence, and so on); but of the many typologies Tilly produced, this is not one.

The concept of social movement is one of the conventional concepts with which the thesis of contentious politics must reckon. Tilly maintains that there is no causal coherence characterizing the phenomena denoted by the concept, such that this sort of phenomena could be said to feature certain causal patterns more or less exclusively; in other words, the mechanisms/processes generating social movements are not distinguishable in any meaningful way from those generating, say, revolutions or strike waves. Further, he holds that the concept has been stretched in the literature to the point of jeopardizing its analytical utility. “For many years,” he writes, “I generally avoided the term ‘social movements’ because it sponged up so many different meanings and therefore obscured more than it clarified” (2004a, ix). Nevertheless, he eventually comes around and recommends not to discard the concept but rather to refocus its connotation and thereby save something of its academic utility.

For Tilly, then, a refocused concept of social movements connotes contentious politics with three specific characteristics: a campaign, a repertoire, and

WUNC displays. By “campaign” Tilly means that the collective and coordinated claims featured in a given manifestation of contentious politics are repeated, rather than being a single performance. When he refers to “repertoire,” he means that the collective performances on behalf of the claims draw from pre-existing forms of performances, with room left for selection, variation, and innovation. “WUNC displays”—a term that is a Tilly trademark—refers to displays within collective performances projecting worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment on the part of the claimants (2004a, 3–5, 2008b, 118–122). With this refocused conceptualization—born from a career as a historian—Tilly wants to derive a tool for the delineation of phenomena in history, rather than an analytical tool classifying phenomena according to their causal coherence. So while contentious politics have been as old as societies, social movements are phenomena that can be dated historically; they are particular forms of contentious politics which have appeared in certain places and at certain times in history and which, even though still very much with us presently, in the future may evolve or even disappear. Nevertheless, while entailing no causal coherence, social movement phenomena typically feature symbolic coherence. The fact that they operate on repertoires constituted by pre-existing social movement phenomena suggests as much (Tilly 2008b, 16).

Similar is Tilly’s take on revolutions. Here is another concept that, on the one hand, has delineable historical/empirical referents but, on the other, does not imply that these referents are constituted by particular, exclusive causal patterns. Tilly offers a precise definition of revolution: “a forcible transfer of power over a state in the course of which at least two distinct blocs of contenders make incompatible claims to control the state, and some significant portion of the population subject to the state’s jurisdiction acquiesces to the claims of each bloc” (2006b, 159). In acknowledging the processual nature of revolutions, he also distinguishes between revolutionary situation and revolutionary outcome. The former is an ideal-typical early phase of the contentious episode, characterized by the emergence of claims at state control, the popular support these claims gain, and the failure of the state to suppress the claims; the latter is an ideal-typical subsequent phase, characterized by defections of regime members, acquisition of armed force by revolutionary coalitions, neutralization or defection of the regime’s armed forces, and acquisition of control over the state apparatus by members of the revolutionary coalition (Tilly 2006b, 159–161). Unlike social movements, of course, revolutions are not exclusively modern phenomena; but still, armed with his definition and analytical elaboration, Tilly can proceed to examine history in search for revolutions, semi-revolutions, near-revolutions, and so on.

Tilly’s work on revolutions is rich and long, going back to his first book, *The Vendee* (1964), which studies the counterrevolution in western France in 1793. A review of this line of work is beyond the scope of this chapter; but it is worth underlying the pertinence of the contentious politics program in respect to it: as revolutions and social movements have certain empirical characteristics but no causal coherence, the study of contentious politics allows not only the

comparison between revolutions and social movements but also the tracing of how contention can evolve from one form to the other. It is worth underlying also that the contentious politics program does not rely on the analysis of the symbolic coherence which concepts such as revolutions and social movements possess. The study of symbolic coherence would be possible to pursue, to be sure, and Tilly gives a hint of the possibilities when he remarks on the importance of the French Revolution in providing subsequent aspiring revolutionaries with a model for action (2006b, 158, 1993). But such a study for its own sake is unappealing to Tilly—though of course welcomed if it is part of the causal explanation of contentious politics phenomena.

While Tilly utilizes conceptualizations of social movements and revolutions, it discards other terms that fall under the rubric of contentious politics. Riots and terrorism are two conspicuous ones. These are obviously two utterly politicized terms, used by social actors to control and/or vilify the “rioters” and “terrorists.” They therefore have symbolic coherence of sorts, with “riot” having a particularly prominent social career in eighteenth-century Britain (Tilly 2006b, 48). Tilly does not elaborate on why he eschews the term “riot,” though it seems that he does so on grounds of its political bias (Tilly 2006b, 46–7). With the term “terrorism,” however, he becomes more explicit and nuanced: he rejects it together with the term “terrorist,” but upholds the term “terror.”

Terror is for Tilly a strategy, an “asymmetrical deployment of threats and violence against enemies using means that fall outside the forms of political struggle routinely operating within some current regime” (Tilly 2004b, 5). As such, it is a relation—rather than a propensity or an ideology—with communication at its center. “In addition to whatever harm it inflicts directly,” he writes, “it sends signals—signals that the target is vulnerable, that the perpetrators exist, that the perpetrators have the capacity to strike again” (Tilly 2005c, 22). For Tilly it is also crucial that the strategy of terror is deployed by a variety of actors, including state militaries and paramilitaries, contenders of the state, and even non-political actors such as mafiosi. Obviously, this variety of actors relates to a variety of motives, organizations, and violent means. In fact, Tilly maintains that the political actors who employ terror typically alternate between this strategy and other forms of politics, and those among them who commit their whole lives to terror perform only a small share of all terroristic acts. In light of this, the term “terrorist” becomes inappropriate, since it isolates and analytically privileges one element of a pertinent relational web and thereby reduces the whole of the matter to one of its parts. The term “terrorism” is inappropriate just the same, since it claims causal coherence where there is none to have. In other words, Tilly rejects these terms as they reify actors, the organizations in which they belong, and one facet of their strategic repertoires. The political bias in the use of the label terrorism and in many definitions of the term terrorism may be an additional reason for Tilly to avoid the term—“I ... dislike any definition of terror that excludes actions by armies and governments” (Tilly 2005c, 27). But the main reason is scientific: “terrorism” and its cognate “terrorist” usher in a synecdoche incompatible with sound analysis.

2.2 *Repertoires of Contention*

It is seen so far that, with respect to contentious politics, Tilly discards such value-laden terms as riots and terrorism while recognizes in the concepts revolution and social movements utility restricted to description rather than explanation. But what are the generalizable categories into which he breaks down contentious politics? One such category, key in his work, is repertoires of contention. As noted, repertoires of contention along with campaign and WUNC displays characterize social movements. But any given stream of contentious politics, whether involving social movements or not, draws from finite pre-existing routines of contention, which mean that the category “repertoires of contention” is applicable across the whole contentious politics range. It provides Tilly with an original pathway down the ladder of abstraction.

Tilly draws pivotal distinctions among repertoires of contention. Some of these distinctions converge on a set of three duplets: parochial/cosmopolitan, particular/modular, and bifurcated/autonomous. Repertoires are parochial when adopted by local groupings and concentrate on local targets; conversely, they are cosmopolitan when they operate on a larger scale than the locality. They are particular when they correspond to different forms of action for different groups, situations, and localities; conversely, they are modular when they feature forms of action that are transferred easily across groups, situations, and localities. They are bifurcated when they are direct with respect to nearby objects of claims and indirect with respect to distant objects of claims, in which latter case powerful people mediate; conversely, they are autonomous when free from the mediation of brokers, no matter whether the objects of claims are nearby or distant (Tilly 2006b, 51–4).

These are distinctions pertinent to varied empirical contexts of contentious politics, present or past, but Tilly finds them particularly pertinent to the historical change of repertoires. Drawing from his early-career work on France, his mid-career work on Great Britain, and his broad knowledge of the USA, he is in a position to propose historical generalizations with respect to the evolution of repertoires of contention in the West. Specifically, his painstaking cataloging of contentious events in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Great Britain reveals a clear evolutionary pattern, which data from other settings corroborates. In this pattern, performances evolved from parochial to cosmopolitan, from particular to modular, and from bifurcated to autonomous. For example, a contentious performance described by Tilly took place in 1768 London and involved dock workers and boat men at the river Thames assembling in front of the city’s mansion house and presenting their complaints to the Lord Mayor, who then promised to relay the complaints to the Parliament. This was a performance drawing from parochial, particular, and bifurcated repertoires typical of the time. By the 1830s, Tilly goes on to show, the repertoires already were changing. Indoor meetings with elected officials and audiences were emerging as a common form of performance. Such performances, moreover, often included the signing of petitions and aimed to communicate

directly with centers of power, such as the Parliament. These performances, therefore, drew more and more from cosmopolitan, modular, and autonomous repertoires. Indeed, they signified contentious politics acquiring the form of social movements (Tilly 2008b, 1–8).

However, the question of change in repertoires of contention leads Tilly not only to a historical reply but also to a sociological one, indeed to a relational one. But to understand repertoire change one needs first to understand repertoire uniformity. Here we can quote Tilly at some length:

[We] need further distinction among four possible levels of uniformity: actions, interactions, performances, and repertoires. Conceivably the main regularities could occur at the level of the specific actions, with participants in collective claims learning to cheer, march, smash, shoot, and run away without necessarily putting them into coherent connections with each other. [...] Possibly they learn interactions, so smashing a person differs significantly from smashing a shop window, just as cheering your own group's leader occurs differently from cheering a national hero. Again, participants could learn whole interactive performances such as street marches and infantry skirmishes. Finally, we could imagine learning at the level of entire repertoire, as when social movement participants learn more or less simultaneously to meet, march, picket, pamphlet, and petition, as well as learning which combination of these interactions will produce what effects. (2008b, 17)

Tilly goes on to suggest that each of these levels of uniformity calls for a particular epistemology: psychological processes would account for uniformity at the level of actions; small-scale interactive processes among individuals would account for uniformity at the level of interactions; concatenated processes capturing coordination and shared understanding would account for uniformity at the level of performances; and macro processes capturing extensive coordination, large-scale indoctrination, and group adoption of strategic logics would account for uniformity at the level of repertoires. Learning, Tilly concludes, takes place at all four levels but especially the third one. At that level—the collective level—actions and interactions are also pertinent as they become articulated with each other in the course of performances (Tilly 2008b, 17–18). But the proper understanding of repertoire change also requires acknowledgment of the fact that learning entails a measure of innovation as well as emulation. As Tilly writes, “participants in contentious politics learn how to match performances with local circumstances, to play their own parts within those performances, and to modify performances in the light of their effects. As a result, performances vary and change in partial independence of repertoires” (2008b, 18).

What is more, the question of change leads Tilly to draw another distinction among repertoires of contention. This is the distinction between strong repertoires (available routines that are enacted with some discretion but with small innovations) and weak repertoires (available routines that are enacted loosely and with ample modification) (2008b, 15). His research suggests that what tend to evolve historically are strong repertoires, rather than weak ones. Following this, he offers some tentative generalizations. For example, he points

out that performances involving given actors and issues change little from one round of action to the next, with the earlier actions constraining the later ones. He suggests also that performances become more modular the more connected the histories of actors outside the contention are (2008b, 60).

Additionally, the distinction between strong and weak repertoires of contention has bearing on another dimension of contention: the regime of rule. Thus, Tilly suggests that strong repertoires tend to be featured in regimes of rule that operate in routine fashion, while weaker repertoires in more unpredictable regimes (2006b, 43, 2008b, 15). But, in fact, Tilly's examination of the intersection of regimes and repertoires goes far beyond this suggestion. For him to look at regimes of rule is to look at contentious politics from a top-down perspective, just as to look at repertoires of contention is to look at contentious politics from a bottom-up perspective. He therefore draws distinctions among regimes to accompany his distinctions among repertoires. These distinctions pivot on two dimensions of regimes: more/less governmental capacity and more/less democracy. In general, he maintains that the location of a regime in the space of these dimensions affects how the regime's rulers generate and control contentious politics, with the historical trajectory of the regime in this space also affecting the regime's stand. This approach allows Tilly to develop more nuanced propositions that bring together such dynamic elements as changes in the structures of political opportunity and in ruler-citizen bargaining (Tilly 2006b, 21–2). It can be said, then, that as Tilly finds in the concept repertoires of contention one pathway down the ladder of abstraction, he finds in the concept of regime of rule another.

Tilly's contributions to the topic of repertoires of contention extend also to the realm of political violence, and it has been noted already that he does not consider phenomena of political violence to be generated by forces distinct from those generating contentious politics at large. But he also steps out of the confines of the contentious politics program—broad though they are—to examine violence even more generally. He suggests that the forces generating phenomena of collective violence, though not being exclusive, do exhibit a measure of internal pervasiveness. He therefore argues that mechanisms/processes from the same pool account for a broad range of collective violence phenomena. As one might guess, he goes on to map the broad range of such phenomena not via established categories, but via another original two-by-two matrix.

Accordingly, Tilly locates collective violence in a space determined, on the one hand, by the extent of coordination among violent actors and, on the other, by the salience of short-run damage. Operationalizing these dimensions is not his goal; creating new categories is. Specifically, his path down the ladder of conceptual abstraction leads him to six new categories: “violent rituals,” “coordinated destruction,” “opportunism,” and “brawls” are categories characterized by high levels of salience of short-run damage and by decreasing levels—as we move from “violent rituals” to “brawls”—of coordination among violent actors; “broken negotiations” and “scattered attacks” are categories characterized by low levels of salience of short-term damage, with the latter

characterized also by low levels of coordination among violent actors and the former by relatively higher levels. To illustrate sweepingly following Tilly, lynchings and gang rivalries are examples of violent rituals, war and collective self-immolation are examples of coordinated destruction, looting and revenge killing are examples of opportunism, street and bar fights are examples of brawls, sabotage and arson are examples of scattered attacks, and government repression and protection rackets are examples of broken negotiations (Tilly 2003, 14–15). For that matter, “the use of terror ranks relatively high in the coordination among violent actors and the salience of short-run damage; in that regard it resembles ... violent rituals and coordinated destruction while differing from broken negotiations, scattered attack, opportunism, brawls and individual aggression” (Tilly 2005c, 25).

As in contentious politics, some mechanisms/processes feature prominently in the generation of collective violence. Boundary activation and polarization, for instance, have a prominent role to play in a range of collective violence phenomena, from hooliganism to genocide. At the same time, however, the influence of mechanisms/processes is not necessarily the same across the board. For example, in the space where collective violence is highly coordinated, brokerage and the activation of us/them boundaries loom large, so much so that they may override pre-existing social relations among participants; by the same token, pre-existing social relations have higher relevance when collective violence operates at low levels of coordination (Tilly 2003, 17). Further, it is important that streams of violent events often start out in one location of the coordination-damage matrix and end up in another. Discovering the mechanisms/processes facilitating such changes in location can therefore be illuminating. For example, Tilly maintains that object shift—the mechanism/process referring to alteration in relations between claimants and objects of their claims—is often pivotal. For, as he writes, “object shift often occurs in the short run, during the strategic interaction of contention; battling gangs unite against the police, the intervention of an official in a market conflict diverts customers’ attacks to him, a besieged tax clerk calls in the mayor. Of course such shifts commonly alter the actors and the paired identities they deploy, but they likewise affect the forms of collective claim making that are available, appropriate, and likely to be effective” (2003, 198).

2.3 *Trust, Rule, and Inequality*

Tilly’s work revolving around contentious politics occasionally leaves orbit. This is the case with his work on trust and rule, democratization and de-democratization, and durable inequality. Here we have intellectual ventures transcending the contentious politics program, though retaining affinity with many of the program’s themes. Among the constants remain relationalism and emergentism.

To begin with, trust is for Tilly relational. It is, he writes, “a property of interpersonal relations in which people [take] risks at each other’s failure or betrayal” (2005b, xii). Thus, he chooses to conceptualize trust not as a disposition,

as many scholars do, but as a property of relations the same way that culture and identity are so for him. In fact, trust networks, rather than trust in general, is for Tilly the central concept. Trust networks are a special subset of social networks; what is particular about them is that the people belonging in them carry on long-term enterprises—e.g. mutual aid associations, long-distance trade, or underground religion—and can claim from each other attention or aid based on the commitments entailed in those enterprises (Tilly 2005b, 4). Put more formally, trust networks entail “ramified interpersonal connections, consisting mainly of strong ties, within which people set valued, consequential, long-term resources and enterprises at risk to the malfeasance, mistakes, or failures of others” (Tilly 2005b, 12).

Trust networks often intersect with public politics, and this intersection is of particular concern to Tilly. He makes a rough yet crucial distinction on this account: the relation between trust networks and public politics ranges on an integration–segregation dimension, such that a trust network integrated in public politics possesses a political role while a segregated one does not. Negotiated connections of various forms can be found on the integration–segregation continuum. Trust networks adopt, therefore, various collective strategies in order to protect the network and to further its commitments. For example, they may deem it expedient to minimize compliance and visibility vis-à-vis their political environment, in which case they may seek to feign conformity by adopting some available public identity (a strategy Tilly calls dissimulation) or they may seek to acquire protection by intermediary authorities (a strategy Tilly calls clientage) (Tilly 2005b, 33–4).

Such strategies, however, depend not only on the trust network but also on the nature of the existing public politics. Here Tilly recognizes that the means of connection between trust networks and public politics vary. He therefore proposes a rough typology through which the means of connection can be characterized by: (1) coercion, whereby coercive organizations such as prisons, armed forces, and sanction regimes predominate; (2) commitment, whereby organizations promoting two-way (or multiple-way) considerations predominate, such as organizations underpinning trading ties or communities of taste; and in-between these two predicaments (3) capital, whereby organizations pertaining to the command of tangible resources predominate (2005b, 30–2). Various systems, such as theocracies, democracies, and patronage systems, vary along coercion, commitment, and capital; accordingly, they vary also on the way that, and extent to which they incorporate trust networks into public politics. Offering a historical illustration, Tilly notes that “high-integration twentieth- and twenty-first-century regimes have commonly incorporated trust networks into their systems of rule through welfare entitlements, military service and veterans’ benefits, taxation, schools, certified religious congregations, service-providing political parties, and legally established collaborative institutions such as labor unions” (2005b, 55).

In such historical developments, trust networks may change. As Tilly explains, relevant change can take various forms, such as, for example, when the boundary between the trust network and its political environment loses

sharpness (Tilly 2005b, 60). But it is also true that the integration of trust networks in public politics transforms public politics itself. For Tilly, in fact, such integration is constitutive of the very process of democratization, by which he means the movement towards broader, more equal, more protected, and more binding consultation within the relationships between the state and its citizens (2007, 13–4). He adds, however, that two further processes come into play to constitute democratization: the insulation of public politics from categorical inequality and the reduction of autonomous power clusters. The first of them regards the movement whereby interactions operating on, and reproducing categorical inequalities become disarticulated from political processes (Tilly 2007, 111–20); the second regards the movement whereby entities within or out of the state decrease or completely lose their independent powers, be those powers coercive or otherwise (Tilly 2007, 137–43).

Like with the contentious politics program, therefore, Tilly's approach to democratization is emergentist. He holds that democratization emerges out of these three types of processes and that each of them emerges out of mechanisms which may be plural but worthy of study. Accordingly, his goal is to examine not only the interplay among these processes, but also the forces precipitating these processes. For example, in examining the insulation of public politics from categorical inequality in the context of democratization in South Africa, he argues that in the last two decades of apartheid rule two mechanisms generated through the antiapartheid struggle were particularly important: a mechanism producing sustained popular resistance against the direct inscription of racial categories into politics and a mechanism forging powerful coalitions across racial and ethnic categories. More generally, he suggests that such mechanisms/processes as *the dissolution of state controls that support current relations among social categories, the equalization of assets and/or other well-being across categories within the population at large, and the reduction of private controlled armed forces* can all advance insulation of public politics from categorical inequality (Tilly 2007, 106–32).

Tilly's processual notion of democracy corrects various static notions of democracy, be they substantive, procedural, or constitutional (Tilly 2007, 7–11). Crucially, it also jettisons any suggestion of determinism or even necessarily strong path-dependency: democratization is not an ever-advancing process but rather may, as it has been the case in many settings, change its course. The process whereby the relations between state and citizens move towards broader, more equal, more protected, and more binding consultation may therefore slow down, stop, or reverse. And it can do those things wholesale or piecemeal—piecemeal as, say, when binding consultation becomes less equal but remains as protected as before. Evidence of non-linear democratization processes—i.e. processes alternating between democratization and de-democratization—can be found in modern western European history, as well as elsewhere. Thus, for example, Tilly presents data showing discontinuous advancements of suffrage—an indicator of how and how much a state consults its citizens—for many European states, with the continuous application of manhood suffrage shown to be the exception (2007, 59–66).

Tilly's attention to the insulation of categorical inequality from public politics betrays his broader concern with categorical inequality. Indeed, equipped once again with his emergentist and conceptually fresh outlook, Tilly makes a far-reaching foray on the topic of social inequality—an area as central to sociology as democracy is to political science. Conceptually, Tilly chooses to build on the idea of unequal categories, rather than on continua of inequality, such as income differentials (the normal focus in sociology). His approach remains nevertheless relational since, as he writes, these categories consist “of asymmetrical relations across a socially recognized (and usually incomplete) dividing line between interpersonal networks;” inequality emerges from these networks most particularly when one network is excluded from recourses controlled by another (1998, 8). This perspective allows him to include a variety of standard categories in his analysis, categories such as ones based on religion, gender, citizenship, ethnicity, and so on. It allows him, too, to develop the idea that categorical inequality becomes durable when the categories are articulated in social organizational forms and the stake they carry.

True to his emergentist perspective, Tilly holds that categorical inequality emerges out of the operation of certain mechanisms. He singles out two mechanisms as being crucial. The first he calls *exploitation*, a mechanism “which operates when powerful, connected people command resources from which they draw significantly increased returns by coordinating the effort of outsiders whom they exclude from the full value added by that effort”; the second he calls *opportunity hoarding*, a mechanism “which operates when members of a categorically bounded network acquire access to a recourse that is valuable, renewable, subject to monopoly, supportive of network activities, and enhanced by the network's modus operandi” (Tilly 1998, 10). Tilly's definition of the exploitation mechanism alludes not only to Marx but also to Weber, since it marries the idea of exploitation with the Weberian idea of social closure. This Weberian idea is also present in the conceptualization of the second mechanism, while Tilly allows that this mechanism operates when relatively powerless people, not just the powerful, can hoard opportunities, which they can do under certain conditions (e.g. the acquiescence of the powerful). While Tilly holds these two mechanisms to be crucial in generating durable inequality, he adds that they tend to be reinforced by two more mechanisms. The first of them, which he calls *emulation*, refers to “the copying of established organizational models and/or the transplanting of existing social relations from one setting to another”; the second, which he calls *adaptation*, refers to “the elaboration of daily routines ... on the basis of categorically unequal structures” (Tilly 1998, 10).

Tilly's theory is widely applicable, from inequality entailed in nationalism and chain migration to that entailed in social movements and social mobility. It is also readily apropos work under capitalism. Consider, for example, labor markets under capitalism, which, as Tilly argues, tend to feature not only barriers separating industries and firms but also broader dynamics of recruitment segregation (Tilly 1998, 236–40; Tilly and Tilly 1998). While recruitment may relate to many factors and have ramified consequences, Tilly holds that it crucially relates to how forms of categorical inequality external to a firm (e.g. gender) match

forms internal to the firm (e.g. job positions). And the matching of interior and exterior categories, Tilly argues, is explicable by dynamics that amount to exploitation and opportunity hoarding and potentially also to emulation and adaptation. But it is worth underscoring that Tilly's theory allows that each of these mechanisms emerges from constitutive mechanisms which vary across settings. Just like democratization, then, durable inequality emerges out of specific processes which themselves emerge out of various constitutive processes.

3 CONCLUSION

Tilly was not interested in theorizing the vexing connection between academia and politics, sociology and power. He channeled his incredible energy towards the analysis of politics without taking normative positions. Yet it should be evident from reading this chapter that his penetrating analyses prepare the ground for political reflection. This is not by accident, as he well recognized the stakes. As a reminder of this, let us close this chapter by quoting him on the topic of citizenship:

[If] my reading of European history is right, the frequent founding of citizenship by means of forceful, exploitative, often vicious forms of exclusion does not mean that every new version of citizenship must build on us-them ethnicity. Exclusion will continue in the sense that so long as public authorities that deliver benefits exist, the authorities or their constituencies will draw distinctions between those who have rights to those benefits and obligations to back them, on one side, and those who lack the relevant rights and obligations, on the other. Exclusive communities of fate, yes. Exclusive communities of hate, not necessarily. (2005a, 184)

NOTES

1. At the level of ontology, the definition of mechanism logically covers also process. But mechanism and process may differ variously at the level of epistemology. For a discussion, see Demetriou (2012).
2. Tilly marks out also environmental mechanisms/processes, referring to alterations external to the events under analysis but with repercussion in them; an example is recourse depletion. In the final analysis, however, these mechanisms/process are derivative of relational ones (McAdam et al. 2001, 25–7).
3. Tilly avoids elaborate discussions on ontology, steering away, as he once told me, from philosophy. For a more philosophical discussion of Tilly's realism, see Demetriou (2009); for a discussion of Tilly's use of "analytical formalisms," devices standing in some tension to realism, see Krinsky and Mische (2013) as well as Tilly (2008a, Chap. 3).
4. The proposition that the mechanisms/processes affecting contentious politics phenomena are exclusive to such phenomena may not hold under close scrutiny. But Tilly's general epistemological attitude does not insist on sharp distinctions, and so the adherents to his approach could hold that these mechanisms/processes may well appear in non-contentious politics phenomena but cluster and predominate in contentious politics phenomena.

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Mann and Relational Sociology

Tõnis Saarts and Peeter Selg

I INTRODUCTION

Although Mann has never considered himself a relational sociologist, other scholars have recognized seeds of relationalism in his works. Thus, Emirbayer (1997, p. 295) sees it in Mann's view of societies as overlapping and intersecting socio-spatial networks of power. Heiskala (2016, p. 31) indicates that Mann's framework can be located between resource theoretical and relational approaches to power, and considers the option of enriching Mann's project through setting the stage for a dialogue between him and Michel Foucault, a thinker who is probably *the* most influential among those who have explicitly underlined the need to be attentive to "the strictly relational character of power relationships" (Foucault 1978, p. 95). Similarly, both Dépelteau (2008, p. 52) and Selg (2016b, p. 198) have included Mann among the camp of thinkers who have taken important steps towards "deep" relational thinking, or more. Nevertheless, there have not been any systematic treatments of Mann's work from the viewpoint of relational sociology. This is exactly the gap we set out to fill in the current chapter. However, given our space limitations, we have to restrict our task to Mann's work on power as it unfolds in his four-volume *The Sources of Social Power*, since this is probably the most lasting of his achievements.¹ Two edited volumes of more than 700 pages in total have been dedicated to this work alone (Hall and Schroeder 2006; Schroeder 2016a). Comprehensive overviews of it abound. Here our intention is not to compete with these writings on Mann's magnum opus, but to engage the reader with the storyline of this work, which is anything but abstract theorizing, but

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rather an empirical masterpiece written in accordance with the best traditions of historical sociology. We will come to Mann's conceptual framework after a brief introduction of his major topics in the four volumes.

Volume 1 (Mann 1986) is titled "A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D 1760." The volume starts with the story of the emergence of the human civilization, the first states and empires (in the Fertile Crescent region). Mann analyses the ascendancy of the Greek multi-actor civilization and regards the Roman Empire as the most advanced among the ancient empires in combining skilfully all sources of social power. He also examines the rise of Christianity and the transformation of the ideological power relations arising from it. Mann provides a compelling analysis of the birth of the medieval Western civilization that had a "cell-like" social structure which turned out to be one source of the European dynamism in the later centuries. In the last chapters of the volume Mann pays a lot of attention to the evolution of the modern states, while his major focus is on the developments in the medieval and early modern England and North Western Europe in general.

Volume 2 (1993) titled "The Rise of Classes and Nation-states, 1760–1914" analyses the Industrial Revolution, the French and American revolutions, and the emergence of modern nation states and social classes—all the formative processes that profoundly transformed the existing power relations. Mann treats the rise of class politics and that of nation-states as interlinked processes that produced very different outcomes for the five countries (France, Britain, Germany, Austria-Hungary and the USA) analysed in depth in the volume.

Volume 3 (Mann 2012) is titled "Global Empires and Revolution, 1890–1945". At the turn of the nineteenth century the European colonial empires encompassed all the continents of the world and their impact was so pervasive that for capturing it Mann brings in the concept of "globalization". Unlike in Volume 2, in Volume 3 Mann also concentrates on the non-Western powers, namely Russia and Japan whose ascendancy had a huge impact on the power relations in the twentieth century. Mann analyses the rise of two transcendent ideologies, fascism and communism, in the first half of the twentieth century and outlines a blueprint of the theory of revolutions and their causes. He also focuses on the class relations and the class politics before and after the Great Depression, both in Europe and in the USA, tracing the roots of the modern welfare state which was born out of the lib-lab (liberal-labour) consensus at that time.

Volume 4 (Mann 2013) has the shortest subtitle, "Globalization, 1945–2011", and it is the volume in which Mann's socio-democratic and liberal political views find the clearest expression, as he analyses very contemporary issues such as environmentalism and climate change, the rise and demise of neoliberalism, the causes of the Great Neoliberal Recession, and so on. Nevertheless, the volume is predominately focused on the power relations in the post-war globalized world, in which the leading power has been the USA. Mann analyses the ways in which all sources of power have helped to maintain American hegemony. Far from predicting the rapid demise of the

American power, he just points out how incoherent the American Empire has been in its nature. However, Mann does not predict China's rise to replace the USA in the near future and points to many internal contradictions in modern Chinese society as well. Concerning Mann's study on the USA he analyses all the formative events in American history since 1945: the rise of the civil rights movement, class relations and the welfare state, Reagan's reforms, the recent Great Recession and so on. He demonstrates how various actors and social groups combined different power recourses and gained some advantage over their political opponents in these complicated political processes. Mann finishes his "magnum opus" with a smart but grim prediction that one of the greatest challenges in the twenty-first century will be environmental problems and when confronting them we will have to undo all the greatest achievements in the twentieth century such as capitalism, nation states and individual liberties.

This is, very briefly, the storyline of Mann's work on the history of power over the last 5000 years. Although organically embedded in this vast empirical material, Mann's conceptual framework can still be analysed separately and compared to the major streams of relational sociology.

Since Emirbayer's (1997) "Manifesto for a relational sociology" the latter term is reserved for conceptual logic that has later also been termed "deep" relational thinking (Dépelteau 2013), "radical relationalism" (Powell 2013) and "Continental relationalism" (Selg 2016a). According to the proponents of this position (see also Powell and Dépelteau 2013; Dépelteau and Powell 2013; Dépelteau 2008) sociological analysis should treat social actors and individuals not as isolated from each other, but as interdependent, and presume that through dynamic relations the identities, practices, values, beliefs and so on of the social actors are constantly redefined. To put it briefly, neither individuals nor social phenomena can be understood apart from the dynamic relations they are embedded in, and through which, in turn, they are constantly transformed and reconstituted. The relational sociologists also argue that individuals are not "driven only or even mostly by internal properties, or that social phenomena are 'social things,' meaning external and constraining or enabling forces that impose themselves on individual and collective actors" (Dépelteau and Powell 2013, p. xv). Therefore, relational sociologists attempt to overcome structure-agency dualism, because they see both individuals and larger social formations (institutions, collectives, systems, etc.) as embedded in the same relational order in which they constantly reconstitute each other (Powell and Dépelteau 2013). As Powell and Dépelteau (*ibid.*, p. 3) put it: "Social formations (structures, systems, discourses, etc.) are nothing other than the relations among interdependent human beings."

When considering Mann's approach to power, some elements catch one's eye that might strike one as "relational" in the above sense. His concept of *diffuse power*, that spreads in spontaneous, unconscious and decentred manner (Mann 2012, pp. 5–6; see also Mann 1986, p. 8, 1993, p. 6) seems to be close to the relational approach to power (see Selg 2016b; Chap. 27 in this volume), because given its characterization in Mann, it probably assumes

relations and communication between different power actors through which the identities of actors may be transformed. The concept of *collective power* that is “secured jointly through cooperation with others” (Mann 2012, pp. 5–6) also indicates that there must be some relations between different actors that may change their own nature and identities or the nature of power they exercise. His insistence that there “is no one master concept or basic unit of ‘society’” or his entertaining of adopting “an odd position for a sociologist” to “abolish the concept of ‘society’ altogether” (Mann 1986, p. 2). And finally, because Mann is focused on the historical processes and long-term social transformation, it certainly corresponds to the canons of relational sociology that stress the need to study social *processes*, rather than just take snapshots of social reality (Dépelteau 2008, 2013; Powell 2013).

True, Mann never explicitly suggests that relations are the most essential elements that constitute power and power networks in societies. Yet, on the other hand, he talks about “power relations” quite a lot and at the more fundamental level he seems to accept that the dynamic relations between individuals themselves, and particularly between individuals and social structures/institutions, transform the power relations in society. This, in turn, could also transform the identities and perceptions of the social actors involved in the power relations. Hence, there are some seeds of relational approach in his framework of power. But in what sense more specifically? The tradition of distinguishing between self-actional, inter-actional or trans-actional approaches to power helps us to locate his position at least as far as two large traditions of “relationalism” are considered. We will untangle these notions below. However, before that we will engage ourselves with Mann’s conceptual toolbox as it is presented in his own terms.

2 MANN’S APPROACH TO SOCIAL POWER

Mann distinguishes between four different types of power: (1) ideological, (2) economic, (3) military and (4) political power. The approach is often referred to as the “IEMP model” of power.

Ideological power “derives from the human need to find ultimate meaning of life, to share norms and values, and to participate in aesthetic and ritual practices with others” (Mann 2012, p. 6; cf. Mann 1986, pp. 22–23, 1993, p. 7). According to Mann both religion and secular ideologies (liberalism, nationalism, etc.) are major manifestations of ideological power. Mann distinguishes between transcendent and immanent ideologies. *Transcendent* ideologies are the most ambitious and permeate through the existing institutions, attracting converts from different power networks and creating their own networks. New religious cults, world religions, but also fascism, communism and radical environmental ideologies belong to this class of ideologies. *Immanent* ideologies strengthen the solidarity in the existing power networks. In his later volumes Mann also talks about “institutionalized ideologies,” which are hidden inside the institutions and underpin many norms and values that are taken

for granted in particular societies (e.g. patriarchy in modern societies). Mann prefers the term “ideological power” to “cultural power” but considers culture (and science) to be a part of the ideological power networks.

Economic power “derives from the human need to extract, transform, distribute, and consume the produce of nature” (Mann 2012, p. 9; cf. Mann 1986, p. 25, 1993, p. 7). Economic relations encompass mobilization of labour, circuits of capital, trade and production chains—thus, economic power is related to both markets and production. However, Mann approaches economic power more widely than the neo-classical and purely economy-centred theories and concentrates also on the questions of how economic power reproduces or transforms social relations, particularly the class relations. Mann pays a lot of attention to economic power in his volumes, because the evolution of capitalism and class relations comprise the major focus of his research since Volume 2.

Military power is defined by Mann as “the social organization of concentrated and lethal violence”. “Concentration” means mobilized and forced; “lethal” means deadly” (Mann 2012, p. 11; cf. Mann 1986, p. 26, 1993, pp. 8–9). Although Mann sees military power as being tightly connected with political power he considers it still an autonomous form of power. Mann argues that military power is less rule-bound than other forms of power.

Political power “is the centralized and territorial regulation of social life. The basic function of government is the provision of order over the realm” (Mann 2012, p. 12; cf. Mann 1986, pp. 26–27, 1993, p. 9). Political power networks “are intensively, routinely regulated and coordinated in a centralized and territorial fashion” (ibid., pp. 12–13; cf. Mann 1986, pp. 26–27). Territoriality is a hallmark of political power, and this makes it distinct from other sources of power. Political power can be either territory-centred, or more extensive, encompassing a geopolitical dimension. According to Mann the most powerful instrument of political power, throughout the human history, has been the state. That is why Mann is so focused on the evolution of the state and the state-like structures (e.g. empires). He distinguishes between the despotic and the infrastructural powers of the state. *Despotic* power is based on the ability of the state elites to make arbitrary decisions without consulting with the representatives of the civil society. *Infrastructural* power allows the state to penetrate society and logistically implement the decisions. Infrastructural power enables the state to diffuse the power through society, while despotic power is a power “over society”. The modern nation-states can use both despotic and infrastructural powers and can sometimes combine them (Mann 2012, p. 13).

Mann (ibid., pp. 5–6; see also Mann 1986, pp. 6–10, 1993, pp. 6–7) further distinguishes between three modalities of those different types of power. First, he makes the distinction between *distributive power* that is exercised over others, and *collective power* that is “secured jointly through cooperation with others” (Mann 2012, pp. 5–6). According to him, actual power relations require both. Second, Mann differentiates between (1) *authoritative power*, which

involves commands by individual or collective actors and assumes the conscious obedience by subordinates, and (2) *diffuse power* that is a subtler form of power and rather spreads in a relatively spontaneous, unconscious and decentred manner. Political and military power can be more associated with the authoritative modality of power, while economic and especially ideological power tend to be more diffuse. Third, power can be extensive or intensive. *Extensive* power encompasses a large number of people or territories, whereas *intensive* power mobilizes high level of commitment from participants. Again, one rarely encounters the pure modalities of power in real life. Often authoritative power is combined with diffuse power, extensive power with intensive power, in order to enhance the power resources of specific institutions, social actors or individuals.

The framework proposed by Mann should never be treated as an abstract *grand theory*, but it is rather a *middle-range* theory (Heiskala 2016). Mann suggests, that the four types of power form not a social system in its own right, but they are rather “an analytical point of entry for dealing with messy real societies” (Mann 2012, p. 16). All of these four types of power in the IEMP model could be viewed as ideal types; they are never represented in their pure forms, they occur in impure mixtures (ibid., p. 15). According to Mann the four power sources have a degree of autonomy from each other, while they generate “overlapping, intersecting networks of relations with different socio-spatial boundaries and temporal dynamics” and “their interrelations produce unanticipated, emergent consequences for power actors” (Mann 2012, p. 15; cf. Mann 1986, pp. 28–30, 1993, pp. 9–10). Mann’s major goal in his four volumes is to analyse how these four power sources have been in constant interplay with each other throughout the human history while creating new and unanticipated combinations. He analyses how the manifestations of the four power sources themselves have transformed during the course of history and how these different forms of power and their combinations have influenced various social actors and institutions/organizations, and vice versa.

3 MANN’S CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: SOME CRITICISMS

Before exploring the issue of how Mann’s conceptual framework relates to relational sociology, it is perhaps fruitful to consider some criticisms of Mann’s work. We will not go through all the critical reviews put forward by various authors gathered in the volumes dedicated to Mann’s approach (see Hall and Schroeder 2006; Schroeder 2016a), but present some essential critical remarks that will enable us to discuss Mann’s theory from the perspective of relational sociology.

First, while Mann claims that he sees four power sources as being entangled in overlapping and intersecting networks, one could assume a very network-based analysis of power, which, in turn, could also be relational. As Emirbayer (1997) notes, one way to implement the empirical potential of relational sociology is to concentrate on the analysis of social networks and power networks.

However, this is somewhat deceptive, because for Mann power networks rather serve as a general concept or even a metaphor for illustrating the idea that power relations are not just isolated streams or entities, and that there is a high interconnectedness and constant interplay between different power actors and the types of power. He has never engaged in the analysis of networks of the kind the theorists of social network analysis (SNA) conduct. Neither does Mann distinguish between nodes, ties and flows within power networks or other important concepts essential for the network analysts. Interestingly, few scholars have pointed out how inadequately Mann conceptualizes *networks* both in his theoretical and empirical studies. Briefly, the mere fact that Mann brings up the notion of “network”, does not make him a relational sociologist *per se*.

Second, while reading Mann’s *The Sources of Social Power* one could be struck by how empirical Mann’s analysis really is. Mann is indeed a great storyteller—analytical and engaging in the sense of classical historical sociology. With a grand sweep he covers an astonishing variety of topics, tells about very different societies and eras, makes novel and compelling generalizations about the course of human history, especially about the rise and nature of the Western civilization. While one seeks for an analytical and accessible account on global history, or likes to explore the major formative processes that have shaped the human societies up to present, we really recommend reading Mann. Almost no other historical sociologist at the present can match Mann’s sweep and encyclopaedic knowledge. However, for those who hope to find elaborated theoretical passages and grand philosophical ideas, Mann’s volumes would be a disappointment. Except for the introductory chapter of Volume 1 where there is an almost 40-page treatment of the conceptual framework (and the introductory chapters for the subsequent volumes where there are a few pages dedicated to the recollection of this framework) there are almost no theoretical reflections, although, according to Schroeder (2016b, p. 1), Mann “is now working on a fifth volume where he will reflect on his project”. Furthermore, while carefully reading his volumes one can find that Mann is surprisingly unsystematic in applying his theoretical models to the historical empirical material. He only occasionally refers to his theoretical concepts when analysing particular socio-historical processes, cases and eras. Rather, he simply puts forward an analytical historical narrative on a given subject, not a systematic theoretically informed sociological analysis. Nevertheless, the theory and the empirical material are slightly more tightly knit in Volume 1 than in the subsequent volumes (particularly in Volume 4 where the connections between the theoretical accounts and the empirical analyses are very loose).

Mann’s unwillingness to focus on theorizing has not remained unnoticed by other scholars. As Heiskala (2016, p. 29) puts it: “Even if Mann has done almost all that can be done to downplay the status of theoretical vocabulary, he actually has quite an extensive toolbox of theoretical concepts.” Smith (2016, pp. 43–45) outspokenly calls him “a dedicated empiricist”.

On the one hand, it makes it easier to approach Mann's framework of power in view of relational sociology, because there are many good empirical examples in his writings that allow us to illustrate the major points we intend to make in the following analysis. Yet, on the other hand, it will make our task even more complicated, because the level of abstraction in his theory and its elaborateness is not sufficient for providing a very detailed and convincing analysis. Rather we will propose just one possible interpretation of Mann as a relational sociologist, while not denying that there could be alternative interpretations. For analysing Mann's oeuvre from this perspective, we use the vocabulary of *self-action*, *inter-action* and *trans-action*—originating from the classical work of Dewey and Bently (1949)—that has been applied in the metatheoretical reflections for distinguishing the specificity of “substantialist” and “relational” approaches in the social sciences (see Emirbayer 1997, pp. 282–291; Dépelteau 2008, pp. 59–64, 2013, pp. 166–171, 177–183; Selg 2016a, b). Here we only extract very briefly the gist of these works.

4 FROM SUBSTANTIALISM TO RELATIONAL THINKING: SELF-, INTER- AND TRANS-ACTION

Conceptualizing social relations as *self-actions* means that the social entities (structures or actors) are acting under their own powers. They generate their own power resources and the exercise of power by actor A is not dependent on reactions or resistance by actor B, upon which the power is exercised. Self-action is expressed not only through individuals but also through social structures and institutions. The structuralist theories often see various self-substituent “social structures”, “social systems” or collective actors (like cultures, nations and social groups) as the exclusive source of action in human societies. While analysing power from the self-actionalist perspective, one has to concentrate on A's not on B's, because B's are not free to make choices on their own and are rather manipulated or deceived by A's.

Inter-action refers to relationships in which “entities no longer generate their own action, but the relevant action takes place among the entities themselves” (Emirbayer 1997, pp. 285). However, similarly to self-actionalism, the nature and essence of the entities are presumed to ‘remain fixed and unchanging throughout such interaction, each independent of the existence of the others’ (Emirbayer 1997, pp. 285–286). Furthermore, not the entities, but their attributes do the inter-action and thus “create outcomes, themselves measurable as attributes of the fixed entities” (Abbott 1988, p. 170). Methodologically this approach often takes the form of the “variable-centered approach”, which is still prevalent in contemporary sociology (Emirbayer 1997, p. 286; Selg 2016a, b).

The *trans-actional* or “deep” relational perspective (Dépelteau 2013) assumes that there are no entities or actors with fixed attributes or identities which are separate from each other, but “units involved in a transaction derive their

meaning, significance, and identity from the (changing) functional roles they play within that transaction” (Emirbayer 1997, p. 287). There are no discrete A’s or B’s (individuals, structures, etc.) or even actions, since “the action^A is the action^A only because it is interconnected to the action^B, and vice versa” (Dépelteau 2008, p. 60; Selg 2016b, p. 188). Trans-actional approach “sees relations between terms or units as pre-eminently dynamic in nature, as unfolding, on-going processes rather than as static ties among inert substances” (Emirbayer 1997, p. 289). Briefly, entities or actors assume their distinct attributes/identities only due to the mutually constituting dynamic relationship they have with each other. They have no identity outside these relationships, and the attributes and identities they have are never fixed but constantly in flux due to this ever-changing character of the relationship. Or as Dépelteau (2008, p. 65) puts it: “The notion of trans-action implies that the production of the world is not based on free will and self-action. The principle of trans-action is founded on the idea that the production of the social world happens through social relations and in a physical environment.” Transactional perspective sees social relations as a process or a flow in which it makes no sense to make an ontological separation between A’s and B’s. The social relations between A and B are actually always presumed to be parts of wider networks in which the “third parties” (the C’s, D’s, E’s, etc.) have a constitutive role as well (Selg 2016b, p. 195). Social relations are dynamic, constantly unfolding processes, which constitute the very attributes and identities of the actors/entities involved and these entities and identities emerge only in the context of these relations, they are never pre-given.

5 MANN AND RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY

In order to examine the question of whether Mann considers human relations and power relations in mostly self-actional, inter-actional or trans-actional terms, we present our version of the general theoretical model of how power might operate in human societies according to his *The Sources of Social Power* (see Fig. 16.1).

Let us start with the bottom section of the figure. One can see different social actors and various types of relations between them. All the social actors depicted are collective (rather than individual) human actors and institutions/structures (they could be the working class, capitalists, feudal lords, liberal political parties, administrations of presidents, labour unions, monarchs, military elites, etc.). Mann rarely talks about single individuals or analyses power relations at the micro level. It is the major reason why the title of his book refers to “social power” not just to “power” or to “individual power”.

The relations between different actors, according to Mann, could be primarily either what we delineated above as self-actions or inter-actions. We will further explore that point in the closing paragraphs of the sub-section.

When moving upwards along the figure, one can see that social actors and relations between them can affect four types of powers (IEMP) separately or influence the unique combinations/intersections that emerge between them.

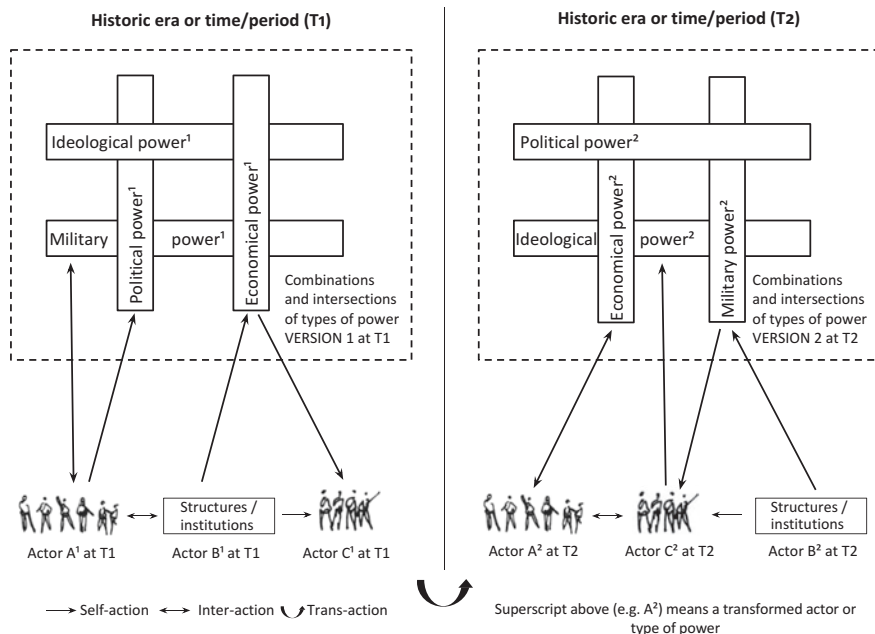


Fig. 16.1 Mann’s approach to power: an interpretation from the perspective of relational sociology
 Source: authors’ own

The relations between the social actors and the forms of power are more difficult to specify: on the one hand, Mann often assumes (and it is logical) that different human actors and structures/institutions use different power resources (ideological, economic, military and political), and that power functions primarily *between* the actors. But on the other hand, Mann is not always very consistent in his empirical analyses and often one can find passages in which the possible interpretation is that different types of powers (e.g. ideological power), or their combination, affect the actors directly and vice versa (actors shape the character and content of the four types of power and have an impact on how they intersect with each other). Thus, different types of power in the IEMP model could be seen as independent entities or even as actors by themselves.

The relations between the different actors and the powers described in the IEMP model could be conceptualized in both self-actional and inter-actional terms: they are self-actions in the sense that the types of power, while relying on their own unique resources, can influence the actors and vice versa; they are inter-actions in the sense that the actions by actors and the corresponding types of power affect each other and produce new (and sometimes unintended) consequences.

During all these self-actions and inter-actions the identities of the actors or those of the types of power (and their combinations) remain largely unchanged. But if the time passes on and the next period (T2 in Fig. 16.1) arrives, new identities for actors will emerge. Even if Mann is not very explicit in these terms, one can find multiple hints in his works, that the above-mentioned change could happen due to constant mutually constituting relations between the actors that are also mediated and influenced by the four types of power. In other words, Actor A¹ becomes Actor A² with a changed identity and nature due to constant relations with other actors. This transformation can to a large extent also be affected (or mediated) by the powers distinguished in the IEMP model, and this, in turn, can also change their combination and nature (ideological power¹ becomes ideological power,² political power¹ transforms to political power,² etc.). However, the last transformation among the types of power is not as profound as the one that takes place among the human actors. For example, the basic nature of the “ideological power”¹ (to provide a meaning and symbolic order for human life) does not change, but the content and the manifestations of it can transform to the extent that it becomes accurate to talk about “ideological power”.²

Therefore, Mann does not concentrate so much on the trans-actions between the actors than on the trans-actional processes (or mechanisms). This becomes clear if one attentively examines the way he analyses the large scale historical processes and demonstrates how the nature, identity of the actors, and also the intersections within the power networks, are in an endless transformation. In other words, social action as trans-action is barely observable in Mann’s approach to power, if one takes a random chapter of his volumes or a snapshot of a historical period analysed by him. On these occasions Mann appears to be a profoundly self-actionalist or inter-actionalist thinker. However, Mann’s potential for trans-actionalism becomes more evident, if one explores a prolonged historical process in which often the same types of actor are active but transform their identities and nature in the course of constant interplay with one another. Hence, the major argument of the chapter is that *if one reads Mann’s approach to power from a synchronic perspective it does not correspond very much to the canons of “deep” relational sociology and his depiction of power relations is clearly self-actionalist and inter-actionalist. But if one assumes a diachronic perspective, Mann appears to be engaged in a more trans-actionalist sociology.*

In order to illustrate the statement above and relational mechanisms depicted in Fig. 16.1 we provide a relatively simple empirical example. In Volume I (Chap. 6) Mann demonstrates how the adoption of the iron tools and weaponry at the end of the second millennium BC transformed the power relations and the nature of human civilization in the Western part of Eurasia. The core features of the argument are depicted in Fig. 16.2. The group of people whose complex network of trans-action with various mineral resources, technologies and people as co-producers, enemies and so on resulted in the gradual emergence of iron weapons transformed the content of the military

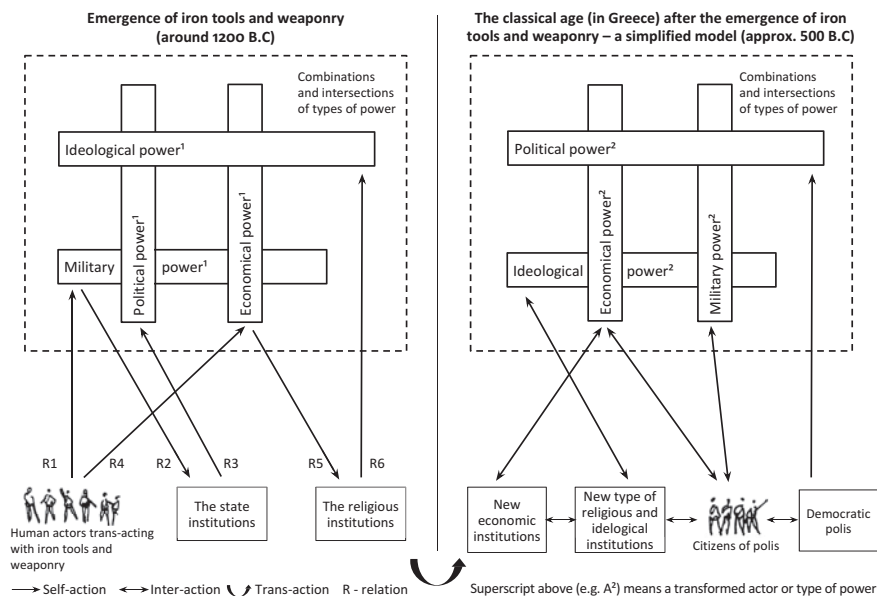


Fig. 16.2 An empirical example: the emergence of iron tools and weaponry and its social consequences on power relations
 Source: authors' own

power (self-actional relationship R1) that became more efficient and lethal. This, in turn, affected how it was possible to exercise the state power through state institutions (R2) and this, in turn, also affected the content of political power (R3). Briefly, the early despotic empires in the Fertile Crescent lost their former monopoly to provide weapons for their subjects, because unlike bronze, iron was widely available and every community could make their own weapons and tools. This empowered the ordinary peasants who formed the bulk of the infantry which soon replaced chariots as the major military force on the battlefield. Political power, in turn, became more decentralized and dispersed than during the Bronze Age. The people who adopted iron tools also profoundly affected the economic power (R4), because with the new iron tools ploughing was more efficient, making it possible to till heavier, rain-watered, soils. This resulted in a more forceful expansion of the agricultural civilizations to Assyria, Anatolia, Greece and Italy. The productivity of agriculture increased as well and the urban civilizations spread more extensively, meaning that more regions could be incorporated into tensor trade networks in which the independent trading cities became the major actors. The changes in the economic power and the military power also affected the religious institutions (R5) and this, in turn, had an impact on the ideological power (R6). Here the intensified warfare and urbanization created the new unexpected tensions in the society and the old polytheistic, local cults-based religious systems and rudimentary philosophies were unable to provide adequate answers to new, more metaphysical questions that the people had.

The adoption of iron tools and weaponry created new relationships between the different human actors and institutions. These new and changed mutually constituting relations gradually transformed the identities of the human actors and changed the nature of institutions/structures. The change also affected the content of the four types of power and the way they were aligned with each other. These slow trans-actional processes produced completely new societies around the year 500 BC (Fig. 16.2). For example, in Greece the former small agricultural communities transformed into polises, which changed the way in which political power operated. It became more democratic and the new city dwellers started to identify themselves as the citizens of their city states, not just as peasants of small semi-urban communities. Even some elements of proto-nationalism emerged. The hoplite army consisting of free citizens became the most important military force and a military institution. New types of religious and ideological institutions emerged in which the new rational Greek philosophy and philosophers gained prominence. The efficiency of ideological power increased considerably with the spread of literacy which, in turn, was facilitated by an intensification of trade and communication. New economic institutions based on coinage affected the various ways other social institutions could interact with each other and how the economic and political power operated and so on.

It is impossible to map all the new self-actional or inter-actional relationships that emerged in these new classical societies of the iron age. What is important is the fact that both the essence of the types of power was transformed (e.g. ideological power¹ transformed into ideological power²) and that various key actors changed their very identity and nature (and some new actors emerged).

In order to further clarify the issue of whether Mann could be considered primarily a self-actionalist, inter-actionalist or trans-actionalist, some additional empirical examples and remarks could be provided. One, indeed, encounters self-actions very often, when reading his *The Sources of Social Power*; Mann assumes that the actors have their own unique self-generated powers to put large social processes in motion. Christians, for instance, had their own unique power sources which transformed ideological power in late antiquity (Volume 1), the British empire-builders had their own self-generated political and military powers to subjugate the large swaths of lands in Asia (Volume 2), the presidential administration in the USA relied largely on its own political power sources in order to launch the New Deal reforms in the 1930s (Volume 3), the neoliberal economists had their unique advantage in terms of ideological power to convince the politicians and the general public to initiate the radical laissez-faire free market reforms in the 1980s (Volume 4), and so forth. Conceptualizing social action as self-action seems to be a particularly prevalent trend in Mann's writings when he is talking about the critical events or junctures that have fundamentally changed the course of human history, like significant technical innovations (Fig. 16.2), big revolutions (e.g. in Volume 2 and 3), far-reaching reforms (e.g. in Volume 3 and 4) and so on.

Nevertheless he also often assumes the inter-actional relations between different human actors and institutions in which the nature or the identity of these actors or entities does not change, but their attributes interact with each other and produce new outcomes (institutions, structures or transformed networks of power). For example, in early modern Europe the intricate interplay between the nobility, the cities, the religious authorities and the monarchs gave birth to the different models of early nation-states (the constitutional and the absolute monarchies) (Volume 1); the peculiar alliance between the conservative junker nobility and the liberal bourgeoisie enabled the semi-democratic institutions in the German Empire (1871–1918) to flourish (Volume 2); the complex relations between different social classes, which already had their own self-articulated and clear identities by the first quarter of the twentieth century, helped to promote the left-wing revolutions in Europe (Volume 3); the Great Recession in the early twenty-first century was possible because the neo-liberal political elites were successfully convinced by the financial elites that there was no need for institutionalized rules for the global financial market (Volume 4) and so on.

When it comes to trans-actional relations then, as was noted earlier, Mann does not provide a very detailed analysis on how the trans-actions between different actors really work and he certainly does not analyse these processes at the micro level. Rather he takes snapshots from different eras and describes how very broad historical processes and shifts in power configurations produce the substantial identity shifts and changes in the very nature of the different collective human actors. It seems to be a hidden (not explicitly pronounced) assumption in his works that the constant relations between different actors constitute and reconstitute their identities. This becomes clear when one not only reads some random chapters of *The Sources of Social Power*, but systematically goes through Mann's volumes. The trans-actional processes are more manifest in those volumes in which Mann focuses on a limited number of cases in a more in-depth manner (the UK in Volume 2; the USA in Volumes 3 and 4; Japan in Volume 3; and China in Volume 4), and examines the actions and relations between the same key actors (classes, social groups, institutions, etc.) through different eras.

Perhaps the best example concerns the case of the USA and the destiny and impact of the New Deal reforms (Volumes 3 and 4). One can see that during the period of the 1930s and the 1980s (when Reagan's administration largely dismantled the achievements of the New Deal reforms) the key actors' identities and self-perceptions were profoundly transformed. The republicans and the democrats in the 1930s were not the same as in the 1980s—their mutual struggle (and multiple other factors) had transformed their ideological views, perceptions of the world, various key elements in their identities and so on. African Americans adopted a very different identity and self-perception in the 1960s in comparison to that of the 1930s. It also largely

happened due to the complex relations they had with the white majority and with themselves. The white working class abandoned the more militant class identity they had in the 1930s and in the 1950s and became more docile and right-wing by the 1980s. The transformation was also largely facilitated by the complicated relationship they had with the employers, with the political elites in both parties, the rivalries within the labour unions and so on.

If one reads Mann's profound analyses of nineteenth-century Britain (Volume 2), post-Meiji restoration imperial Japan (1868–1945) (Volume 3) or twentieth-century China (Volumes 3 and 4) attentively one can find similar transactional processes or mechanisms that come into play.

6 CONCLUSION: THE MULTIPLE FACES OF MANN AND RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY

As a way of concluding, we can reiterate the point that has been made throughout this chapter: *even if Mann is mostly self-actionalist and inter-actionalist, a trans-actional approach is also decipherable in his writings. Oftentimes it is presented in a not very explicit way, but it is still evident, when one considers the large historic processes and the identity shifts accompanied by them.* In order to find the trans-actional Mann, one has to follow his work in its full detail attentively and systematically, because the seeds of trans-actionalism are often found “between the lines” of his writings, and spotting them requires an open-ended and creative reading of his work. This would also mean taking a diachronic macro perspective rather than a synchronic micro perspective. Mann is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, his process-oriented trans-actionalism or “deep relationalism” emerges most clearly when he looks at power from a great distance, that is, at the macro-level—here the constitution and reconstitution of (collective) actors and their power relations is apparent. On the other hand, as we also indicated above, the trans-actional processes are most manifest in those volumes in which Mann focuses on a limited number of cases in a more in-depth manner. Actually this paradoxical relation—being in depth and distanced at the same time—looks less paradoxical if one takes seriously one of the major methodological precautions of relational analysis that Elias has put forth in another context: the various perspectives on social reality (micro, meso, macro) “can be considered separately, but *not as being separate*” (Elias 1978, p. 85, italics added; see also Selg 2016b).

NOTE

1. For a discussion of Mann's *Fascists* (Mann 2004) and *The Dark Side of Democracy* (Mann 2005) see Volume 4, issue 3, pp. 247–297 of *Political Studies Review*, where contributions from Daniele Conversi, Roger Eatwell and Jacques Semelin is accompanied by a response of Mann himself.

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Pierre Bourdieu and Relational Sociology

Christian Papilloud and Eva-Maria Schultze

1 INTRODUCTION

Pierre Bourdieu was born in Denguin, France in 1930. He studied philosophy and literature at Paris, Alger and Lille (1951–64), before he finally started working as a sociologist. His main concern was to describe the interplay between differences in human action through an empirical observation of distinctive practices. According to Bourdieu, distinctive practices typify themselves in the expression of personal preferences and value judgements. Distinctions are differences that hold meaning and make sense if we connect to others but they also separate us from others. In its first sense, the term “distinction” refers to the simple fact that individuals, groups or societies are not the same. Distinction has also a second meaning; Bourdieu tells us that being a particular social actor is something that becomes visible in society through each actor’s lifestyle, which leads to several forms of social recognition as well as to social discrimination. Distinctions identify, locate and situate social actors within society; they influence the way in which those actors behave and the way in which they themselves will be perceived. Distinction legitimates the right to have an identity, which can be recognized and defended, as well as being at the same time an object of desires, manipulations and denials. Thus, distinction is the basis of Bourdieu’s relational sociology; it contributes to the core definition of his sociology as a relational one, and it enables us to better understand the meaning of the word “relational” in Bourdieu’s work.

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2 DEFINITION OF RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY

Bourdieu gives a literal and an expanded, as well as a more cryptic definition (see the next section), of relational sociology. As his concept of distinction supposes, identity and differences can only be analysed and understood relationally. This statement finds a general application in Bourdieu's sociology, which he summarizes in a kind of Hegelian formula: "The real is relational" (1998, 15). Bourdieu means that the reality that matters to sociologists is the sum of the relationships between individuals, groups and societies because these relations enable us to identify the social position of each (individual or collective) actor based on their differences. At the same time, they enable us to understand how they are distinguishing themselves from any other based on their identity. These relations are of a specific nature, even of a double one. On the one hand, they are dialectical relations (Bourdieu 1982). On the other hand, they are asymmetrical relations, or in other words, they are relations of power between social actors. As dialectical relations, they express the interdependence of social determinations. As relations are the lifeblood of societies, this interdependence is present everywhere. It can be located in individual behaviour, the life of social groups, the evolution of societies and the destiny of cultures. This is also true of their second property, power. Power is available everywhere in social life and is the fundamental logic of our everyday life which is the struggle for the definition of these power relationships between identity and difference that have to be faced by individuals and groups constantly in society. Yet saying that the core of Bourdieu's relational sociology is the dialectical interrelatedness of power does not mean that this relation is reciprocal. This observation might be surprising, but it actually underlines one of the cardinal properties of those power relations: they are unilateral, that is, power is always exerted by the dominating actors over the dominated ones—here Bourdieu is adapting Max Weber's conceptual frame of power and domination to his sociology. Thus, if social life rests on such power relations, not every social actor has enough amount of power to change the power set he is in or to achieve recognition by society, in terms of both identity and difference. Actors with more societal advantages and resources are likely to take up dominating positions in society earlier, more quickly and more easily than actors with fewer advantages or resources, who will remain dominated. Even if Bourdieu considers that actors have a certain liberty in the various ways they construct their life, he underlines the power of structural macro-mechanisms, which reproduce this divide between socially favoured and socially disadvantaged actors.

3 MAIN RELATED CONCEPTS AND METHODS

In the section above, we looked at Bourdieu's more cryptic definition of relational sociology, which is in its essence the developed formula of his literal definition, and which unveils the general purpose of his sociology, namely to deliver a theory of social practice. This theory of practices can be summarized

in a formula that brings Bourdieu's core sociological concepts together: $[H \times C] + F = P$, where H means Habitus, C capital(s), F field(s) and P practice (Bourdieu 1982, 175). Bourdieu describes the level of individuality by using the concept of habitus, sometimes also called "habitus of class" (Bourdieu 1993, 29). Habitus is both a structured and a structuring ensemble of relations, which actors spontaneously develop to other actors. Habitus is a kind of stock of resources at the disposal of each actor, of which the actor is, however, not fully aware because he inherits them from the social environment in which he lives, that is, his own class. A class is not a social class in the Marxian sense of the word—a group of people living in the same socioeconomic conditions—but rather a collection of social, economic, cultural, symbolic and interrelated affinities that people share without knowing each other: living at the same location, having the same friends, eating at the same restaurants and so on. A class is, in this sense, the output of a construction made by sociologists, which represents structural principles explaining the motivations for the actors to develop such a lifestyle, or to act in such a way. Thus, each individual actor not only expresses himself in his practical everyday life, but he also expresses the rules of the groups from which he comes, that is, in which he grew up. Bourdieu makes it particularly visible as he speaks about what one would see as the most individual property of an actor: his taste. Taste and judgements of taste, Bourdieu says, reveal from where we socially come, and how the social context in which we have been raised has affected us. This kind of determinism affects our body and our intellectual dispositions (hexis) in our earliest years, and thanks to socialization, the habitus gives each actor his social and cultural identity (ethos). These are markers which direct each actor's life, and which the actors collect during their socialization—from family, friends, schoolmates, colleagues and so on—or maybe better, which every actor accumulates during his life. This accumulation is a capitalization of societal resources, which reinforce the determinism at the basis of each actor's way of life. The motivation of such accumulation is one of the most important of Bourdieu's assumption. Each actor has "in this or that specific field (...) in reality the goal of implementing a certain rule principle" (Bourdieu 1982, 489). This is the starting point for the formulation of a second important concept in Bourdieu's sociology—that is, capital.

Heritage relies on four principal resources that Bourdieu calls capitals. He distinguishes four capitals, from which two are critical for the structuration of the actor's habitus, and of society: the economic and the cultural capital. The third capital called social capital is of contextual importance. The last one—symbolic capital—is transversal capital which expresses the output of the relations between the other three capitals. In terms of their content, economic capital is not only money, but economic wealth. Cultural capital links to resources, which are not limited to education, but more generally to every kind of cultural resource gathered by the actors during their socialization. Social capital can be understood as the network of relatives, friends and others who support an actor's habitus. Symbolic capital can best be portrayed as the prestige that an actor can gather in his life by occupying a dominating position in society. Capital can be seen as a

social resource and each habitus implies a precise volume and structure of capital. The way they take shape depends on each habitus' position within the system of social classes, but it remains the same for all actors. They can allow their capitals to grow by accumulating resources. How does this work? Capital in general means accumulated "social work" in the sense of accumulated activities within society, where these activities vary depending on which of the four types of capital is involved (Bourdieu 1992a, 49). On the one hand, this social work consists in economic and educational activities. On the other, it consists of sociability and legitimation activities. Regarding Bourdieu's basic assumption in his general economy of practices—actors want to "maximize specific profits" (Bourdieu 1980, 96)—each activity refers more or less consciously to the accumulation of certain types of profit, depending on the corresponding capital, as for example the accumulation of money or material wealth in the case of economic capital, the accumulation of academic degrees or titles in the case of cultural capital, the accumulation of relationships in the case of social capital, and the accumulation of power in the case of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1992a, 52, 53, 57ff., 60, 64ff.). Furthermore, actors can construct relations between capitals—for example, one actor can invest his economic resources in order to study at prestigious universities, and he can use the prestige of his educational trajectory in order to build up a network of strong supporters which will facilitate the growth of his symbolic capital. In this sense, the power of the habitus will be multiplied by the capitals, and its influence on the social trajectory of actors will be stronger. This last consideration also shows the important role of economic capital in Bourdieu's sociology (*ibid.*, 60, 70ff.) in the sense that the veil of economic capital is the most important prerequisite for the legitimation of the cultural, social and symbolic powers of actors in society (Bourdieu and Waquant 1996, 151ff.).

Dominant social groups determine which combination of capital has to be favoured in order to hold dominant positions. These dominant social groups specify the exchange rate of capitals, that is, the price for the optimal combination of the four capitals, which must be paid in order to hold power positions in a field. The dominant positions of social groups and actors in society refer to the logic of monopoly as sketched out above, where social groups and actors accumulate capitals in order to unilaterally impose their "principles of vision and division of the social world", thus maintaining or improving their own dominant position in the social space (Bourdieu 1985, 731; Bourdieu 1992b, 149ff.; Bourdieu 2001, 81). This logic of accumulation leads to the discrimination of actors who cannot get power because the quantity of capitals is missing, or because the structure of the four capitals is not adapted to the structure of the capitals required in a specific field (see e.g. Bourdieu 1982, 51). These actors are thus actors dominated in the social space—that is, in society—or in one of its specific fields. The concept of "field" is the third major concept in Bourdieu's sociology. There are a lot of social fields (e.g. the fields of economics, politics, culture, religion), which Bourdieu compares to magnetic fields in physics—actors in each field stand in a kind of attraction/repulsion to each other—each field being a field of power, that is, a field in which there will be a

struggle for dominant positions. If an individual or collective actor has a dominant position in any given field, he exerts power over the entire field, that is, he determines who can enter the field by defining the price that has to be paid in order to attain a position in the field, by defining the rules of participation in the activities within the field, and by controlling the opportunities to gather profits in that field (Bourdieu 2005, 195ff.). Any social field is likely to be divided into specialized sub-fields (the sub-field of finance within economy, the sub-field of haute couture in the field of fashion, etc.). All social fields and their sub-fields are relatively autonomous from one another, or, to put it differently, they are all more or less interdependent. Social fields are like games, and Bourdieu often uses this metaphor in order to explain that actors in a field behave strategically within the dynamics of struggle. This depends on the illusion, that is, on the general faith and the interest of the actors in the field. In each field, each actor has “a sense of the game” that is to be played, which is the sense of what is “at stake” in each field (Bourdieu 1977, 3–43). Social fields are structured by the four capitals, and the sum of the social fields is the social space. The social space reflects the social allocation of resources in a society according to the variety of habitus, their classes, and their volume and structure of capitals. The social space draws a picture of the interdependency between social determinations within a society, and of the shapes these interdependencies can take according to the viewpoint of each social class. Like the social space, each field and sub-field is a construction made by the sociologist, which represents one of the most probable cases of what is happening in real social life.

Finally, there are two dialectical complementary processes that explain what practice is. The first is the dialectical relationship between distinction/prestige, and this leads to the second dialectical process of misjudgement/recognition. Because every actor is different from the others, and because every actor wants to have meaning as a specific identity in the social space he is striving for recognition of his social position. At the same time, this recognition comes from the other actors, and depends on a process of attribution. What motivates this attribution is misjudgement—it is impossible for the actors to fully understand the reasons why some actors have dominant positions in society while others do not. Therefore, attributions always rest on misjudgements, which conduct to legitimate some actors who shows some ground to be legitimated—the actors having power positions in a social field or in society—and to illegitimate others who do not show such apparent legitimacy—the actors who do not have dominant positions. This attribution of legitimacy is in itself the practice of power in social relations, and it leads to symbolic violence. The strength of symbolic violence has two modes: (1) it is present daily, but invisible and (2) it is efficient, but physically painless. Symbolic violence is, as Bourdieu sometimes says, “magical” (e.g. Bourdieu 1997, 83). It protects the dominant doxa in the social space—the *Weltanschauung* of dominant actors and classes—which can prevail because they are recognized by other actors who do not know the grounds of its legitimacy. This is why Bourdieu says that

even if society evolves over time and even if there is social mobility for actors, there is no structural change. Society's structures do not change; they will be rather identically reproduced from generation to generation.

4 EMPIRICAL ILLUSTRATIONS

The strength of Bourdieu's sociological framework comes from its possible application to several societal fields, particularly the fields of the arts, and the field of education. In the field of the arts, let us take the example of literature in order to show Bourdieu's sociological theory in motion. The field of literature has been constructed in particular by the French naturalists whose main protagonist was Emile Zola (1840–1902). In order to enter the field of literature, Zola must reject commercial profit. Within this field, this anti-commercial behaviour possesses nevertheless its own economic rationality. It enables Zola to obtain the symbolic profit of becoming famous as a writer, which can be converted afterwards into other capitals. Zola shows that successful writers can earn money. They can also discuss several public topics, and gain a sociopolitical reputation in society. This success was possible because Zola and the naturalists created a new form of literature between journalism and short fictional stories. It differs strongly from other forms of literature, which already existed in the field of arts—like poetry or plays—and will increasingly promote the autonomy of literature within the field of arts: the novel. Novels appealed not only to an aristocratic or scholarly audience, who rather turned to the poem or the play, but to a general audience. This made the success of the novel possible while changing at the same time the criteria of so-called “good” or “bad” literature. These criteria depend no longer on academic literary institutions but on the resonance of a book in society, which symbolizes the social and economic success of the writer, that is, his reputation, his wealth, his network of power supporters—especially editors, and professional critics which contribute to keeping the social order in the field of literature. Thus, the writer cannot only live of his art, but he also can work independently from patrons. This leads to the development of a new social field, or in other words, Zola and the naturalists have constructed a new social “game” with new challenges and new rules, which are no longer bound to the classical literary institutions, to the forms which they imposed on literature, and to the legitimacy which they confer to writers. At the same time, a new kind of writer's personality emerges—the writer as politicized intellectual (see Pinto 1984, 23–32). This new field of literature strengthened the competition between writers. As time passes, the dominance of naturalistic novels became threatened by the appearance of new writers—the avant-garde—in this field (Bidou-Zachariassen 1994, 60–70), offering a new form of literature, the psychological novel (Ponton 1975, 66–81). The audience read more of this literature thus contributing to the increasing reputation gained by these writers in the field of literature. Zola and the naturalists increasingly lost public recognition.

The field of education is also an important concern in Bourdieu's sociology and has contributed to the assumption that social origin determines the inequality of opportunities in the educational system. In Bourdieu's sociology, this is a very important issue which is based on the power of habitus and leads Bourdieu to the supposition that the relations between pupils and students and the educational system is rooted in their original class. Each social group gives to its actors a preschool culture, which will be of importance for the future educational career of the children. This culture is class specific, and it is class-specifically inherited and embodied. The habitus determines by those families, which materially and culturally prevail in the social space, corresponds more to the culture which the educational system teaches than to the one cultivated in dominated social classes. In the dominant classes, children are from early on accustomed to develop the cultural values of their class. For the educational system, these values are at the core of the educational "game" the actors have to play. The dominant classes try to promote the social independence of their actors by long training. The dominated classes, however, attach importance to the early economic emancipation of their actors from the family, and thus, to an early exit from the educational system, as well as to an early entrance into the world of labour. For the children of the dominant classes, it is natural, therefore, to read and write before entering the educational system, as well as to be able to communicate eloquently about oneself, one's own ideas, feelings and so on, in order to be taken into account and understood by the adults (Bourdieu and Passeron 1971, 111; Labov 1993, 37–50). Because the teaching in the educational system reproduces the values of the dominant classes Bourdieu sees this system as an institution owned by the dominant classes, which selects pupils and students according to their values—that is, to the benefit of these classes (Dannepond 1979: 31–45). Social inequalities are not corrected by the educational system; rather, on the contrary, they will be reproduced within the school in order to protect the social order against any changes to its structure. Bourdieu does not see such relations as linear causal ones, but as homeostatic, for the benefit of the stability of the entire social system, and at the cost of dominated classes. The higher the social position of a class, the greater the opportunities for their actors to create the conditions for their successful educational and social career. For the dominant classes, this means sending their actors to the best schools/universities in the educational system, as well as to the most prestigious disciplines, which stimulates competition within the educational system between schools/universities as well as between the related personals. For the dominated classes, this often means sending their actors to schools/universities that enable them to enter the labour market as soon as possible. When the dominated classes send their actors to reputed schools and universities this is very often for these actors a moment of desocialization, which leads them to forget their social origin and imitate a habitus of higher class, while trying not to be discovered. These strategies to mask habitus are best seen with examinations, which the educational field uses in order to control and maintain the school order, as well as

to reproduce the society's social structure. As a result, examination not only establishes a classification among pupils/students, but it also functions to unveil strategies likely to hide the actor's true habitus, and to sanction them by evaluation methods.

5 SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES TO OTHER THEORIES

Bourdieu's sociology has inspired much sociological thinking, in particular because of its relational character. Bourdieu is one of the thinkers in contemporary sociology who insisted on the importance of investigating social phenomena to understand their relatedness, and for this reason, he is at the origin of the reconsideration of structuralism since the mid-1970s.

In Germany, Bourdieu's relational sociology has fostered several debates, especially by the proponents of the Critical Theory at Frankfurt University. Many of the scholars around Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno felt overwhelmed by Bourdieu's sociology (Egger 2014: 86), which mostly is a consequence of Bourdieu's similar criticism and Marxian take on the Critical Theory's traditional topics, such as the economy, politics and stratification of society in conflicting classes (*ibid.*). For the new generation of Frankfurt School thinkers, Bourdieu's critical concept of society and the "critical theory of society" by the Frankfurt School were, despite their similarities, incompatible. Because he insists on the reproduction of power structures within society, Bourdieu does not support the utopian idea of social liberation and emancipation shared by the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School (Honneth 1984, 1990; Beer 2002; Egger and Pfeuffer 2002; Demirović 2014; Egger 2014; Proifl 2014). Nevertheless, this does not lead to a consensus, as other scholars belonging to the Frankfurt School support the idea that Bourdieu could be considered an advocate of "Critical Theory" (Bittlingmayer and Bauer 2000, 2014; Eickelpasch 2002). For these scholars, the Frankfurt School and Bourdieu's relational sociology share an important common social critique of power, especially the power of the bourgeoisie, which holds or tries to build up monopolized positions within society. This same attention to the social logic of monopoly leads Bourdieu as well as the Frankfurt School scholars to similar conclusions. The logic of monopoly in current society is—for the Frankfurt School—the result of the generalization of the accumulation of profit (Adorno 1968, 361). Bourdieu conceives it in similar terms, the social logic of monopoly resting on the generalization of the accumulation of capitals (Bourdieu 1980, 96). Another important similarity regards the shift in the social power within the field and sub-fields of culture, which Bourdieu underlines with his concepts of symbolic violence and symbolic struggles, and which we can find in Critical Theory, especially in Adorno's considerations about late capitalism, the postulate of negative social classes and the concept of cultural industry. For Adorno as well as Bourdieu, the dominated individual and collective actors in the fields and sub-fields of culture do not have any opportunities and therefore do not want to rule the social world. Rather, they tend to conform to the

models provided by the dominating actors and to the standard patterns of the dominating forms of culture and cultural production that cultural and symbolic systems have spread over the entire society (Adorno 1942, 377; Bourdieu 1991, 10, 1987, 52, 1984, 68).

In France, Bourdieu's relational sociology has caused many debates, not only because Bourdieu analyses topics with a sometimes strong political resonance—as, for instance, the school system—but also because he proposes a very deterministic vision of society. According to Bourdieu, social actors have almost no influence on their social destiny. Their social trajectory is determined by macro-social forces, which contribute to the reproduction of society to the benefit of the dominant classes. Without rejecting Bourdieu completely, Jean-Claude Passeron, who wrote various books together with Bourdieu, and publishes with Claude Grignon *Le savant et le populaire* (Passeron and Grignon 1989), points out the limits of a sociology that because it concentrates nearly only on the logic of domination cannot describe the logic of social practices in a sufficiently suitable way. The relations of power as Bourdieu conceives them have been described in the sense of social hierarchy only. However, there is another important dimension in society. This is the development of relationships on the same social level. As Michel de Certeau has shown (de Certeau et al. 1980a; *ibid.* 1980b), there are relationships of solidarity as well as cultures of proximity between social actors who look not only for benefits in the everyday life of competing strategies, but for communication and the sharing of their differences in order to understand one another, and to live together. Social life is pluralistic just like social exchanges between actors, which cause complex social trajectories of social actors and groups, as sociologists should acknowledge. Yet, in order to develop a sociological theory aware of such social complexity, sociology would need a stronger epistemological basis.

According to Passeron in his book *Le raisonnement sociologique* (Passeron 1991), Bourdieu's sociological prospect fails in satisfactorily coupling history and sociology. Sociology has, as Bourdieu shows, its own language, which refers to quasi-experimental methods (e.g. investigations made on the basis of qualitative or quantitative surveys). On the other hand, sociologists must pay attention to the histories of the investigated contexts in order to compare them adequately. Without this attention to history, their analyses would only lead to general results, which would be seen falsely as general “truths”. This criticism is directed particularly against the book that Passeron published together with Bourdieu, *La reproduction* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970). Passeron says that he and Bourdieu did not consider the history of the positions of schools and universities in the French education system. This does not mean that *La reproduction* publishes incorrect results, but that the sociological theory upon which the book is based is only valid for one temporally and spatially defined case. Therefore, Passeron formulates a new requirement for sociology: it must describe limited contexts, and it must not deliver some “grand theory” but rather sociological perspectives limited to such contexts.

A further criticism comes from another of Bourdieu's former colleagues, Luc Boltanski. In his books *L'amour et la justice comme compétences* (Boltanski 1990) and *De la justification*. In *Les économies de la grandeur* (with Boltanski and Thévenot 1991), Boltanski delivers an alternative sociology of acting which does not take power relations for granted, but instead analyses them. For Boltanski, there is no unconscious logic of practice, as Bourdieu postulates. Instead, there are social actors who can reflect upon their actions, who live according to two orders of social action—controversy and peace—and who struggle for recognition in society. Instead of studying the reproduction of society, Boltanski assigns to sociology the study of these struggles between actors within society, as well as the corresponding legitimation processes which they support. In his work on comics as a form of literature, and in a similar way to Jean-Louis Fabiani's writings on jazz (Boltanski 1975, 37–59; Fabiani 1986, 231–245), Boltanski shows how dominant institutions of culture or social classes take up popular practices in the arts, and how they contribute to give them legitimacy. In contemporary societies, the comic becomes an academic discipline taught at professional schools of art. Jazz is part of sophisticated culture (culture cultivée), and is taught at professional schools of music—the traditional place of serious classical music. Particularly in the work of Boltanski, such examples show that the struggle for the definition of rules structuring the social fields are not beyond actors' reach, which—as Bourdieu presupposes—would be controlled by social macro-mechanisms. The actors question the logic of power within society because they do not live according to only power relationships. Actors' strategies are never as unconscious as Bourdieu assumes (Boltanski 1990). Furthermore, these strategies do not show a one-sided logic of power in society, but a kind of reciprocity between classes, which does not exclude power relationships or struggles between actors.

Bernard Lahire, equally criticizing and continuing Bourdieu's sociological work, has shed light on several aspects of the concept of habitus, which should be revised. Accustomed to the reading of Bourdieu, many sociologists end up believing that they know perfectly well what a disposition or a pattern or a system of dispositions or a generating formula of practices is, as if the existence of a socio-cognitive process such as that of the transmission of such dispositions and patterns, which structure the habitus, would be a clearly established empirical fact. Lahire rather considers habitus as a construction, which has never been empirically examined. In his book *L'homme pluriel* (Lahire 1998), Lahire shows that the habitus tends to solve a lot of sociological questions before they have been actually addressed. In order to make such questions visible, it is necessary to systematically compare the social dispositions of the actors with the contexts of their action—their fields of practice, spheres of activity, micro-contexts, styles of interaction, etc.). It is then possible to understand how these dispositions can be made available to the actors by influence on the contextual factors, which determine the social career of the actors. Lahire extends his reflection to the arts, considering in his last book Nicolas Poussin's painting "Fuite en Egypte au voyageur couché" (Lahire 2015) in order to reconstruct

the historical roots of Bourdieu's fields of the cultural production. Lahire describes the boundaries within which—following Bourdieu—the games in the fields of the arts are played. He analyses the production of structural obligations, with which the actors of such fields must deal in order to produce the arts as history, field, object, falsification and fetish. The book clarifies Lahire's prospect, who wants on the one hand to deepen Bourdieu's analyses in a relational perspective, and on the other hand to understand the actors as subjects of their actions in the contexts in which they act. Their activity does not have to be reduced to only one logic of practice but should be understood in its varieties (Lahire 1998; likewise Coulangeon 2005). Regarding Bourdieu's "rules of art" (Bourdieu 1992c), Lahire states in his article *The Double Life of Writers* (2010) that Bourdieu's analyses of the field of art must be revised. For Lahire, Bourdieu sees artists as if they were conventional people doing a conventional job. In the arts, however, this supposition cannot be supported. For example, the work of writers in the sub-field of literature is not a profession like any other, but for most writers rather a side job, or a secondary activity which does not lead necessarily to a profession, and thus, to a position in the sub-field of literature (Lahire 2010, 448–449). For this reason, if Bourdieu's field theory proves to be suitable for structured occupational fields, it does not seem to suit the field of art, as well as other social fields where social positions are not well-institutionalized (ibid., 85). In such fields, we encounter actors who have one foot in one field and the other in another field where they have their bread-winning job. In other words, such actors often live in more than one social universe, and they often have to switch between these fields in order to survive. They are "occasional players", "gambling addicts" or "professional players", which are roles indicating the degree of involvement of these actors in the field of art, showing their more or less important opportunities to derive benefit from their involvement in this field (ibid., 459, note 1).

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Pierre Bourdieu's sociological work delivers a theory of action based on a relational scheme. Analytically, Bourdieu considers this scheme to be a dialectical scheme. Because the social actors are not aware of the whole complexity of their own structuration, and of the structuration of society, they tend to legitimize the social domination exerted by dominating social actors, leading to the reproduction of their social position. In other words, there is no social mobility at all and no democratization of society in modernity. This strong deterministic view has been widely criticized because it disregards the plurality of actors' strategies, which are not solely driven by domination but can be improved as well as adapted to the context in which social actors have lived their lives. However, what Bourdieu and his critics do share refers to the reduction of the plurality of actors' strategies as a major condition of social integration in our societies. On the one hand, this leads to questions regarding the capacity of modern institutional frames that effectively support the democratic claims in

order to give all social actors equal opportunities. On the other hand, this asks for other forms of recognition of the social careers of actors in modernity which are not based on the accumulation of social resources, but which rather value the plurality of their social trajectory and their corresponding commitments in several social fields. Even if this sounds idealistic, this is the sense of Bourdieu's last writings in sociology that proffer a radical criticism of globalization, the de-politicization of social groups, the increase of abstraction through the huge implementation of digital media, and the radicalization of communities in industrialized societies. If modern society as described by Bourdieu does exist, it nevertheless is only one of many possible other societies that can be constructed. Other forms of society are possible, but this requires deep reforms not only of institutional frames, but also at the level of the relationships that we want to support together.

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Relational Sociology and Postcolonial Theory: Sketches of a “Postcolonial Relationalism”

Julian Go

What do relational sociology and postcolonial theory have to do with each other, if anything? In some ways they are diametrically opposed, not least because sociology more generally and postcolonial theory are opposed. Disciplinary sociology first emerged as a knowledge project in, of, and for empire. It was born in the USA and Europe out of the interests and concerns of the white, straight, middle- to upper middle-class males in the urban centers of the imperial metropolises (Connell 1997). The very notion of the “social”—as a space between nature and the spiritual realm—initially emerged and resonated in the nineteenth century among European elites to make sense of and to try to manage social upheaval and resistance from workers, women, and from so-called natives (Owens 2015; Go 2013; Steinmetz 1993).

Relational sociology may or may not be directly implicated in imperialism, but it is nonetheless part of this sociological tradition. Powell and Dépelteau (2013, 2) remind us that relational ideas in social theory “go back at least as far as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and feature prominently in the works of landmark theorists like Karl Marx, Georg Simmel, Ernst Cassirer, Norbert Elias, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Seyla Benhabib, Bruno Latour, and Nancy Chodorow, among others.” In other words, relational sociology is yet another instance of Western European discourse, part of particular intellectual concerns and debates that have developed in the center of the empires. In this sense it is like the sociological discourse of which it is a part: it was born of, and embedded within, the culture of Anglo-European imperialism.

Postcolonial theory has a different lineage. While this history also has to do with empire, postcolonial theory has been spirited by opposition to empire. Postcolonial thought is primarily an anti-imperial discourse that critiques

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empire and its persistent legacies. Today, when academics hear the term “post-colonial theory,” most think of the scholarly fad in the humanities that began in the 1980s with theorists like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Subaltern Studies and Dipesh Chakrabarty, among many others (Gandhi 1998). But in fact this was only the “second wave” of postcolonial thought. The first wave emerged earlier in the twentieth century with anticolonial thinkers such as Frantz Fanon (1925–1961), Aimé Césaire (1913–2008), Amílcar Cabral (1924–1973), C.L.R. James (1901–1989), and W.E.B. DuBois (1868–1963) among others (Go 2016). These first-wavers were all embroiled in a wider climate of anticolonial revolution of the early to mid-twentieth century. They all wrote, thought, argued, and mobilized in opposition to colonialism and its economic, political, and racial injustices. In the process, they came up with a novel set of concepts, categories, and theories—a body of writing and thought that is now labeled “postcolonial theory” (Young 2001).

In short, not only do sociology and postcolonial thought have different and divergent histories, they also embed opposed viewpoints and ways of thinking about the modern world in which we live. Sociology embeds the culture of imperialism; postcolonial thought manifests critiques of empire. Given this opposition, and given that relational sociology is a branch of sociology, what would relational sociology and postcolonial thought have in common, if anything at all? How might they be reconciled? In this chapter I suggest that, contrary to appearances, relational sociology and postcolonial thought share common ground and can be readily reconciled. This is because relational thinking itself is endemic to the postcolonial project; something called a “postcolonial relationalism” already exists. I begin by sketching the contours of postcolonial theory and how it offers a critique of dominant strands of sociological thought. I then discuss the relational ontology and analyses which I argue are inherent to postcolonial theory. Through this, we will see that relational sociology and postcolonial thought are complementary rather than opposed. I conclude with an empirical example using Bourdieu’s field theory.

1 POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND SOCIOLOGICAL THOUGHT¹

As noted, one key characteristic of postcolonial thought is its anticolonial stance. Postcolonial thought ultimately aims to critique, and transcend, the world of modern empires whose legacies persist to this day. This is what both the “first wave” and the “second wave” share. Of course, other intellectual traditions, such as Marxism, have been critical of empire and colonialism. But postcolonial theory has a more specific focus. It interrogates the discursive, ideological, epistemic and psychological processes and forms associated with imperialism. For instance, while Frantz Fanon (1967) wrote of colonialism’s economic exploitation, he also uniquely highlighted the role of racial ideology and racial knowledge in shaping French colonialism. Similarly, in *Orientalism*, one of the founding texts of the second-wave of postcolonial theory, Edward Said (1979) showed how epistemic structures representing the Orient

(as regressive, static, singular) served to support Western imperialism. Other lines of second-wave theory continued this tradition, yielding a subfield of study known as “colonial discourse analysis” (Bhabha 1994; Parry 1987).

Postcolonial theory, in sum, critically analyzes the entire culture of empire and its colonial expression. This means, in turn, that the analytic and critical target of postcolonial theory is wider than colonial discourse. The culture of empire includes novels or other art forms, as well as scientific knowledge (Said 1993). From the perspective of postcolonial theory, the culture of empire penetrates deep, constituting an entire imperial episteme of which Western science is a part. The goal of postcolonial studies follows: to create or find new knowledge that does not fall prey to the limits of the imperial episteme and help decolonize consciousness. This is why it is labeled postcolonial theory. The word “postcolonial” here does not refer to the historical phase or period after decolonization. It refers instead to a critical position or stance against colonialism and beyond it (Young 1990, 4).

But what, exactly, characterizes this imperial episteme that is the target of postcolonial criticism? First, postcolonial writers highlight how the imperial episteme operates through racialized and Orientalist modes of thought. Said’s *Orientalism* revealed how colonial discourse reduced other societies into a singular homogeneous mass called “the Orient,” or “culture” that was presumed to be static, unchanging, and fully endogenous. Orientalist discourse denigrated what scholars called “Islam” or “Arab culture” for “its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habit of inaccuracy, its backwardness” (Said 1978, 205). Similarly, Fanon (1967) critiqued the racial knowledge that informed French colonialism in Algeria. Such racial knowledge, which depended upon biological reductions of race, manifested what he called “epidermal” thinking (112).

Second, postcolonial theorists critiqued the binary schemas of the imperial episteme. Said called this the “law of division.” This relates to Orientalism but reflects a more general operation; one whereby—in Said’s (1979, xxviii) words—“an ‘us’ and a ‘them’” are constructed. Postcolonial theorists claimed that the colonizer and colonized, the Orient and the Occident, the East and the West, and metropole and periphery are all constituted through mutual interaction (Césaire 2000). Said (1979) showed that it was through Orientalist discourses that the “West” was invented. “The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (1979, 2). Similarly, Fanon (1967 [1952], 110; 1968 [1961]) theorized colonialism as a mutually constitutive social force that shaped the identities and self-understandings of the colonizer as well as the colonized. He also insisted upon recognizing how colonialism made Europe wealthy. “Europe is literally the creation of the Third World. The wealth which smothers her is that which was stolen from the underdeveloped peoples” (Fanon 1968 [1961], 102). But the imperial episteme’s law of division occludes rather than admits of mutual constitution. Rather than recognizing that “us” and “them” are constructed in opposition to each other, the law of division

insists upon their ontological separation. Likewise, rather than recognizing the importance of colonialism and empire in shaping the experience and wealth of Europe, the imperial episteme erases colonial and imperial history, and isolates “Europe” as separate entirely from relations with its Others.

The related aspect of the imperial episteme pinpointed by postcolonial studies is the occlusion of subaltern agency. As the law of division separates West from the Rest, so does it analytically repress the role of postcolonial and colonized peoples in making history. DuBois (1915) criticized mainstream historiography for writing Africa out of world history. C.L.R. James (1989) opined the way in which Africans were mischaracterized in conventional historical texts. “The only place where Negroes did not revolt,” he wrote, “is in the pages of capitalist historians” (77). The Subaltern Studies variant of postcolonial theory challenged conventional histories of India for effacing the role of peasants and other marginalized groups in history (Chakrabarty 2002; Guha 1984, vii). Postcolonial thinkers thereby sought to recover that agency. “The colonists usually say that it was they who brought us into history,” Amílcar Cabral declared in a conference in Dar es Salaam in 1965, “today we show that this is not so” (Cabral 1969, 65).

In sum, whether questioning Orientalism, binary thinking or the occlusion of agency, postcolonial theory aims to interrogate all the “impressive ideological formations” and “forms of knowledge affiliated with [colonial domination]” (Said 1993, 9). This would include sociological knowledge. It is well known, for instance, that classical sociological thinkers like Marx, Weber, and Durkheim effectually portrayed non-Western societies in their theories as homogeneous essences, blanketing over “inter-group complexity and differences” and transforming the non-West into a “generalized ‘other’” (Chua 2008, 1183; Connell 1997). They likewise portrayed non-Western societies as static and backwards, hence reserving dynamism, social creativity and energy and enlightenment for European societies alone (Magubane 2005, 94; Zimmerman 2006). Said (1979, 153–156, 259) himself discussed these Orientalist strands of thought in the work of classical theorists.

We could also notice the related “law of division” in sociology: an analytic bifurcation of metropole from colony, the “East” from the “West,” the “domestic” from the “foreign,” the inside from the outside, and so on. Note, for instance, that Durkheim’s (1984) theory of social solidarity was dependent upon colonialism: it was through data on so-called “primitive peoples” that he differentiated between organic and mechanical solidarity. But he never incorporated colonial societies as social types into his analysis—even though, in his time, most of the world’s societies were either imperial societies or colonized societies. Nor did he recognize how those very societies were interconnected: how, for instance, those societies that he called “organic” were actually industrial imperial societies whose very existence was shaped by if not dependent upon the colonial societies they ruled and whose so-called “mechanical” solidarity was kept intact deliberately for the purposes of colonial rule. Durkheim

instead sees “mechanical” societies as isolated spatially from colonialism, and temporally relegates them to the past. He bifurcates into two societies that were inextricably connected, hence cutting off vital social relations across space.

Various strands of sociological thought also repress colonialism from their accounts and thereby fail to appreciate the agency of colonized and postcolonial populations. Just as Du Bois had charged historians for writing Africa out of world history, so, too, did Durkheim and other classical social theorists write colonialism out of its accounts, agenda, and analytic infrastructure. As Boatcă and Costa (2010, 16) puts it, “key moments of Western modernity, for which the sociological approach was supposed to offer an explanation, were considered to be the French Revolution and the English-led Industrial Revolution, but not Western colonial politics or the accumulation of capital through the Atlantic Slave Trade and the overseas plantation economy.” This suppression reproduces the very “law of division” that Said lamented while falling prey to the imperial episteme’s failure to appreciate the contributions to history made by dominated groups.

A good example of these limitations in conventional sociological theory and research can be found in accounts of diffusion in “World Society” theory and research. In advancing his World Society perspective, Meyer (1999, 138) claims that modernity originates in the metropolitan core and then diffuses throughout the rest of the world-system. This theory, by its very categorical scheme, centers Europe as the origin of all things and makes Europe the prime agent. It overlooks both colonialism and the role of colonized peoples in making history. If the approach is able to refer to colonialism, it is obliged to portray it as the medium through which Western ideas or practices flowed upon the colonized. It thereby portrays colonized peoples as passive receptors.

Of course, we know that colonialism sometimes served as a mechanism through which things, practices, and ideas flowed. The problem is what gets elided in the theoretical approach. We cannot see, for instance, the ways in which the presumably essential unchanging thing that spreads might get refashioned or reconstructed along the way or how it may have been forged through interactive relations in the first place. It may very well be, for example, that our modern notion of human rights emerges from key discourses and events in the West and that the concept of rights has diffused to other parts of the world. But what would not be captured in existing sociological theories of diffusion is how the notion of rights has been able to diffuse partly as a dialectical response to Western imperial domination; or that the very reason it has been able to resonate with non-Western peoples (and, therefore, more easily diffuse) is because non-Western peoples already have their own indigenous or preexisting local discourses of rights from which to work, and so there is an active reception and engagement on the part of colonized peoples rather than passive adoption. In other words, the problematic assumption, reflected in the theory, is that diffusion always and only happens when it is from the West to the Rest, and the flow is unidirectional rather than interactive.

These are just some of the ways in which sociology can be rightly situated firmly within the imperial episteme, and therefore how sociology does not escape the problems pinpointed by postcolonial thought. Yet not all of sociology would suffer from these critiques registered by postcolonial thought. Relational sociology, through its critique of substantialism, in many ways escapes the limitations of imperial episteme. Fittingly, there is a strong tradition within postcolonial thought of relying upon, deploying, and cultivating relational ontologies and analyses. A postcolonial relationalism is already available.

2 POSTCOLONIAL RELATIONALISM

Postcolonial theory itself manifests relational thinking. Much of its epistemic critique derives from an implicit relationalism, and its analytic strategies follow the imperatives of relational sociology. Consider postcolonial literary criticism, such as in the work of the philosopher and literary critic Walter D. Mignolo (2013). Advancing a “decolonial” approach to knowledge (which for our purposes is interchangeable with “postcolonial”), Mignolo critiques the conventional comparative method in literature. That comparative method obliges us to separate different literary texts as representing ontologically distinct and sequestered “nations” or “cultures.” It also implies that the observers are separate from those nations or cultures. On these counts, the conventional comparative method embodies the “European frame of modernity,” and comparison is exactly how European imperialism operated (2013, 114). “Overall, the major implicit motivation behind comparative methodology ... was to consolidate Europe, in the line of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, as the epistemic center of the world” (2013, 112).

To overcome this problem and thereby develop a more critical approach, Mignolo (2013, 112) asks instead: “But what if, in trying to compare two or more entities, we attempt to relate them? What would be the consequences of relating instead of comparing?” Finding relations between texts, and recognizing the observers’ embeddedness in those relations, constitute Mignolo’s decolonial approach. Such an analysis would not be “interested in similarities and differences” between putatively separate entities but rather “relations and hierarchies between entities, regions, languages, religions, ‘literatures’, people, knowledges, economies, and the like” (Mignolo 2013, 114). This approach thereby focuses “not on two assumed autonomous entities to be observed and compared” but rather “the entanglement, in which we, as scholars, are also intellectually implicated” (115). In short, Mignolo advances a sort of relational sociology as the way to overcome the limits and violences of the imperial episteme. In fact, he names it as “relational ontology” precisely, suggesting that we move from an “ontology of essence to a relational ontology” (113).

Mignolo notes that this relational tradition has roots in Europe.² For example, he highlights how Max Horkheimer and other Critical Theorists questioned “the ontology of essence” and instead proposed a relational ontology, one that recognized not only relations as primary (113). Yet Mignolo

adds that a relational ontology that advances a decolonial project is “not the same as the relational ontology in the frame of Western modernity with which Horkheimer was operating,” primarily because decolonial relationalism puts colonial relations front and center. It is not only that objects and knowers are constructed relationally, it is that they are constructed through colonial relations of power. Postcolonial or “decolonial thinkers,” he summarizes “are interested in uncovering hidden connections and relations between events, processes and entities in the colonial matrix of power” (Mignolo 2013, 114; my emphasis).

Relationalism is also clearly evident in the first- and second-wave’s critiques of the imperial episteme. Much of these critiques are critiques of substantialism from the standpoint of relationalism. Consider Fanon’s challenge to racial discourses in the French empire, which he saw as reflecting “epidermal” thinking. Such discourses manifest naturalizations of race, conceptualizing race as a matter of blood or stock, phenotype, and biology. Fanon, however, argued that this notion of race, and the subsequent ideas of “black” and “white,” were products not of biological essences but relations—specifically, colonial relations. For Fanon, the colonial relationship itself constructs race: the colonized exist only in relation to colonizer, and so blackness is constructed only in relation to whiteness. “For not only must the black man be black,” Fanon declares in *Black Skin, White Masks*, “he must be black in relation to the white man” (1967, 110). The very identity of “black,” and with it, the sense of inferiority which the colonized internalize or “epidermalise,” is invented by the colonial relationship:

I begin to suffer from not being a white man to the degree that the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonized native, robs me of all worth, all individuality, tells me that I am a parasite on the world, that I must bring myself as quickly as possible into step with the white world ... The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European’s feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: It is the racist who creates his inferior. (Fanon 1967 [1952], 93)

Said’s critique of Orientalism and his subsequent strategy for transcending it is probably the clearest expressions of such postcolonial relationalism. Note that Said’s critique of Orientalism is basically a critique of substantialism from the standpoint of relationalism. When Said warns of Orientalism, he is warning against the dangers of essentialism—itsself a form of substantialism (1993, 311). Orientalism suffers from turning complex societies into singular essences. The same goes for “nativism,” which Said contends is a form of “reverse Orientalism.” All such discourses are problematic because they essentialize, which is also to say they operate from a substantialist ontology. Nativism and Orientalism together embody and reproduce the “metaphysics of essences” which also takes other forms, “like negritude, Irishness, Islam and Catholicism” (1993, 228–229).

Alternatively, like Fanon, Said insists upon the relational construction of all such identities. Both the “Orient” and the “Occident” exist only in relation to each other. “As much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other” (Said 1979, 5). And why? As Said (1995, 35) avers, “the development and maintenance of every culture require the existence of another different and competing alter ego. The construction of identity ... involves the construction of opposites and ‘others’.”

It is arguably difficult to find a clearer statement of a relational ontology in the humanities than this, and it follows that Said’s analytic strategy for transcending the imperial episteme and its substantialism is to enlist relational analysis. In suggesting ways of overcoming Orientalism and its related “law of division,” Said proposes instead a “contrapuntal perspective” that reveals “overlapping territories” and “intertwined histories” (1993, xxviii, 36). He explains: “If I have insisted on integration and connections between the past and present, between imperializer and imperialized, between culture and imperialism, I have done so not to level or reduce differences, but rather to convey a more urgent sense of the interdependence between things.” He continues:

So vast and yet so detailed is imperialism as an experience with crucial cultural dimensions, that we must speak of overlapping territories, intertwined histories common to men and women, whites and non-whites, dwellers in the metropolis and on the peripheries, past as well as present and future; these territories and histories can only be seen from the perspective of the whole of secular human history. (1993, 61)

The strategy is deceitfully simple. If the imperial episteme’s law of division cuts the world up into separate entities, Said’s postcolonial approach starts by reconnecting the separated parts. This means recognizing that the “experiences of ruler and ruled [colonizer and colonized] were not so easily disentangled” (Said 2003; Said 1993, 20). In other words, this “contrapuntal” approach is itself a relational strategy.

For Said, this relational or “contrapuntal” approach is partly a literary approach, a way of reading texts. Contrapuntal analysis means reading texts “not univocally but contrapuntally, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominant discourse acts” (1993, 59). For instance, a contrapuntal literary analysis would mine texts to find constitutive relations and interdependencies between metropole and colony, or dominant culture and subordinate culture. Understanding an English novel contrapuntally involves contextualizing the novel within a bigger “history of colonization, resistance, and native nationalism” (1993, 59). And this tactic of reading underscores not just the English characters of the narrative but also the otherwise hidden histories of colonization and subaltern agency that stage those

characters' trials and tribulations (1993, 51). Said accordingly rereads Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* to show how England's overseas possessions structured the narrative. In his reading, slavery on West Indian plantations provided the wealth of the English estate in the novel. Slavery is thus shown to be intimately connected with the lives of protagonists like Fanny Price far off in England (1993, 80–95). The “principal aim” of this “contrapuntal” strategy, Said (1993, 15) stresses, “is not to separate but to connect.”

But more than a literary approach, Said's postcolonial strategy of contrapuntal analysis also insinuates a relational sociology. For Said, contrapuntal analysis has other possibilities besides just offering a way to read novels. Said suggests that it could be used to craft new histories and narratives, such as those about English or French identity. These identities would be approached analytically “not as god-given essences, but as results of collaboration between African history and the study of Africa in England ... or between the study of French history and the reorganization of knowledge during the First Empire.” Said explains further: “In an important sense, we are dealing with the formation of cultural identities understood not as essentializations ... but as contrapuntal ensembles, for it is the case that no identity can ever exist by itself and without an array of opposites, negatives, oppositions” (Said 1993, 52). Furthermore, Said goes on to suggest that contrapuntal analysis is pregnant with political possibilities, enabling us to better realize the goal of crafting new postcolonial knowledge. “[B]y looking at the different experiences contrapuntally,” he explained, “I shall try to formulate an alternative both to politics of blame and to the even more destructive politics of confrontation and hostility” (1993, 19).

Again, the relationalism is palpable here, but it does more than allow postcolonial critiques of Orientalism and the law of division. By carefully recounting the ways in which Europe and the Rest, West and East, colonizer and colonized were constituted ideologically, discursively, and materially by their relations with each another through contrapuntal analysis, this relationalism also allows for a certain type of agency on the part of the colonized to be retrieved. Contrapuntality adumbrates how colonized peoples have helped constitute “the West” and, indeed, modernity itself. It serves to incorporate the subaltern into historical narratives and social analysis in a way that substantialism does not. Whereas substantialism would posit a distinct essential “European” history untouched by outside influences, a contrapuntal approach in the mode of relational thought would recognize how that history has been connected to and shaped by those presumably “outside” of Europe's history. It would show how the subaltern has contributed to European modernity, even as substantialism would analytically repress the relations by which those contributions occurred.

In short, postcolonial thought here is firmly planted on anti-substantialist ground, to be replaced with contrapuntal analysis. Contrapuntal analysis for Said offered a way of thinking that did not fall prey to the imperial episteme's binarisms and related essentialisms. But contrapuntal analysis is merely another name for relational sociology. “In an important sense,” he writes, in discussing

his approach for understanding English or French identity, “we are dealing with the formation of cultural identities understood not as essentializations ... but as contrapuntal ensembles, for it is the case that no identity can ever exist by itself and without an array of opposites, negatives, oppositions” (Said 1993, 52). In their musings regarding relationalism, Dewey and Bentley (1949, 112) clarify that relationalism involves “the seeing together ... of what before had been seen in separations and held severally apart.” How better to describe post-colonial theory’s strategy for overcoming the limits of the imperial episteme? In this sense, relational sociology and postcolonial thought are not only compatible; they are interdependent and can be mutually beneficial.

3 FIELDS OF REVOLUTION: AN EXAMPLE

But what would contrapuntal analysis actually look like in sociological research and theory? To better see the compatibility between postcolonial relationalism and relational sociology, here I critically reconsider the French Revolution from the standpoint of postcolonial relationalism, and I use Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory as the sociological counterpart to Said’s contrapuntal analysis.

The French Revolution of 1789–99 has long been heralded as a monumental event in modern history. It has figured as a “story of the origins of the modern world” that establishes European identity as modern (Bhambra 2007, 107). Brubaker (1992, 35) summarizes the long-standing view that the French Revolution “invented” modern national citizenship, bringing “together for the first time” ideals of civil equality, political rights, and the “link between citizenship and nationhood.” Others expound its global and universal character, a centerpiece in the history of all of humanity. Historical sociologists Skocpol and Kestnbaum (1990, 27) declare: “The French Revolution was, is—and ever will be ... a truly world-historical event.” Once the valiant French revolutionaries invented and codified this universalist language, it then spread to other parts of the globe to make the modern world.

This scholarly story about the French Revolution as the center of modern human history sits happily with dominant social theories. It fits with the categories and logic of diffusion stories produced by the World Society approach. Highlighting the “Western” origins of global political ideas, this theory would treat France as the “mother and repository of the universalist language of rights” (Dubois 2000, 22). It would then conceptualize the French Revolution as the source from which all things liberal and universal flowed. Even critical theorists are not immune to these tempting grandiose characterizations. As Bhabha (1994, 224) notes, Michel Foucault ethnocentrically treats the Revolution as the paradigmatic “sign of modernity.”

Is there another way to think of this? Consider C.L.R. James’s *The Black Jacobins* (1989 [1963]). Rather than putting the French Revolution, or indeed European revolutions, at the center of history, James puts the Haitian Revolution at the center, thus inviting a reconsideration of the French Revolution by virtue of his analysis of the Haitian Revolution. James reminds

us that France was economically dependent upon its overseas colonies, such as Saint-Domingue, which, along with Guadeloupe and Martinique, had been among the world's most lucrative slave-holding colonies. He explains that the fortunes created from the slave trade supported the revolutionary bourgeoisie; and many of the National Assembly members relied upon colonial trade for their own wealth (James 1989 [1963], 31–61). In this sense, liberty in Paris depended upon slavery in the colonies. James further reveals how the French Revolution was connected to the Haitian slave revolt in critical ways. In fact, it was the slave revolt that compelled the French revolutionaries to rethink their own beloved concepts of freedom and liberty. The revolutionaries previously had discarded the notion that *liberté* should apply to blacks or mulattoes. Robespierre was among many who did not even support the notion that blacks should have equal rights. But the slave insurgency changed everything. Due to the slave revolt the Parisian revolutionaries eventually universalized their otherwise restricted operationalization of rights and liberty (James 1989 [1963], 119–121). Directly inspired by James's approach, historians have built upon James's insights, further highlighting their relevance. "If we live in a world," writes one such historian, "in which democracy is meant to exclude no one, it is in no small part the actions of those slaves in Saint Domingue who insisted that human rights were theirs too" (Dubois 2004b, 3).

As a historical narrative, James's story fulfills the postcolonial challenge of overcoming the "law of division" while insinuating a contrapuntal approach. James's historical narrative reveals an interdependence between metropole and colony. But in terms of relational sociology, one way to think about James's narrative is to consider it in terms of Bourdieu's field theory. In Bourdieu's (1991) conceptualization, a "field" is a social space of relations defined by struggle over capitals. It is an arena of struggle in which actors compete for a variety of valued resources, that is, various species of "capital" that are potentially convertible to each other. The concept field thus refers to the configuration of actors (the multidimensional "field of forces") and the classificatory schemes and rules of the game, which actors use as they strategize and struggle for position (i.e. the "rules of the game") (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 97). Field theory thus offers a relational rather than a substantialist view of the social. "To think in terms of fields," explain Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, 96), "is to think relationally." The field concept is also relevant because although it typically has been used to refer to intranational or local arenas of action (like a professional field), it also can refer to terrains of action that cut across national boundaries. The boundaries of fields are at times blurry but always potentially extensive; the boundaries themselves are often the site of struggle and, therefore, can expand, contract, or be redrawn. This means that, analytically, fields might not just be restricted to sites within a single society or nation. We might thus think of transnational or trans-, intra-, or inter-imperial fields; fields of interaction and struggle between actors (over different species of capital) that extend across conventional nation-state boundaries (Go and Krause 2016).

In terms of the French Revolution and its relation to the Haitian Revolution, a fields approach offers an angle that more closely approximates James's analysis and hence a contrapuntal perspective than conventional bifurcated accounts. Rather than seeing unilateral flows of influence from France outward, a fields approach urges us to consider revolutionary actors in wide arenas of struggle and conflict, interacting and (re)shaping other actors and one another. To be sure, the Parisian revolutionaries were not just struggling against conservative loyalists at home. They were embedded in wider transnational, inter- and intra-imperial fields of interaction that included challenges from imperial rivals like Britain and potential problems in France's colonies in the Caribbean, not least Saint-Domingue. Expanding the lens to include these wider fields is exactly James's approach in *The Black Jacobins*. The intra-imperial economic field that included the Caribbean colonies was vital for the Revolution, as James (1963) points out. And there was also a wider political-ideological field wherein Parisian revolutionaries interacted with a wide range of political actors, including groups in the Caribbean like the *gens de couleur* (freemen of African descent), French settlers and planters, bureaucrats, and slaves. From Paris and Nantes to Saint-Domingue, all of these groups were engaged in various "struggles for position" (in Bourdieu's phrase) to define and shape the Revolution. The French Revolution became a field in itself, overlapping with and shaped by the other fields. And it included not just revolutionaries in France but also colonists and colonized peoples.

With this field mapped out, we can begin to reconnect and reconstruct rather than separate. For instance, one of the key issues at stake in the revolutionary field was citizenship. According to conventional accounts, the French Revolution is to be noted for connecting citizenship to nationhood and articulating both with a universalist language of rights. But what gets overlooked in these accounts is the question of who was to be granted full rights and citizenship. What about, for instance, the *gens de couleur*? Or the slaves in France's Caribbean colonies, like Saint-Domingue, the richest slave colony of the Americas? The matter was not discussed. Neither the Revolution of 1789 nor that of 1791 did anything about slavery. Any time the question of slavery came up in the National Assembly, it was tabled or swiftly ignored (Dubois 2004b, 74–76). This outcome surely pleased the many colonial plantation owners in the French assembly. They had been trying to keep at bay the Société des Amis des Noirs ("Society of the Friends of Blacks"), the only active political group in Paris discussing race and citizenship. Inspired by antislavery movements in Britain, the Société had been attacking the slave trade. The antislavery movement in France had nowhere near the same following as did its counterpart in Britain, and the Société restricted its initial efforts to granting citizenship to the *gens de couleur*. But its efforts nonetheless put French planters on the defensive, and so the planters funded the Club Massiac to pressure the National Assembly to work in their interests.

One of the planters' allies, M. Barnave of Dauphiné, proposed important new laws in 1790. These effectively ensured the continuance of slavery in the

colonies and prohibited even the *gens de couleur*, the black freedmen, from full citizenship status by granting colonies full autonomy. Given that the colonies were ruled by white planters, it was assumed the planters would maintain the existing slave system and the racial hierarchy that excluded *gens de couleur* from enjoying full rights. With hardly any debate, the laws came into effect in March of 1790. They essentially meant that the French constitution or, presumably, the Declaration of the Rights of Man, did not apply to the colonies. The colonies, notes Laurent Dubois (2004b, 85), were “made safe from the dangers of universalism” (see also Dubois 2004a). Thus did France perpetuate conservative tyranny, even as it supposedly originated liberal modernity? This is the sort of thing that Bhabha, in his remarks on Foucault’s valorization of the French Revolution, might refer to as “the aristocratic racism of the ancien régime” (1994, 244). It marked a “tragic lesson” that “the moral, modern disposition of mankind, enshrined in the sign of the Revolution, only fuels the archaic racial factor in the society of slavery” (Bhabha 1994, 244).

Later, the French Constitution was, indeed, extended to the colonies. The *gens de couleur* obtained active citizenship and the slaves were freed. This was radical, and it came in two steps. On April 4, 1792, the National Assembly declared that “the hommes de couleur and the nègres libres must enjoy, along with the white colons, equality of political rights.” They could finally vote in local elections and be eligible for positions (as long as they, like whites, met the regular financial criteria for “active” citizenship). The salient political distinction in the colony was no longer based upon color but upon freedmen status. It was not whether one was black or mulatto that mattered; it was whether one owned property or not. Then, later, even that distinction was obliterated. In 1793, still amidst the slave insurgency, French Republican colonial officials on the island abolished slavery, and in 1794, the National Convention ratified the decision. Slavery for the entire French empire was abolished. Slaves were no longer slaves, and the principle of liberty and active citizenship applied to all.

This was a profound transformation in the modern world. But how and why did this happen given the Parisian revolutionaries’ early recalcitrance to the extension of rights? What had changed? The answer does not lie in the benevolence of the Assembly, nor even in the work of the Société des Amis des Noirs in Paris. Rather, it lies in the agency of colonial subalterns: specifically, the slave insurgents in Saint-Domingue. Erupting in August 1791, when thousands of slaves overthrew their masters in the Northern Province, and then spreading to most of the colony by January 1792, the slave insurgency altered the revolutionary field in fundamental respects, ultimately leading to the profound transformations that existing scholars pin on the agency of the Parisian revolutionaries only. The “slave insurgents claiming Republican citizenship and racial equality during the early 1790s ultimately expanded—and ‘universalized’—the idea of rights.” The actions of slave insurgents “brought about the institutionalization of the idea that the rights of citizens were universally applicable to all people within the nation, regardless of race” (Dubois 2000, 22).

How? The answer lies in the slave insurgency, which transformed the field entirely. The slave revolt had posed a radical threat to the Revolution: without stability and order in the colonies, the revolutionary state's wealth and power would be undercut. The Parisian revolutionaries now had to do all they could to stop it. In order to enlist their support, the Parisian revolutionaries decided to finally grant *the gens de couleur*, and the so-called mulattoes in the colony, the rights they had been demanding. The decree granting them their rights expressly noted that the decree was in response to the "uprising of the slaves" and would create unity among citizens against the slaves (Dubois 2004b, 154). It would put freed blacks and mulattoes on equal footing with white planters, aligning them against the insurgent slaves. The irony is not lost on historians. The "only way to save the colony," James (1989 [1963], 115) observes, "was to give the Mulattoes their rights." The National Assembly, adds Dubois (2004b, 131), had "to grant racial equality in order to save slavery." Ironic or not, this extension of active citizenship to freed blacks was a strategic measure amidst struggles within the imperial field, a relational action rather than one that flowed from the benevolence of Paris.

On the one hand, it is the case that the insurgent slaves had been partly inspired by the language of rights articulated by the Parisian revolutionaries. On the other hand, the Parisian revolutionaries did not extend the constitution until the unexpected slave revolt compelled them to do so. In the terms of Bourdieu's field analysis, the slave insurgency turned the *gens de couleur* and mulattoes into a valued resource to the Parisian revolutionaries, whereas they had not been one before. Due to the agency of the once silent slaves in Saint-Domingue, the *gens de couleur* suddenly became political capital for Paris. Or as historian Robin Blackburn put it, the argument for free-colored's political rights did not resonate due to French Republic ideals alone. It "had been transformed by the sight of the smoke rising from burnt-out plantation buildings and cane fields" (Blackburn 1989, 206).

The ultimate extension of the constitution to the slaves also can be apprehended in terms of relational field dynamics. For this, there was an additional field at play: the inter-imperial field, which included the rival empires of Spain and England. In January of 1793, the Republican revolutionaries executed Louis XVI, and the Spanish and British monarchies declared war on France. They wisely had their eyes on Saint-Domingue: as the heart of the French empire, taking it would be decisive for the tide of the inter-imperial war. "If the British completed the conquest of San Domingo," James (1989 [1963], 136) writes, "the colonial empire of revolutionary France was gone; its vast resources would be directed into British pockets, and Britain would be able to return to Europe and throw army and navy against the revolution." It was so important that England dispatched enough troops to leave itself defenseless against an invasion from the Continent (1989 [1963], 135).

Had the war broken out a decade earlier, in the absence of the slave revolt, this might have been a typical war. But the fact of the slave insurgency, with thousands upon thousands of armed blacks clamoring for freedom, changed the field significantly: having the support of the insurgent slaves was now vital

political and military capital. Therefore, amidst this inter-imperial struggle, the French intra-imperial struggle over the meaning of the Revolution took a radical turn. The French Republic eventually offered full freedom to the slaves to encourage them to fight off the foreign empires banging on the door. It began when the Republic's Civil Commissioner in Saint-Domingue, L ger-F licit  Sonthonax, granted official freedom to all slaves in an effort to win them over. He previously had pleaded with the Convention to "do something for the slaves" because it would give the Republic new allies in the inter-imperial war and against monarchical loyalists (quoted in Dubois 2004b, 154). As the war erupted, though, he took the initiative himself, declaring that any slaves who took up arms and fought with him would become "equal to all freemen" and be granted "all the rights belonging to French citizens" (ibid., 157). His official decree later freed all slaves in the colony. The decree began by stating: "Men are born and live free and equal in rights" (ibid., 163). Finally, the National Convention in France ratified the decree, but only as a strategic measure to ensure that the slaves would fight for France. James (1989 [1963], 142) summarizes: "by ratifying the liberty which the blacks had won," the Convention gave the ex-slaves a "concrete interest in the struggle against British and Spanish reaction." And it gave France the power it needed to fend off its imperial rivals. "The English are done for," shouted Georges Jacques Danton after the ratification at the Convention, "Pitt and his plots are riddled" (ibid., 142).

Standard sociological accounts of diffusion would compel us to think of metropolitan France as the center from which the innovative ideas of modernity emanated. This would accord with conventional histories that portray slave emancipation, as Blackburn (2006, 643–644) notes, as something that flowed easily "from the proclamation of the principles of 1789 and the Rights of Man and the Citizen" to the colonies. It is true that Enlightenment thinkers in France played a part in conceiving of the idea of universal rights. But whereas diffusion stories are obliged to stop there, a fields approach in the spirit of James's empirical analysis and Bourdieu's theoretical apparatus enables us to see this and subsequent processes for their relational aspects. A field is not a space wherein ideas or action flows unidirectionally from one point to another. Rather than having us search for metropolitan origins, a field analysis beckons us to map diverse stances and positions in relation to each other. And rather than an outward flow it posits interactions between actors engaged in struggle and exchange, alliance and confrontation. While not denying power differentials (i.e. differential access to economic, social, or symbolic capital) across actors, it nonetheless highlights mutual constitution and interdependent action between them. Unlike conventional diffusion accounts, therefore, recognizing the wider field of discourse and interaction in which the Parisian revolutionaries were embedded alerts us to the contrapuntal dynamics to which Edward Said alluded: the "overlapping territories" that made the "French" Revolution both French and Haitian, a story of master and slave, metropole and colony. It thereby helps us better see the relationality of power relations in the imperial world, while also illuminating the shared ontological and analytic ground of relational sociology and postcolonial thought.

NOTES

1. For a more complete analysis of postcolonial theory and sociology, see Go (2016).
2. In fact, relational thinking is not purely Eurocentric in its origins. Strands of thought from outside the Western tradition also contain strong relational elements, such as various forms of Native American or “indigenous” knowledge (Wilson 2008).

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Shorelines, Seashells, and Seeds: Feminist Epistemologies, Ecological Thinking, and Relational Ontologies

Andrea Doucet

I INTRODUCTION

Mapping fields is an act of humility and of boundary making. It requires what I refer to in this chapter, as “diffractive readings,” (Barad 2007, 30) which are about “heterogeneous history, not about originals” (Haraway 1997, 273). One such reading of the beginnings of the diffuse and diverse field of feminist epistemologies recognizes the moment when Canadian feminist epistemologist and philosopher Lorraine Code asked what she later called (1998, 173) an “outrageous question” in a piece entitled “Is the sex of the knower epistemologically significant?” (Code 1981). A similar line of questioning—the “exploration of feminist concerns and insights” and how they might be “brought to bear on epistemology, metaphysics, methodology, and philosophy of science”—was taken up a few years later in a classic collection of essays that sought to challenge “the philosophic fields that were purportedly completely immune to social influences?” (Harding and Hintikka 2003, xii). Since these instigating contributions, and across the past four decades, the field of feminist epistemologies has been called an “oxymoron” (Alcoff and Potter 1993, 1), “both a paradox and a necessity” (Longino 1993, 327), and “marginalized, if not invisible, in ‘mainstream’ epistemologies” (Rooney 2011, 3). More recently, Phyllis Rooney confirmed that feminist epistemology is still treated with “hostility and dismissal” in wider “epistemology ‘proper’” circles (Rooney 2011, 6). Yet in spite of this contested history, feminist epistemologies have made seminal contributions to theories and practices of knowledge making, to subjectivities, and to relational epistemologies, relational methodologies, and, more recently, relational ontologies.

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In this chapter, I argue with Rooney (2011, 14–15) that “the marginality of feminist epistemologies has also translated into a ‘metaepistemic advantage’ in that it affords specific insights into the limited understandings of epistemology.” Here, I highlight how in its earliest iterations, as laid out in Sandra Harding’s well-known trifold classification (feminist standpoint, feminist empiricism, or as postmodern/transitional epistemologies), theoretical, methodological, and epistemological relationalities were central. More recently, relational ontologies have become increasingly important in feminist epistemological work as more and more cross-disciplinary scholars engage with what it means to work within the “ontological turn” and address some of the performative, posthuman, and non-representational ramifications that are part of this “turn.” While this is a large field, I work with one key contributor to these debates: Canadian feminist philosopher and epistemologist Lorraine Code.

This chapter is mapped in the following way. First, I offer a brief sketch of feminist epistemologies, arguing that they provide key foundations for more recent epistemological approaches. As Heidi Grasswick (2011, xx), puts it: “Not only are feminist epistemologists mining the resources of these approaches for their own projects, but their insights are also contributing significantly to the development of these approaches themselves.” Second, I argue that Lorraine Code is an excellent example of such moves while she also exemplifies entanglements between ethics, epistemologies, and ontologies, or what Karen Barad has astutely named as “ethico-onto-epistemology” (Barad 2007, 185). Working with Code’s four-decade body of work (e.g., Code 1981, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995, 2006, 2014) and her ecological thinking approach, I highlight how ecological thinking, as an epistemologically and ontologically relational approach, radically reconfigures knowledge making, subjectivity, and our epistemic responsibilities. Drawing on her metaphorical and literal ecological examples—from notions of “affecting and being affected” from Deleuzian ethology, Rachel Carson’s provocative insights on empty shells on shorelines, and seeds and socio-cultural roots—I demonstrate what it means to work with relational epistemologies and relational ontologies in knowledge making.

2 DIFFRACTIVE READINGS OF FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGIES

It is important to say at the outset that my reading of, and writing about, all the approaches and authors mentioned in this chapter are guided by diffractive readings. This approach to reading embodies the relational approach I articulate in this chapter. To use Code’s words, I move away from “a top-down, aloof, and interchangeable spectator model” (Code 2006, 285) towards an intra-active, relational, engaged, and constantly unfolding approach to reading. As Barad notes,

Diffraction does not fix what is the object and what is the subject in advance, and so, unlike methods of reading one text or set of ideas against another where one serves as a fixed frame of reference, diffraction involves reading insights through

one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge: how different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how those exclusions matter. (Barad 2007, 30)

To read diffractively is to read generously and “to read through, not against; it means reading texts intra-actively though one another, enacting new patterns of engagement” (Barad 2009, 14; see also Code 2006; Mauthner 2015).

My mapping of feminist epistemologies begins with Sandra Harding (1986, 1991), who set the tone for at least a quarter-century of writing on feminist methodologies and feminist epistemologies when she laid out what she called three “successor epistemologies”: feminist standpoint epistemologies, feminist empiricism, and transitional (postmodern) epistemologies. While these epistemological categories have since given way to a wider set of feminist epistemologies, I briefly review them below in order to illuminate the enduring relational concerns that were and still are, addressed by feminist researchers working within these traditions.

Feminist standpoint approaches, first introduced in the 1970s and 1980s (Harding 1986; Hartsock 1983, 2003; Hill Collins 1986, 2000; Rose 1983; Smith 1987), evidenced at least four relational concerns. First, drawing on or connecting with Donna Haraway’s (1988) concept of “situated knowledges,” such approaches posited that all knowledges and knowledge making processes are constituted by the relationality of the standpoints of both the researcher and the researched. Second, standpoint feminists claimed from the outset that women’s narratives or standpoints must also be located and analyzed within broader relations of ruling or social structures (Smith 1987, 1999). Third, feminist standpoint epistemology understands standpoint as a relational accomplishment (Hartsock 1998) that is constructed through “historically shared, group-based experiences” (Hill Collins 1997, 375). Finally, the work of Dorothy Smith (1989) and Hilary Rose (1983) explored how women’s responsibility for children and emotional and relational labor was epistemologically significant in that these responsibilities led to “the exclusion of women from the conceptualization of sociological or philosophical problems” (Harding 2008, 340).

A second strand of feminist epistemologies, *feminist empiricism*, is an approach that holds “that sexism and androcentrism are social biases correctable by stricter adherence to the existing methodological norms of scientific inquiry” (Harding 1986, 24). For many commentators, feminist empiricism has been characterized in at least three ways that highlight how relations and relationality are central to its investigations. First, it is *contextualist* in its view that all observation, “facts,” and “findings” are rooted in values, including political values (Rolin 2011). A second point is that “knowers” are not individuals, but communities, and more specifically, epistemic and epistemological communities (Campbell 1998; Longino 1990, 1993, 2002; Nelson 1990, 1993). Finally, feminist empiricism challenged enduring binaries, calling instead for relationalities between, for example, the context of discovery/context of justification distinction, the fact/value distinction, and the traditional distinction between cognitive and social values (Intemann 2010, 781).

The third long-standing feminist epistemological tradition, identified by Harding as *feminist postmodernism (or transitional epistemologies)* emerged through intersections between feminism and postmodernism. It called for articulations of a multitude of perspectives, none of which could claim objectivity or transcend into the “god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere” (Haraway 1991, 189). While postmodernism and poststructuralism invited complexity into feminist theories and epistemologies, it also introduced tensions within feminism; some argued that these approaches could weaken feminist collective and relational politics (e.g. Benhabib 1995). Over time, however, these concerns became less urgent as feminist theorists and epistemologists began to outline ways of combining relativism and realism, including what Code (1991, 251) called “mitigated relativism,” through versions of “soft,” “skeptical,” or “affirmative” postmodern positions (e.g. Rosenau 2002). Situated knowledges is a central concern in feminist postmodernist approaches—as it is in feminist standpoint approaches—but greater attention is given to discourses that shape women’s accounts and constitute their identities.

As Harding herself predicted, the three successor epistemologies have been surpassed by other epistemological and theoretical developments (Harding 1987, 1991, 1998). Code (2008a, 188) maintains, “It is not that the categories have been transcended, but that they are not as distinct as they once seemed to be.” Since the beginning of the millennium, several notable social theory “turns” have infused theories and practices of knowledge making, including the “material turn” (e.g. Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Barad 2003, 2007; Coole and Frost 2010; Hekman 2010), the “postconstructionist turn” (Lam 2015; Lykke 2010), and the “posthumanist turn” (Braidotti 2016a, b). These “turns” have all been accompanied by deepening attention to performativity, non-representational approaches to knowledge making (e.g. Barad 2007; Bell 2012; Law 2004), and relational ontologies (e.g. Barad 2007; Code 2006; Somers 2008; Tuana 2008, forthcoming). While there is currently a multiplicity of alternative approaches and much debate and disagreement within and between them, all of them build on or intersect with feminist epistemologies; these approaches include, for example, new materialist feminisms (Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Coole and Frost 2010), transcorporeal feminism (Alaimo 2008, 2010), viscous porosity (Tuana 2008, forthcoming), agential realism (Barad 2003, 2007), relational empiricism and “ecologies of emergence” (Verran 2001, 2002, 2013), decolonizing epistemologies (Kovach 2010; Tuhiwai Smith 2012), and ecological thinking (Code 2006, 2008a, b, 2015). While all of these approaches inform my thinking, my work has been guided mainly by Code for several reasons. Like many of the approaches mentioned above, ecological thinking is an approach to knowledge making that attends to entanglements of methodology, epistemology, ontology, ethics, and politics. Code’s work also maintains inheritances from feminist epistemologies with its focus on situated knowledges, the politics of knowledge making, relational dimensions of methodologies and epistemologies, “the politics of testimony” and “epistemic marginalization” (Code 2014, 10), and epistemic responsibilities.

As I detail below, ecological thinking radically reconfigures dominant conceptions of method and knowledge making as well as our understanding of researchers as epistemic subjects with epistemic responsibilities.

3 ECOLOGICAL THINKING

Code develops her concept of ecological thinking through a “scavenger approach to epistemic resources” (Code 2011, 218), drawing on and contributing to feminist epistemologies as well as naturalized epistemologies, social epistemologies, virtue epistemologies, epistemologies of ignorance, philosophical pragmatism and contextualism, and, more recently, postcolonial and anti-racist epistemologies. Notably, it is Code’s long-standing contributions to the field of naturalized epistemologies (1981, 1987, 1991, 1995, 1996, 2006) that led her to approach epistemologies as objects of investigation (see also Hacking 2002; Law 2004). Her ecological thinking approach is thus underpinned by a sustained discussion of historical epistemologies and her argument that most knowledge making is still governed by a hegemonic “instituted social imaginary” (Code 2006, 22) of knowledge making wherein researcher scientists are witnesses who let “the facts speak for themselves” (Law 2004, 120). As Code puts it, these are “spectator epistemologies” where the knower “stands as a shadow figure invisibly and indifferently apart from discrete objects of knowledge” and “[o]bjects remain inert in and unaffected by the knowing process” (Code 2006, 41). In Haraway’s highly cited words, this is “the view from above, from nowhere” (Haraway 1988, 589).

Yet in spite of this hegemonic instituted social imaginary of knowledge making, Code argues that many “instituting” imaginaries of knowledge making are continually emerging as forms of “radical social critique” (Code 2006, 32). One such instituting imaginary is ecological thinking, a “revised mode of engagement with knowledge, subjectivity, politics, ethics, science, citizenship, and agency that pervades and reconfigures theory and practice” (Code 2006, 5). Pulling together her decades of work in various epistemological traditions, ecological theories, and Deleuzian “ethology” (Deleuze 1988), Code maintains that ecological thinking reconfigures a wide series of relationships: epistemological, ontological, ethical, scientific, and political relationships, as well as those between and among living beings and between human and non-human subjects and worlds.

3.1 *Knowledge Making and Epistemic Responsibilities*

Ecological thinking, on my reading, embodies a non-representational and epistemologically and ontologically relational approach to knowledges and knowledge making. It is less about gathering data or information and more focused on engagement, intervention, and the making of just and cohabitable lives. Code argues that ecological thinking “carries with it a large measure of responsibility ... [in that] it could translate into wider issues of citizenship and politics”; it is “about imagining, crafting, articulating, [and] endeavouring to enact

principles of ideal cohabitation” (Code 2006, 24; emphasis added). This translates, in turn, to a focus on how specific epistemic practices can bring forth different knowledges, realities, social worlds, and effects. That is, we are not just making knowledges but we are “reconfiguring” or “articulating” worlds (Code 2006, 48; Rouse 2009, 2015), “material-semiotic realities” (Barad 2007; Haraway 1997), or “worldlings” (e.g., Ingold 2011, 2013; Stewart 2010; see also Heidegger 1971).

Ecological thinking challenges us to think very differently about our positioning as researchers. It underlines how researchers are responsive to and responsible for their participation in and accounting of unfolding worlds and relationally constituted knowledges. Broadly put, this shifts our roles from, on the one hand, data gathering, “collecting stories” (Code 2011, 217), and representing data, to, on the other hand, “intervening” in (Hacking 2002; Verran 2002, 2013) and “intra-acti[ing]” (Barad 2007) *with* data and with research subjects and their worlds. Here, knowledge making “is always an interpretive, engaged, contingent, fallible engagement” (Haraway 2000, 167) where we are “casting our lot with some ways of life and not others” (Haraway 1997, 36). This kind of engagement and commitment—where one puts their “subjectivity ... on the line, and [assumes] responsibility for what and how he/she claims to know” (Code 2006, 275) is part of Code’s forty-year (e.g. Code 1983, 1987, 1991, 2006, 2015) evolving approach to epistemic responsibilities.

Epistemic responsibility recognizes that knowledge making is an intervention that always has consequences. As Barad (2007, 37) writes, questions of accountability, responsibility, and realism are “not about representations of an independent reality but about the real consequences, interventions, creative possibilities, and responsibilities of intra-acting within and as part of the world.” Researchers work with a “politics of possibilities” (Barad 2007, 46) rather than with representations and we do so in specific sets of relations and conditions of possibilities. This leads to a reconfigured conception of objectivity: one that is rooted in reflexivity or in diffraction, which underscores epistemological and ontological relationality and accountability in knowledge making, with all its effects. It also reconfigures notions of objectivity. As Barad notes, “Objectivity is simultaneously an epistemological, ontological, and axiological issue, and questions of responsibility and accountability lie at the core of scientific practice” (Barad 2007, 37). In Code’s terms (2006, 219), researchers, as knowers, must “learn how to acknowledge and take responsibility for the implications and effects of situation, to recognize the impossibility of an innocent positioning, while striving to achieve a politically-epistemically responsible one.”

3.2 *Ecological Metaphors, Relational Epistemologies, Relational Ontologies*

Code’s choice of the descriptor “ecological” is provocative and radical. She admits that she did initially worry about its applicability: “The most delicate tasks in making such a model epistemologically workable are, first, that of

achieving an appropriate balance between literal and metaphorical readings of the governing concept—ecology—so as to benefit from ecological science without running aground on details of analogy/disanalogy with specific ecological events” (Code 1996, 13). Code is also clear that while ecology refers to practices, subjects, concepts, and objects of investigation, her main purpose is to “propose an analogy with the *ecological model of knowledge*” (Code 1996, 15; emphasis added). In this section of the chapter, I work with literal and metaphorical ecological images and examples (as Code does) to develop three strands of thought that widen and deepen what it means to work with an approach to knowledge making that entangles relational epistemologies and ontologies. These strands focus on how Code draws on the Deleuzian ethology of affecting and being affected as a way of thinking about knowledge making as deeply relational processes; the ontological relationality of all things; and the ontological notion that what something *is* depends on its wide socio-cultural nexus.

4 AFFECTING AND BEING AFFECTED

Code roots her work partly in Deleuzian ethology. As she puts it, ecological thinking is “animated, in part, by Gilles Deleuze’s conception of ethology, as the capacities for affecting and being affected that characterize each thing” (Deleuze 1988, 125–126; cited in Code 2006, 26). She argues that Deleuze extends ethology literally and metaphorically to characterize it as inquiry that studies “the compositions of relations or capacities between different things” and as “a matter of sociabilities and communities” (Deleuze 1988, 125–126). Ethology is about mapping relations between people and between people and their multilayered locations and habitats, always attending to “physicality, sociality, place, cultural institutions, materiality, corporeality” and “charting its effects, where neither ‘worlds,’ ‘beings,’ nor ‘relations’ can be presumed before the fact to be static, unchanging” (Code 2008b, 3).

This connection between ecology and ethology exemplifies a relational approach in that it explores processes of “affecting and being affected” in varied intra-active sites across time. This has implications for how we, as social scientists, approach methodological practices and matters. If relations are primary and co-constitutive, then knowledge merges in practice through relational processes and is embedded in specific processes. This also relates to sociology’s long-standing preoccupation with reflexivity, including epistemic reflexivity (e.g. Bourdieu 2004; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1993; for overviews, see Mauthner and Doucet 2003, 2008).

4.1 *From Reflexivity to Diffraction*

An ecological approach builds on these notions of epistemological reflexivity and extends them towards a concept that entangles epistemology and ontology: *diffraction*. The move beyond reflexivity is animated by the work of both Code and Barad, who build on Haraway’s conception of diffraction. Code

concur with Haraway (1997, 16) “that reflexivity as a critical practice ‘only displaces the same elsewhere, setting up worries about copy and original and the search for the authentic and really real.’” Diffraction, on the other hand, “is an optical metaphor for ‘the effort to make a difference in the world’” (Code 2006, 121; citing Haraway 1997, 16). This has many methodological implications. One is that while reflexivity is about how one positions oneself in data collection and analytic processes, these processes remain somewhat separate from the “already there” data that is collected. As Barad (2007, 157) notes: “Objects are not already there; they emerge through specific practices.” Diffraction, however, refers to how we are deeply entangled within the making of data. Moreover, while reflexivity tends to stop once the researcher’s location has been articulated, diffractive readings and analyses “rel[y] on the researcher’s ability to make matter intelligible in new ways and to imagine other possible realities presented in the data” (Taguchi 2012, 267). This entails a process of constantly working with intra-active differences, rather than assuming that we can capture or mirror data that is “out there” waiting to be found in a place where processes of affecting and being affected do not exist.

5 “TO UNDERSTAND THE SHORE, IT IS NOT ENOUGH... TO PICK UP AN EMPTY SHELL...”¹

In order to demonstrate ecological imaginaries in practice, Code develops several case studies in *Ecological Thinking* (2006) and in her subsequent work (e.g. Code 2008b, 2012, 2015). The most notable, and indeed very moving case, is about Rachel Carson. Bestselling and award-winning author of *The Sea Around Us* (1951) and the infamous *Silent Spring* (1962), which launched her as one of the founders of the American environmental movement that challenged pesticide companies and the use of DDT in crop spraying, Carson is presented by Code (2006, 38) “as exemplary for ecological knowing” and as a “pathbreaking practitioner of twentieth-century ecological thinking and practice” (Code 2006, 36; see also Code 2012, 2014).

From Carson’s book, *The Edge of the Sea*, Code borrows the following idea: “To understand the shore, it is not enough to catalogue its life” or “pick up an empty shell and say ‘this is a murex’ or ‘that is an angel wing’” (Carson 1955; cited in Lear 1977, 275; quoted in Code 2006, 50; emphasis added). Code uses the relation between an empty shell and the larger shoreline to make several points about how we come to know and classify objects, illustrating the complexity in naming, classifying, and constructing taxonomies and categories. She explains that “entities, organisms, and events do not fall naturally into categories and kinds”; rather, “classifications are multiply contestable” partly because what something *is* depends on “the habitats, patterns, or processes in which seemingly distinct organisms and entities interact” (Code 2006, 50). Through cross-disciplinary and creative leaps, Code (2006, 50) contends that these “issues translate, by analogy, into practices of classifying people, by race, gender, physical ability, age, and so on, with comparable tendencies to reify, solidify into stereotyped

identities.” She argues that instead of working to “achieve, create, or impose a certain order,” ecological thinking “maps it differently” (Code 2006, 50). This mapping “requires understanding how those specificities work together” and addressing “the explanatory power of an attentive concentration on local particulars [and] specificities” while also seeking to “generate responsible remappings across wider, heterogeneous epistemic terrains” (Code 2006, 50).

Ecological thinking also connects with a central tenet of relational ontologies: non-representationalism. Barad’s (2007, 55) work is helpful here in that she describes representationalism as “the view that the world is composed of individual entities with separately determinate properties.” An ontologically relational approach is non-representational because it focuses on how things are brought together and considers each part/object/subject and related practices as contingent on time, place, and whole-part relations.

5.1 “Intra-action” and “Nothing Comes Without Its World”

An ecological perspective reminds us that every entity exists multiply, and is intertwined and intradependent with other objects; an object is ontologically multiple and relational as it cannot be fully defined outside of its entanglement in any one particular habitat or “assemblage.” Put differently, what any object (be it a human, non-human or posthuman subject, a concept, a narrative, or “narrated identity” [Somers 1994]) *is*, what it can be, what it does, and what it becomes is constituted by and contingent on its fluid relations with other objects and its wider ecologies. In Haraway’s words: “nothing comes without its world” (Haraway 1997, 137; cited in de la Bellacasa 2012, 198). This means that we are never studying individual objects but, rather, relationships, which coheres with the oft-cited point in relational sociology that social realities are not static “things,” but “dynamic, continuous, and processual ... unfolding relations” (Emirbayer 1997, 281). As Bruce Curtis notes, this is a “sociology of relations and practices, rather than of essences and objects” (Curtis 2002, 43). Powell (2013, 190) concurs that it means treating “relations as constitutive of objects” while also holding to the view that we “take relations as our fundamental unit of observation.” Moreover, Powell (2013, 203) also adds, “If relations constitute all objects, then one can never know objects independently of the relations through which one encounters them.”

Feminist theories of subjectivity (Benhabib 1995; McNay 2003) and early feminist work on the ethics of care (Held 1993; Sevenhuijsen 1998; Tronto 1993, 1995) have long highlighted “relational subjectivities” and emphasized the interdependence of human relations. Yet the ecological approach espoused by Code goes much further in thinking about how subjects and objects of investigation are not only *inter-dependent*, but *intra-dependent* and intra-active. It focuses on what Barad calls “intra-action” or the “entanglement” of the various parts of our “objects of investigation.” Nancy Tuana (2008, 2001, 238–239) expresses this idea as “a world of complex phenomenon in dynamic relationality.” Powell (2013, 187) notes that it is “an epistemology that

contains no residual dualist elements and therefore treats all social phenomena, including individuals themselves, as constituted through relations.” An ecological approach is therefore also an ontological position on the relationality of being and becoming.

6 “FROM SEEDS TO INSECTS TO HUMAN BEINGS”²: SOCIOCULTURAL NEXUS AND RELATIONAL ONTOLOGIES

One further way that Code explicates relational ontologies and knowledge making is through her metaphor of seeds. As she puts it, this means “(s)tarting perhaps implausibly from seeds” and moving “toward dislodging the allegedly self-evident, if seldom articulated, belief that ‘a seed is a seed is a seed’” (Code 2008b, 4). Drawing on various ecologists, Code (2008b, 4; citing Lacey 2003, 91; her emphasis) argues that “what seeds ... and the plants that grow from them *are* is partly a function of the sociocultural nexus ... of which they are constituents.” She demonstrates how Rachel Carson made a similar point in her writing during her National Book Award acceptance speech for *The Sea Around Us* (1951) when she said: “it is impossible to understand man [sic] without understanding his environment and the forces that have molded him physically and environmentally” (Carson 1956; cited in Lear 1977, 278).

For Code, these forces that shape and mold are not determinant or causal; rather, they are constitutive of a multiplicity of possibilities for the coming-into-being of objects and they entail “multiple connections and reciprocal effects” (Code 2008b, 5). Literally and metaphorically, Code (drawing on Carson and other ecological writers) is referring to locatedness across a vast spectrum of existence—the planting and the making of “so small an entity as a seed or an insect; so large an entity as a human being or an elephant” (Code 2008b, 5). This exquisite point coheres with what Ian Hacking calls “all manner of constitutings” (2002, 4), which include “scientific objects,” “concepts, practices, and corresponding institutions,” as well as “things, classifications, ideas, kinds of people, [and] people” (Hacking 2002, 4–5). They are also connected with ontological questions that concern “the very possibility of the coming into being of some objects” (Hacking 2002, 2), including the coming into being of particular knowledges, narratives, and worlds.

6.1 Vitality and Processes of Becoming

Concerns with how various beings and objects emerge and grow in specific conditions of possibility resonates with the rich ecological approach of anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000, 345), who argues (through case studies of shells, stones, baskets, pottery, bricks, and watches, among other things) that objects, subjects, and human and non-human lives grow and evolve through “self-transformation over time of the system of relations within which an organism or artifact comes into being.” Also drawing on the work of Deleuze and

Guattari (2004, 451–452), Ingold (2012, 433) highlights “the variability of matter—its tensions and elasticities, lines of flow and resistances.” This connects, in turn with Code’s ecological thinking as well as new materialist approaches that suggest that “materiality is always something more than ‘mere’ matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable” (Coole and Frost 2010, 9).

Methodological implications also arise from these points about vitality. For example, what most researchers call data is also a form of constantly flowing matter that must be followed, rather than captured or collected. Ingold writes: “Production, then, is a process of correspondence: not the imposition of pre-conceived form on raw material substance, but *the drawing out or bringing forth of potentials immanent in a world of becoming*” (Ingold 2012, 435; emphasis added).

6.2 *Relational Ontologies and Ontological Alterity*

If we are studying unfolding worlds, and if our concepts, methods, and problematics are constitutive, this calls for some clarification of our ontological underpinnings. The “ontological turn” has garnered massive attention in the past decade and there are many diverse approaches to ontological issues. My approach is rooted in the work of Code as well as indigenous scholars (e.g. Craft 2013; Simpson 2011, 2014; Watts 2013) and anthropologists (e.g. Blaser 2014; Ingold 2007, 2011, 2012, 2013; Strathern 2005; Verran 2001), who recognize ontological multiplicity, ontological alterity, and ontologies as “enactments of worlds” (Blaser 2010, 3). As Mario Blaser writes (2014, np), an onto-epistemological approach, while internally heterogeneous, points broadly to “ethnographic descriptions of the many-fold shapes of the otherwise, an injunction not to explain too much or try to actualize the possibilities immanent to others’ thoughts but rather to sustain them as possibilities; and, as a corollary, a politics that initially hinges upon the hope of making the otherwise visible so that it becomes viable as a real alternative.” If multiple worlds or wordlings are possible, then the researchers’ or ethnographers’ role is not to represent, but to contribute to bringing new stories, relationships, and worlds into being. Metaphorically, the researcher plays a role in these seeding, planting, and harvesting processes.

7 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provides a brief sketch of feminist epistemologies, their early iterations, their contributions to relational epistemologies and methodologies, while also highlighting how they have sown the seeds for continuing feminist contributions to relational dimensions of knowledge making. These contributions have, in turn, led to more and more attention given to what it means to work with non-representationalism and ontological and epistemological relationality in knowledge making practices. While there is currently a great

multiplicity of such approaches, which build on or intersect with feminist epistemologies, this chapter engages, through diffractive readings, with some of the key contributions of Lorraine Code's four-decade trajectory of writing, and especially her recent work on ecological thinking. While Code's work has its roots in feminist epistemologies, it also draws on, contributes to, or intersects with a wide array of other epistemological traditions (naturalized epistemologies, social epistemologies, virtue epistemologies, epistemologies of ignorance, and, more recently, postcolonial, and anti-racist epistemologies, and indigenous epistemologies). I work with Code's metaphorical and literal ecological examples, demonstrating the value of Code's ecological thinking as an epistemologically and ontologically relational approach to knowledge making, subjectivity, and epistemic responsibilities (See also Doucet 2018, in press).

Ecological thinking is just one of many emergent approaches that are grappling with what it means to work with within the "ontological turn" and to address some of the performative, posthuman, relational, and non-representational ramifications that are part of this "turn." This chapter also articulates some of the methodological implications that arise from working with ecological thinking. I offer insights about epistemological and ontological relationality that resonate with, but also expand, current sociological methodological approaches and relational sociology. These include making shifts from reflexivity to diffraction and from interaction to intra-action; a focus on vitality and processes of becoming; and thinking through our ontological underpinnings, including what it means to work with ontological alterity and ontological multiplicities. I argue that Code's ecological thinking approach warrants more attention within relational sociology.

NOTES

1. This quote is from Rachel Carson's *The Edge of the Sea* (1955) cited in Lorraine Code (2006, 50).
2. This quote is from Code (2008b, 4).

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PART III

Main Current Approaches in Relational Sociology

Beyond the Manifesto: Mustafa Emirbayer and Relational Sociology

Lily Liang and Sida Liu

Mustafa Emirbayer (1997) penned his “Manifesto for a Relational Sociology” (hereinafter “the Manifesto”) as fighting words against substantial perspectives “that failed to think in dialogical or field-theoretic terms” (Emirbayer 2013: 209). In this groundbreaking essay, he offered the ceaselessly changing “transaction” between dynamic actors, entities, or processes as the proper unit of analysis for sociological research, or what he termed “relational sociology.” Emirbayer’s early relational theorizing was deeply influenced by American pragmatism, especially John Dewey’s (1958 [1925], 1966 [1916]) work on human experience and action. Since writing the Manifesto, Emirbayer also incorporated Pierre Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) into his relational approach. Since the early 2000s, he has made persistent efforts to compare Bourdieu and various aspects of pragmatism and call

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for their rapprochement in contemporary social theory (e.g., Emirbayer and Goldberg 2005; Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012; Emirbayer and Desmond 2015; Liu and Emirbayer 2016).

In this chapter, we examine how the creative exchange between Dewey and Bourdieu that Emirbayer mines in his writings has enabled him to effectively problematize substantialist assumptions that continue to lurk in our sociological inquiry. First, we consider the theoretical and practical implications in adopting a trans-actional approach to sociology as it is outlined in the Manifesto. Next, we elaborate how the sustained Dewey-Bourdieu dialogue found in Emirbayer's later writings solidifies his vision for a pragmatism-influenced relational sociology. Last, we discuss Emirbayer and Desmond's research agenda for studying race and the racial order in America as a prototype of Emirbayerian relational sociology in practice. As Emirbayer's contribution to sociological theory is an ongoing project, we do not intend to make any premature assessment on its efficacy in this chapter. Instead, we focus on how his work develops over time and how it spans across and integrates the insights of other social theorists.

1 RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY: A TRANS-ACTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

After completing his PhD at Harvard and a postdoctoral fellowship at Berkeley, Emirbayer arrived at the New School for Social Research as an assistant professor in 1991, when "the New York area ... was a rich hub of conversation that contributed to a reformulation of the link between networks, culture, and social interaction ... [that] helps to mediate (if not resolve) the tension between structure and agency" (Mische 2011: 84). At the New School, Charles Tilly was rethinking the "cultural processes of identity formation, storytelling, and boundary construction ... in dynamic, relational terms" (ibid.: 83). Uptown at Columbia, Harrison White was grappling with the "link between temporality, language, and social relations" in network analysis (ibid.: 82) and organized a series of mini-conferences around these themes. Emirbayer's participation in these mini-conferences inspired him to write a programmatic statement on why he believed sociology needed a "relational turn." The Manifesto became a rallying cry for a relational approach in sociology.

Emirbayer (1997: 281) opened the Manifesto with a divide that he believed confronts sociologists today: they study the social world as made up either of static "things" or of "dynamic, unfolding relations." Based on this fundamental distinction between substantialist and relational thinking, he proceeded to develop a "trans-actional" perspective in contradistinction to the "self-actional" and "inter-actional" perspectives. Emirbayer argued that both varieties of substantialist thinking assume that social entities come preformed into the world and, as such, substances are not affected by the processes and changes that they effect. The perspective of self-action conceives action taking place *within* preformed entities. "The relational matrices within which substances act provide ... no more than empty media for their self-generating, self-moving activity" (ibid.: 283). The perspective of inter-action conceives action taking place

among substances. “[A]ll of the relevant action takes place *among* them—they provide merely the empty settings within which causation occurs—rather than being generated *by* them” (ibid.: 286; original emphasis).

In contrast to these two perspectives, the perspective of trans-action conceives action taking place where relations among the entities and among their elements move “within fields of mutual determination and flux” (ibid.: 288). A transactional perspective does not maintain a sharp separation between things of action (i.e., self-action) or between elements of action (i.e., inter-action). Rather, it treats dynamic relations between actors, entities, or processes as the proper object of sociological inquiry. Some relational sociologists misinterpret Emirbayer’s trans-actional approach as one that “reduces the category of relation to a mere transaction” (Donati 2011: 10) and “denied the emergent character of social relations” (Donati and Archer 2015: 20), but this misinterpretation is largely based on a plain-text reading of the word “transactional” in the economic sense. In fact, Emirbayer drew his “transactional” concept from Dewey and Bentley (1949: 137), “transaction assumes no pre-knowledge of either organism or environment alone as adequate ... but requires their primary acceptance in common system, with full freedom reserved for their developing examination.” Or, as Dépelteau (2008: 65) put it, “The principle of trans-action is founded on the idea that the production of the social world happens through social relations and in a physical environment.” Trans-action implies precisely an emergent ontology in which social entities are not preformed substances, but situated “within fields of mutual determination and flux” (Emirbayer 1997: 288).

Emirbayer’s call for sociologists to focus on relations that transcend individual actors is partly Durkheimian (Emirbayer 1996), but it is more deeply influenced by pragmatist philosophy (Dewey 1958 [1925], 1966 [1916], 2002 [1922]; Dewey and Bentley 1949; Joas 1993, 1996). Drawing on pragmatist insights concerning the creativity of human action and the temporality of human experience, he maintained that “individual persons, whether strategic or norm following, are inseparable from the transactional contexts within which they are embedded” (Emirbayer 1997: 287). The ends and means of their actions are not prescribed but are problematized, deliberated, and carried out within the relational and temporal contexts in which they are situated. Actors can transform themselves and the social structures in which they are embedded when they reconstruct the contexts of their relations to those structures.

To understand Emirbayer’s early research program for a relational sociology that foregrounds the relationality and temporality of social action, we consider the Manifesto in conjunction with two articles that he co-authored with Jeff Goodwin on network analysis (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994) and with Ann Mische on agency (Emirbayer and Mische 1998), both of which were published in the same period. This trinity of work nicely illustrates how Emirbayer’s theoretical agenda reworks the relationship among structure, culture, and agency.

Emirbayer (1997: 298) emphasized that all social action unfolds in “three transpersonal, relational contexts”: social structure, culture, and social psychology. He conceived actors as embedded in overlapping relational “environments” of

social and cultural formation, or what he called “the temporal-relational contexts of action” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). Social and cultural relations so thoroughly interpenetrate and mutually condition that, to paraphrase Charles Tilly, culture constitutes the “very ‘sinews’ of social reality” (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994: 1438). The “sheer multiplicity of structures” in which actors are embedded makes human agency tenable: “Not only is autonomy linked to location within overlapping and intersecting networks of social ties ... but it is also made possible by actors’ location among a multiplicity of cultural structures” (ibid.: 1444–1445). The relationality of structure, culture, and agency in conditioning and contextualizing social action “guarantees that empirical social action will never be completely determined or structured. On the other hand, there is no hypothetical moment in which agency actually gets ‘free’ of structure” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 1004). Meanwhile, Emirbayer (1997: 298) argued that the mutual constitution among structure, culture, and agency should not prevent us from investigating each of these temporal-relational contexts of social action on its own terms, for each context “operates according to its own partially autonomous logic, intersecting with the others in varied and interesting ways.”

In terms of social structure, Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994) saw a promising approach in network analysis for moving the sociological enterprise beyond the divide between structure and agency. Network models “transform a merely metaphorical understanding of the embeddedness of actors in networks of social relationships into a more precise and usable tool for social analysis” (ibid.: 1446). Specifically, the “anticategorical imperative” of network analysis “rejects all attempts to explain human behavior or social processes solely in terms of the categorical attributes of actors, whether individual or collective” (ibid.: 1414). Instead, network models focus on “how resources, goods, and even positions flow through particular figurations of social ties” (Emirbayer 1997: 298). They explain changes in actions and processes over time by directing attention to the patterns of relations that link social actors in the overall social structure. When social structures are reconfigured from preformed, static substances to patterned relations among actors within a network of ties, concepts such as power are also transformed from “an entity or a possession” (ibid.: 291) to a relationship between actors in different positions of a network. In Tilly’s words that Emirbayer (1997: 292) quoted, “bonds, and not essences, provide the bases of durable inequality.”

Nevertheless, Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994: 1436) maintained that network analysts have gained insights on the relationality of social structures at the expense of neglecting “the potential causal significance of symbolic and discursive formations” in reproducing or transforming social action and relations. “[C]ultural discourses, narratives, and idioms” (ibid.: 1438) have an autonomous inner logic of their own. Yet, network analysis as a relational approach “has neglected the cultural and symbolic moments in the very determination of social action” (ibid.: 1446). Cultural structures can constrain actors by making certain courses of action unthinkable. They can also enable actors “by ordering their understandings of the social world and of themselves, by

constructing their identities, goals, and aspirations, and by rendering certain issues significant or salient and others not" (ibid.: 1441). Emirbayer (1997) made the case for using relational methodologies to study meaning structures that maintain durable inequality by reifying social categories. Cultural meaning is what makes social categories appear "real" and taken-for-granted; classification struggle is "one of the most important dimensions of social conflict" (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994: 1441). The trans-actional perspective challenges the "reified nature of all categories" by showing how totalizing identities "are in fact often multidimensional and contradictory"; and how supposedly autonomous categories are in effect "embedded in complex relational networks that are both intersubjective and public" (Emirbayer 1997: 309, 300).

Furthermore, actors exercise agency when they reconstruct the relational contexts in which they are embedded (Emirbayer 1997: 309–310). Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 970) argued that actors can use their "habit, imagination, and judgment" to reproduce or transform their relationship to the overlapping social and cultural environments in which they are situated. They drew on Mead's insights into the human experience of temporality and conceived agency as "a temporally embedded process of social engagement" (ibid.: 962). Emirbayer and Mische claimed that, "as actors respond to changing environments, they must continually reconstruct their view of the past in an attempt to understand the causal conditioning of the emergent present, while using this understanding to control and shape their responses in the arising future" (ibid.: 968–969). In analytically disaggregating the concept of agency into three agentic dimensions (i.e., iterational, projective, and practical-evaluative) that loosely correspond with the progression of time, they advanced that "the ways in which people understand their own relationship to the past, future, and present make a difference to their actions" (ibid.: 973). For instance, actors use their "past patterns of thought and action" to give order and stability to their places and roles in society (ibid.: 971); they imagine future trajectories that can reconfigure their relationship to social structures; and they select a solution among possible alternatives to resolve the problem at hand. By engaging with different temporal contexts in their course of action, Emirbayer and Mische suggested actors also practice what Dewey calls reflective intelligence (ibid.: 967–968).

In sum, Emirbayer's trans-actional perspective is "relational all the way down" (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 974). Not only does it beseech us to see "relations between terms or units as preeminently dynamic in nature, as unfolding, ongoing processes rather than as static ties among inert substances" (Emirbayer 1997: 289), but it also urges us to recognize that the social, cultural, and agentic dimensions of human action work together, as well as on their own, to transform or reproduce the patterned relationships among actors within a web of social ties. Furthermore, the trans-actional perspective directs our attention to how the dynamic interplay among structure, culture, and agency unfolds at different levels of sociological analysis. At the most macroscopic level, we can investigate how institutions and societies are shaped and transformed by "a diversity of intersecting networks of social interaction"

(*ibid.*: 295). At the interactional level, we can identify and examine the “recurrent mechanisms, patterns, and sequences” that create and maintain regularities in the interaction order (*ibid.*: 296). At the microscopic level, we can analyze how interests, identities, and lines of action grow out of actors’ different positions in “circles of recognition” (*ibid.*: 296). Finally, at the intra-personal level, we can focus on how the psychology of the “relational individual” (*ibid.*: 297) is reconstructed through transactions with others.

2 WHEN DEWEY MEETS BOURDIEU: PRAGMATISM AND REFLEXIVITY

After moving from the New School to the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1999, Emirbayer started to study systematically Pierre Bourdieu’s writings and incorporate Bourdieu’s field-theoretic approach to his relational sociology. He offered a series of graduate seminars on Bourdieu. Among the enrollees of the very first seminar were Erik Schneiderhan, Shamus Khan, and Matthew Desmond; the influences of that seminar were evident in their first books and co-authored articles with Emirbayer. Hans Joas, a major contemporary pragmatist theorist, also arrived in Madison as a visiting professor in the late 1990s and interacted with Emirbayer. Undoubtedly these intellectual engagements further shaped Emirbayer’s relational thinking. But to better appreciate the development of Emirbayer’s relational sociology, we must begin at its roots in American pragmatism, particularly the influence of Dewey.

Emirbayer’s trans-actional perspective recognizes that social actors are neither cold-calculating machines nor cultural dupes; their practical action is non-teleological and sometimes “directed towards certain ends without being consciously directed to these ends, or determined by them” (Bourdieu 1990 [1980]: 10; quoted in Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012: 137). His pragmatist roots have inspired him to investigate how our practical action can reproduce social inequality and, more importantly, how the reconstruction of our habitual practices can transform relations of power and domination. Dewey asserted that the knower and what she knows are inseparable from the act of knowing, which unfolds “as processes of the full situation of organism-environment” (Dewey and Bentley 1949: 131). Knowledge emerges from the trans-actional experience between the actor and the social environment in which she is embedded. Accordingly, Dewey (1958 [1925], 1980 [1929]) called for a return to the world of experience where elements of the solution emerge when old habits cannot solve new problems. We suspend what we know to work in the past and imagine new ways of using our old routines to solve the problem at hand. These insights informed Emirbayer’s early understanding that social action and its potential for reproduction and reconstruction are all “located” (Abbott 1997) in the world of experience. This notion that experience encapsulates the creative exchange between actors and their environments was embodied in Emirbayer’s proposition in the Manifesto that relations and not things should be the proper object of sociological inquiry.

Emirbayer advocated for all inquiries of social action to begin and end in the world of experience because “humans could intervene in the stream of events or affairs of experience and redirect their course” (Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012: 135). According to early American pragmatists such as Peirce (1992 [1877]), Addams (2002 [1902]), and Dewey (2002 [1922]), most of the time social actors navigate the world with their habits, which enable them “to react in real time to the changing vicissitudes of social situation” without resorting “to conscious planning or deliberate following of instructions” (Emirbayer and Maynard 2011: 227). But sometimes dilemmas arise and habits do not point to a clear way to proceed—a situation that Dewey referred to as a “fork in the road” (*ibid.*: 227). When such ruptures generate perplexity, social actors engage in a purposeful thought process. They apply their reflective intelligence to creative problem solving and reconstructing their habits in relations to the ever-changing environments. In this process they transform these very relations. Optimistic about the transformative potential of human agency, Emirbayer and Goldberg (2005: 483) observed, “It is precisely this poor fit between habits and their environments that opens the door to the reconstruction of habits, adjustment ... and social change.”

Dewey’s faith in human intelligence and creativity fostered “a pragmatism-inspired theory of agency [that] would reconceptualize human agency as temporally embedded processes of social engagement, one that simultaneously entails agentic orientations toward the past, the future, and the present” (Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012: 150). Mead’s (1983 [1932]) writings on the human experience of temporality also showed how social actors think about past and future events from the perspective of the present in a process he called “reconstruction.” However, Emirbayer and Schneiderhan (2012: 144) argued that such a pragmatic theory of action does not adequately address “how dispositions and habits could give rise to new patterns of action in response to unforeseen or novel situations.” Dewey said little about how exactly a social actor’s relation to the social and cultural structures in which she is embedded constrain and enable her action. “[W]hen speaking of the social space,” they noted, “Dewey placed primarily analytic weight upon divisions based on class, very broadly defined, and did so in a loose, unsystematic fashion” (*ibid.*: 139). Yet, as discussed above, a core tenet of Emirbayer’s trans-actional perspective is that the relationality of structure, culture, and agency conditions and contextualizes social action. The dynamic element of agency never “gets ‘free’ of structure” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 1004).

Not unlike the pragmatists, Bourdieu (1990 [1980]) conceived practice as what social actors do without consciously following certain rules or conforming to certain norms, but what they nonetheless consider “logical” and reasonable. Most of the time, they rely on their habits and past experiences in devising a course of action to meet and manage emergent problems. *Habitus* as a generative system of dispositions is a product of history. “[History] ensures the active presence of past experience, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and

explicit norms” (ibid.: 54). Unlike the pragmatists, however, Bourdieu squarely situated practice in social “fields” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Emirbayer and Johnson 2008; Liu and Emirbayer 2016). Emirbayer understood “fields ... are structured of relations not between concrete substances or entities, but rather, between the nodes those entities happen to occupy, the point being that one must analyze those entities not in isolation ... but as occupants of positions within broader relational configurations” (Emirbayer 2010: 406).

Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology captured for Emirbayer a full picture of how practical action forms and reproduces itself in the relation of habitus to the field. Habitus is both structured by the field and structuring it through practice (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]). This spatial and relational view of practice is what differentiates it from instrumental action. Emirbayer believed that Bourdieu overcame important but false divisions in social inquiry with his insights on the field-habitus relations and it showed a close theoretical affinity to Dewey’s pragmatic approach to social action. Namely, Bourdieu’s “great obsession” with time “further developed and radicalized the Deweyan notion that experience is fundamentally about eventfulness and process rather than fixity, stability, or permanence” (Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012: 146). It spoke to Emirbayer’s core concerns about how a social actor’s past experience and her orientation toward the future shapes how she evaluates and resolves the problem at hand. Field analysis is both synchronic and diachronic in that “it maps out an array of positions, the occupants of those positions, and the pattern of their relations with one another” and, in the meantime, “it helps one to gauge the strategies of action that actors within a field are likely to pursue, depending upon their respective positions within that space” (Emirbayer and Williams 2005: 717).

Nevertheless, Emirbayer admitted that Bourdieu was predominately preoccupied with the reproductive mechanisms of habitus rather than its potential for change, reconstruction, and transformation. Bourdieu maintained that, in times of great social transformation, people may experience a temporal lag between the logic of their practices and that of the social world in which they now live. In his ethnographies on the Kabyle people in colonial Algeria (Bourdieu 1979) and the bachelor farmers from his native place Béarn, Bourdieu (2008: 188) spoke poignantly about how transition from a pre-capitalist to capitalist society in the first case and encroachment of the urban world upon the peasant world in the second destroyed the respective community’s “means of biological and social reproduction.” Kabyle peasant-workers who saw the future as in God’s hands rather than in “a field of possibles to be explored and mastered by calculation” could not help but “convert all their wages, as soon as they get them, into real goods, food, clothing, furniture,” leaving them impoverished in the long run (Bourdieu 1979: 8, 13). As marriage in Béarn required more individual initiative and as its younger daughters left the land and entered the labor force, its eldest sons slipped from their privileged position in the peasant hierarchy. Their “time-lag in styles of dress” and their awkward shyness in talking to women, dancing with them, and talking to them while dancing further sealed their fate of “condemned bachelorhood” (Bourdieu 2008: 171).

In this respect, Bourdieu's focus on the iterational moment of agency frustrates the Deweyan conception of human agency as "a temporally embedded process of social engagement" (Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012: 150). Bourdieu's "overriding concerns to uncover the workings of power and domination" made it impossible for him "to appreciate fully the possibilities of creative and democratic action" (ibid.: 133). The enduring pragmatist in Emirbayer believed that "habits can themselves be made more intelligent. And the social conditions of the production and reproduction of those habits can also be reconstructed" (Emirbayer and Maynard 2011: 228). To some extent, the difference in orientation between Bourdieu and pragmatism reflects a difference between the two societies from which the theories emerged: "French society is hierarchical and full of historical legacies, whereas American society is mobile and full of possibilities (or at least understands itself as such)" (Liu and Emirbayer 2016: 70). This difference presents a cultural hurdle for Emirbayer's theoretical effort to synthesize and reconstruct the two traditions.

In addition to the extensive discussions on field and habitus, in his more recent writings Emirbayer sought to develop Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence to its full potential and in the pragmatist spirit (Desmond and Emirbayer 2009; Emirbayer and Desmond 2012, 2015; Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012). Emirbayer and Schneiderhan (2012: 145) considered the concept of symbolic violence "perhaps the lynchpin of [Bourdieu's] entire sociology." It embodies "the relation of complicity that the victims of symbolic domination grant to the dominant" (Emirbayer and Goldberg 2005: 484). Emirbayer's concern with symbolic violence harkens back to his earlier work (Emirbayer and Mische 1998) on the autonomous effects that culture may have on social action. Culture can reproduce relations of symbolic violence by rendering certain courses of action unthinkable for the dominated. Conversely, the dominated can also transform their relation to the structures in which they are embedded by exercising reflexivity on the categorical relationships between groups that marks one group as more competent and therefore more deserving of distinction than the other. Emirbayer and Schneiderhan (2012) advanced that, by exercising reflexive intelligence, we can disrupt the relation of symbolic violence and retrain our habits to be more conducive to democratic action. Emirbayer and Desmond's (2015) book on race is another example of this adaptation of Bourdieu in the spirit of pragmatism (see the section below).

Besides retraining habits, Emirbayer argued that we also need to transform the very social conditions that reproduce the dominated habitus. For social science researchers in particular, he had in mind the "scholastic unconscious" (Emirbayer and Desmond 2015: 33), or "conditions of leisure and separation from the practical necessities of life" that lead researchers to believe they are studying the social world from an objective point of view when, in fact, their perspective has been "shaped by life experiences marked by distance from practical necessities (*skhole*)" (Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012: 135–136, 147). It is by using our reflexive intelligence that both scholars and ordinary citizens

can “gain limited but very real control over the inclinations of habitus, transforming us from the agents of action into something more like the true subject of action” (ibid.: 146).

3 THE RACIAL ORDER: A PROTOTYPE OF EMIRBAYERIAN RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY

While writing extensively on the theoretical comparison between Bourdieu and pragmatism-influenced sociology, Emirbayer also applied this relational approach to race, arguably one of the most significant research topics in contemporary American sociology. Collaborating with his former student Matthew Desmond, in their recent book, *The Racial Order*, Emirbayer proposed what they considered to be “a comprehensive and rigorous approach to theorizing race ... one that avoids the pitfalls of grand theorizing and middle-range theorizing alike and that pursues creative problem solving in a pragmatist spirit” (Emirbayer and Desmond 2015: 25). The book certainly makes a provocative contribution to the race scholarship; also, it represents Emirbayer’s most systematic effort of integrating the insights of American pragmatism and Bourdieu (and, to a less extent, Durkheim) into a coherent relational sociology of his own.

Emirbayer and Desmond (2015: 51) defined race as “a symbolic category based on phenotype or ancestry and constructed according to specific social and historical contexts, a category that is misrecognized as natural.” Like other symbolic categories, race marks “differences between grouped people or things, and, in so doing, actually help to bring those people or things into existence” (ibid.: 52). This definition emphasizes the relational nature of race, as a social entity both structuring and structured by boundaries between people and groups. Throughout the book, Emirbayer and Desmond engaged with Bourdieu and Dewey extensively, which even led to a critique that “long stretches of the manuscript serve only as primers on Bourdieu and Dewey” (Monk 2016: 620). Indeed, for students of relational sociology, these “long stretches” are of the most interest and thus our discussions in this section focus on them.

Emirbayer and Desmond divided the book into three parts: reflexivity, relationality, and reconstruction. Following Bourdieu (2000 [1997]), they developed a “three-tiered typology of racial reflexivity” (Emirbayer and Desmond 2015: 33), a reflexivity that challenges the social, disciplinary, and scholastic unconscious. Reflexivity on the social unconscious generates recognition that an individual’s position in the racial order, either privileged or disadvantaged, affects her position-takings. Furthermore, every academic discipline has its *doxa* and, for sociology in particular, “works or theories tend to become foils for *political*, not intellectual, reasons” (ibid.: 41). Finally, the pure and disinterested scholastic life itself might conduce to biases in the cognitive, moral, and aesthetic realms of social thought. To overcome these three types of unconscious biases, sociologists must reflect on their own positions and position-takings and move toward a critical and reflexive analysis of the racial object (or any other object)—an argument consistent with Emirbayer’s earlier argument on democratic action (Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012).

In the part on relationality, “the heart and soul of this work,” Emirbayer and Desmond (2015: 335, 129) provided a relational-temporal framework for understanding the racial order that encompasses studying two sets of triadic relations. Their relational approach addressed shortcomings in Dewey’s and Bourdieu’s theories of practical action by synthesizing their strengths to show that structure and agency are mutually constitutive. According to the authors, “All racial action ... is a concrete synthesis shaped and conditioned, on the one hand, by the temporal-relational contexts of action, on the other hand, by the ineliminable moment of racial agency itself” (ibid.: 185). In the chapter “The Structures of the Racial Order,” they presented the racial order in a synchronic moment as a Bourdieuan field comprises “a configuration of objective social relations ... between the nodes [that specific racial groups] happen to occupy within the given configuration” (ibid.: 84). Emirbayer and Desmond took a page straight out of the Manifesto when they insisted that the relation of the racial habitus to the racial field (e.g., dominant vs. dominated) and the relation between racial habitus (e.g., black vs. white habitus) in the field are not only structured by social but also by cultural and collective-emotional contexts in which the relevant racial groups are embedded. Each of these structuring contexts constitute their own distinct analytical domain in the racial field; while they are mutually constitutive, they are also internally autonomous.

By situating racial action in a racial field, Emirbayer and Desmond (2015) addressed a persistent concern with Dewey’s theory of action. Dewey and other pragmatists were right to reject the means-end, teleological explanation of social action because judgment is improvisational and continuous (ibid.: 170). But they, and those who follow them, have not adequately explained *why* social actors would judge one course of action as more “reasonable” than another when they come upon that “fork in the road” (ibid.: 171). Following Bourdieu, Emirbayer and Desmond argued that racial actors must enter the racial game to master it. They become competent when they have developed an embodied feel for the game. “One has to have a feel for the racial game in order to play it well, a capacity to make practical and normative judgment among alternative possible trajectories of action in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations” (ibid.: 167). In other words, the world of experience in which racial actors encounter the means and ends of practical action is not an unstructured social space. It is a racial field structured by relations of power (social, cultural, and collective-emotional), all of which schematize their judgment of what is a “reasonable” course of action.

In the meantime, Emirbayer and Desmond (2015) insisted that racial actors have agency. In the chapter “The Dynamics of the Racial Order,” they presented racial agency in a diachronic moment as “composed of variable and changing orientations within the flow of time” (ibid.: 179). Emirbayer (1997: 305) acknowledged at the end of the Manifesto that, in spite of its many promises, the trans-actional approach also has its own challenges and limitations, one of which being that relational studies “too often privilege spatiality ... over temporality and narrative unfolding.” Emirbayer and Mische (1998) first set to

right the imbalanced attention paid to space and time, as they analytically disaggregated social agency into three temporal moments: iteration, projectivity, and practical evaluation. Emirbayer and Desmond (2015) elaborated on this triad of agentic orientations and, in the process, addressed a primary concern that many have with Bourdieu's theory of action, namely, he prioritized reproduction over reconstruction. "If racial actors are to be seen fundamentally oriented in their actions by past patterns of thought, perception, and feeling, as in Bourdieu's sociology," observed the authors, "then it becomes difficult for race scholarship satisfactorily to analyze more forward-looking, not to mention also reflexively present-centered, instances of transformative agency" (ibid.: 133).

Emirbayer and Desmond (2015: 134) contended that transformation becomes possible, when racial actors are conceived as "mov[ing] in and among different unfolding horizons, they switch between (or recompose) their temporal orientations ... thus are capable of changing their modes of relation to structure." Depending on the situation, racial actors may prioritize one agentic orientation of their experience over the other two in how they manage their changing relationship to the overlapping social, cultural, and collective-emotional structures in which they are embedded. The iterative moment enables racial actors to schematize their racial experience by selectively reactivating past patterns of practices and thoughts (ibid.: 136). The projective moment allows racial actors to imagine alternative possible trajectories when "they distance themselves ... from the habits and traditions that constrain them" (ibid.: 147). Meanwhile, the practical-evaluative moment motivates racial actors to contextualize their experience by using their "situationally based judgment" to meet the contingencies at hand (ibid.: 167). Emirbayer and Desmond's relational framework as outlined in these chapters affirms their commitment in taking "an inclusive, pragmatic, really open, cross-fertilizing approach" (ibid.: 13–14) to studying the racial order.

However, this commitment softens somewhat in their discussion of racial interactions—"the very stuff ... of which the racial order is made" (ibid.: 192). When discussing interactions, Emirbayer and Desmond (2015: 188–203) pitted Bourdieu and the Chicago School against each other, highlighting Bourdieu's insistence on the priority of structure over interaction while drawing heavily on Peirce, Dewey, and Goffman in developing their theory of racial interactions. They maintained that Bourdieu's "critiques of interactionist sociology were problematic because structure and agency actually stand in dialectical relations to, and presuppose, one another" (ibid.: 192). Yet even in doing so, they still sought the possibility of a fusion between the two intellectual traditions. For example, using Bourdieu's vocabulary, they argued that "[a] hallmark of Chicago-style work was the recognition that its ethnographic subjects interact not only in their concreteness but also as occupants of positions in a structure of relations" and "thereby as bearers of different habitus from within a space of dispositions" (ibid.: 195). The engagement with Bourdieu in this book is not limited to Dewey or the first Chicago School (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918–1920; Park and Burgess 1969 [1921]; Bulmer 1984; Abbott

1999), but extended to symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology, particularly the writings of Goffman and Garfinkel (see also Emirbayer and Maynard 2011).

The part on reconstruction, like the two previous parts, begins with a theoretical comparison between Dewey and Bourdieu, with the emphasis on Dewey's reflections on "nonideal theorizing," that is, "one cannot ever hope to know with absolute certainty the proper ends and, accordingly, the appropriate means of (personal as well as societal) reconstruction" (Emirbayer and Desmond 2015: 286). This is contrasted with Bourdieu's notion of "relational utopianism," a utopian thought that is scientifically sound in both its means and ends and based on the collective work of intellectuals. Reconstruction, accordingly, aims at the creation of a new habitus that "would enjoy greater control over the unacknowledged forces otherwise working behind its back and gain, at least to some degree, freedom from determination" (ibid.: 289). This, in the context of race, means the transformation of the racial order "in the direction of greater justice and equity" (ibid.: 339), toward ideals such as color blindness, multiculturalism, and racial democracy. The pragmatist pursuit of social transformation is the strongest in this part of the book.

Scholars of race will have to assess the usefulness of this theory in empirical research but, for our purpose, a prototype of Emirbayerian relational sociology has already taken shape in *The Racial Order*. Although the generous adoption of Bourdieu's vocabulary gives the impression that Emirbayer and Desmond merely applied the Bourdieuan field-theoretic approach to race, the persistent comparison with Dewey and other pragmatists throughout the book suggests a more syncretic approach between structure and interaction, between domination and habitual action. Compared to Emirbayer's earlier writings on Bourdieu and pragmatism, in this book he went beyond his decade-long theoretical contrasts and presented an integrated analytical framework for doing relational sociology, a pragmatism-influenced field theory. It is Emirbayer's provisional answer to his own call for relational sociology in the Manifesto.

4 CONCLUSION

When Emirbayer penned the Manifesto in 1997, a specter was haunting American sociology—the specter of relational thinking. In the next two decades, this specter has grown into a prominent theoretical tradition and attracted a large number of followers in sociology and beyond. Together with his students and collaborators, Emirbayer has greatly elevated Bourdieu's status in American sociology and contributed to a pragmatism revival (Joas 1993, 1996; Gross 2009; Martin 2011; Abbott 2016). More importantly, his persistent and dynamic engagement of the two traditions has facilitated their rapprochement into a more inclusive relational sociology. It is surely too early to make any assessment on this ongoing theoretical project but, in this conclusion, we hope to present a few thoughts on the prospects of Emirbayer's pragmatism-influenced field theory as a model of relational sociology.

Emirbayer is a “total sociologist” (Desmond 2016: 337) whose pragmatist soul believes “[t]otal sociology is our motto: by all means necessary” (Emirbayer and Desmond 2015: 14), regardless of the methods of inquiry. His encyclopedic knowledge of social theory provides him not only a large toolkit for research and writing but also a balanced taste for various authors and theoretical traditions. Although his fondness of Dewey, Durkheim, Elias, and Bourdieu is evident, he rarely gives any author a superior status over others in his writings. Even at the height of his intellectual engagement with Bourdieu, Emirbayer never gave up his Deweyan roots but made extraordinary efforts to compare and integrate the two. This scholarly syncretism, however, can be a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it enables Emirbayer to move adeptly between authors and traditions under the wide umbrella of relational sociology; on the other hand, it dampens the distinction and innovations found in his own relational sociology, which are often obscured by the foregrounding of earlier theorists.

In this sense, Emirbayer’s call for a trans-actional perspective in the Manifesto remains a work in progress. Even in his most recent work, *The Racial Order*, the integration between Dewey and Bourdieu is incomplete, with the spirit of Durkheim haunting in the background. As he acknowledged in the Manifesto (1997: 282): “What I have done here is merely to bring together the various lines of reasoning in this perspective ... and to seek thereby to prevent the sort of eclecticism, the easy mixing together of substantialist and relational assumptions.” Two decades later, relational sociology has successfully distinguished itself from what Emirbayer calls “substantialist thinking” that once dominated sociology, yet his own syncretism within relational sociology has prevented Emirbayer from fully answering his call for “internal debates” as well as “theoretical clarity and reflexivity” (ibid.: 312) in the last pages of the Manifesto. To borrow from his own comment on Bourdieu (Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012: 133), Emirbayer’s overriding concerns to uncover the affinities among other relational theorists make it difficult for him to appreciate fully the possibilities of creative action in relational theorizing.

With the enduring popularity of Bourdieu in today’s sociology (for which Emirbayer deserves many credits), an interesting question is whether Emirbayer will continue to follow a largely Bourdieuan framework as he did in *The Racial Order*, or to turn more reflexive and critical toward Bourdieu’s relational sociology in his future writings. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Emirbayer has offered a series of seminars on pragmatism and the Chicago School of sociology, including not only Dewey but also other theorists such as W.I. Thomas, Robert E. Park, Erving Goffman, and Andrew Abbott. To what extent will he bring insights from these Chicago School sociologists into his relational sociology in dialogue with Bourdieu, as he did in a recent essay “Field and Ecology” (Liu and Emirbayer 2016), remains to be seen.

In this chapter, we have focused on Emirbayer’s intellectual engagement with Dewey and Bourdieu, the two most prominent figures in his relational sociology. However, it would be remiss of us to suggest that the two are his only intellectual inspirations. Social theorists such as Nibert Elias and Charles

Tilly have also influenced his relational thinking in significant ways. Emirbayer sees “deep-seated affinities and compatibilities” between Elias and Bourdieu, both of whom deploy “three important concepts: habitus, field, and power” and “reacted strongly against substantialist tendencies pervasive in sociological theorizing and research” (Paulle et al. 2012: 70, 86). Perhaps because of those close affinities, after Emirbayer began his decade-long engagement with Bourdieu, Elias, who appeared repeatedly in the Manifesto, has become less prominent in his recent writings. Similarly, Tilly was certainly an influential figure in Emirbayer’s early career, but his impact was gradually eclipsed by Bourdieu in later years. In his only essay comparing the two authors, Emirbayer (2010: 409–410) suggests that “Tilly’s relationalism is as much about transactions as about structured patterns of relations”, whereas “Bourdieu never tired of stressing the priority of structure over interaction.” Emirbayer’s own syncretism is probably closer to Tilly than to Bourdieu, yet he finds Bourdieu’s vocabulary more appealing and useful. The progression of Emirbayer’s intellectual trajectory since the Manifesto is a living witness to the rise of relational sociology in the US and beyond.

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Critical Realism as Relational Sociology

Douglas V. Porpora

Technically, critical realism (CR) is not a form of relational sociology if only because, strictly speaking, it is a philosophy of science and social science rather than a theoretical perspective within sociology. As a philosophy of science and social science, CR is a broad tent that does underlie the work of an increasing number of sociologists, my own included. But on the whole, as a philosophy of science and social science, CR underlies more than work just in sociology. It also has, for example, a significant following in international relations (e.g., Wight 2006), business (e.g., Al-Amoudi 2011), and economics (e.g., Finn 2015; Lawson 1997, 2003).

CR—or at least one principal strand of it that I represent—does have a place in this book because it strongly upholds a certain kind of social relationality. Even so, however, CR differs from what is commonly called relational sociology in three main ways. The foremost difference is that CR is about more than just social relations. As a philosophy of science and social science, it is also about other things, like the nature of causality, emergence, truth, and science.

Second, not only is CR about more than just sociology, even in terms of sociology, it is also about more than just social relations. It certainly does not follow Emirbayer's (1997) "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology" in reducing everything social to relations. On the contrary, CR upholds a non-reductive social ontology that considers social reality to encompass more than a single category of thing.

Nor therefore is CR quite captured even by the more moderate statement of Powell and Dépelteau (2013, 1) that "At its broadest, relational sociology investigates social life by studying social relations." Yes, definitely, critical realist sociologists do pay considerable attention to social relations. In fact, along with

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Archer (1995), Donati (2015), Lawson, and Wight, I have been among the critical realists most strongly calling for such attention (Porpora 1989, 2015). Yet not even any of us would say that social relations are all that sociologists should study. Again, our social ontology is non-reductive. Thus, on the contrary, what we think sociologists need to study is better encompassed by Archer's (2013) acronym SAC.

SAC stands for structure, agency, and culture. CR understands culture to refer to the realm of meaning, that is, what has or makes meaning (Archer 1988; Porpora 2015, 2016b). Agency refers to the purposive behavior of individual actors, especially, although not exclusively, their conscious agency—something that much contemporary sociology would like to dismiss. Along these lines, McFarlane (2013) accuses CR of “reactionary humanism,” and, while I would dispute the prejudicial adjective “reactionary,” I would otherwise say guilty as charged; in contrast with Powell's (2013) radical relationalism, mainline CR is realist, affirmative of the subject/object distinction, and in an important sense I will explicate below humanist rather than anti- or post-humanist.

By structure, we critical realists seem to mean a variety of different things, but they are all relational. For the strand I represent, which I think is the most prevalent in CR, structure refers to the kind of social organizational relations upheld by Marx and Bourdieu. As such they are ontologically distinct—not higher but distinct—from the agents they connect. This understanding of structure, like conscious agency, is under threat from much sociology. With the cultural turn, followed by the practice turn, there is a move to reduce everything to culture or to practice. On the contrary, the acronym SAC can be understood as CR's continued affirmation of an analytical need to distinguish the three irreducible ontological categories: structure, agency, and culture.

Actually, the CR understanding of structure as social organizational relations is under threat even within relational sociology, which, with some exceptions (Crossley 2013; Fish 2013), minimally wants to downplay them. Like Powell (2013) specifically, who grants organizational relations secondary status, North American forms of relational sociology want to focus us on transactions, which are essentially interactions, which, however much they may create organization, are not themselves the constituent elements of it.

Not being ontologically reductive, CR does not deny the importance of interactions or transactions. On the contrary, for CR, they are considered important as reciprocal forms of agency. CR would simply maintain that such transactional relations are not all there is to social ontology. Among other things, however much they may result from transactions, relations among social positions like resource inequalities and power differentials are not themselves transactions. Thus, CR considers an overemphasis on transactions to be what Emirbayer and Johnson (2007) call the “interactionist fallacy,” to which ironically, I would hold, Emirbayer's own relational manifesto itself succumbs.

In the kind of social relations affirmed, we thus find the third way in which CR differs from much relational sociology, particularly the North American variety. In addition to interactive transactions, the existence of which CR has

no interest in denying, CR also affirms the far-reaching consequentiality of social relations of a non-transactional form. CR in this sense stands against the interactionist fallacy. But we now have a lot on the table. It is time to go back and unpack some of what has been said above. We can start with CR as a philosophy of science.

1 CR AS A PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

As a philosophy of science and social science, CR stands in relation to sociology as a meta-theory. That means that CR is less a theory of anything in particular than what is philosophically presupposed by any theories grounded in it.

I realize that for a sociological audience, the previous statement above might be obscure. Let me try to clarify it. In both ordinary life and social science, any claim rests on implicit presuppositions. When in his campaign for the US presidency Donald Trump proclaimed he would make America great again, one presupposition was that America was not then great while another was that America had indeed once been great. And behind those presuppositions lay still another: that we all share a common understanding of what it means for America to be great.

Although sociologists are disinclined to examine them explicitly, there are also presuppositions to sociological claims and practices. Certainly, we find such meta-theoretical presuppositions behind relational sociology. Emirbayer (1997) tells us there are no substances but only relations. Powell (2013) tells us likewise that all is constituted by relations. Tserkeris (2013) tells us things have no essential properties apart from their relation to other things. These are all meta-theoretical presuppositions of a proposed sociological research agenda. And, although sociologists are highly disinclined to examine such presuppositions, the success of the proposal in large part depends on their tenability.

If sociologists are disinclined to examine the presuppositions of their theory and practice, it is because to do so involves work that is both conceptual and philosophical rather than empirical. If in turn sociologists are inclined to privilege empirical inquiry over conceptual analysis, it is because sociology inherited a package of philosophical presuppositions that is empiricist. That package is the philosophy of science known as positivism, which continues to underlie much of how sociologists approach the social world (see Steinmetz 2005). Because CR is a post-positivist or anti-positivist philosophy of science, it is helpful to begin with the positivism it opposes.

In standard sociology, positivism is a form of naïve realism. It assumes there is a clear separation between theory and observation and that truth is achieved by their match. This understanding of truth is known as the correspondence theory. Of course, to attain such match, observations must be conducted in a value-free way and in accordance with a foundational protocol that we think of as research methods. That the adoption of such value-free methodological protocol will necessarily lead to truth has been termed foundationalism. So positivism is foundationalist in this sense.

A further presupposition of positivism concerns causality and has exerted a profound influence over sociology. According to what has been termed the covering law model, positivism understands causal explanation to be a species of deductive argument in which an event to be explained is logically deduced from (1) the occurrence of a prior event or events and from (2) a lawful event-regularity linking the prior event or events to the event to be explained.

I can make the above clearer. Suppose B is some event to be explained, like a drop in some society's suicide rate. Suppose similarly that A is some prior event like a rise in that society's social cohesion. Finally, assume we are in possession of a putative lawful regularity like that proposed by Durkheim that links A and B. Then per the covering law model of causality, we might explain B via the following syllogism.

If A then B.
 A. _____
 Therefore B.

There are several things to notice about the above formulation. First, the syllogism will successfully follow through to the conclusion only if the conditional relation between A and B is in some sense invariant. Ideally, the relation between A and B will be a deterministic law: Whenever A occurs, B occurs. Of course, nothing like that has ever been uncovered in sociology, and no one expects it.

Instead sociologists speak of uncovering looser statistical laws. Being disinclined toward conceptual analysis, it is rarely asked what statistical laws might be. But for the syllogism to work at all, something must remain invariant, at least some invariant probability of B's following an occurrence of A. Although weaker, such invariant stochastic connection between A and B would provide enough determinism for at least a probabilistic deduction to go through, but unfortunately, sociology has not uncovered any regularity even that firm.

If causal explanation requires universal causal laws of some determinacy, then of course it makes sense for sociologists to go in search of them. And if the causal laws must be universal or general, then only a quantitative, statistical methodology will suffice, one with adequate representative sampling. Case studies like ethnography will avail little toward the needed generalizability and so can be dismissed as mere description. The same for narrative history. As there is nothing general there, there is no causal explanation. Thus, another thing to notice about the covering law model is that it is the very logic of this positivist causal presupposition that inclines positivist sociology in a quantitative direction.

A third thing to notice is that if what is needed for causal explanation are law-like regularities, then what is not needed are the causal mechanisms or powers by which any particular cause produces its effect. What does that mean? Well, what is it about lower social cohesion that leads to a higher suicide rate? The answer would be the mechanism through which social cohesion produces its effects. Therein would lie what might be called the causal power of social cohesion or its agency.

The covering law model, however, makes no reference to causal powers or the agency of things. Instead, the causal power resides in the laws rather than the things related. Thus, positivism in a sense sucks the causal powers or agency out of the things of the world, leaving them inert. It is an observation newly made by Latour's (2007) Actor Network Theory (ANT) and by the so-called New Materialism (see Bennett 2010). CR, however, was making that argument long before (Bhaskar 2008; Harré and Madden 1975).

Another thing to notice about the Durkheimian example I chose is that it is not just mechanisms in general that are absent from the causal explanation but specifically individual human agency. The Durkheimian example illustrates a kind of sociological holism that shows up as well in the network theory of Barry Wellman, which Dépelteau (2013) considers also a form of relational sociology.

Dépelteau criticizes Wellman's network theory as deterministic, and I would share that critique. Dépelteau goes on, however, to describe CR as in contrast co-deterministic, meaning that for CR causal influences originate from both structural relations and human agency. Dépelteau is right that CR sees causal influences originating from both structure and agency in a dialectical manner, but the adjective deterministic is inapt. The word determined has multiple meanings even in a causal context. If determined is just a synonym for caused, there is no problem. The problem occurs when causality in turn is understood per the covering law model as invariance. Insofar as CR breaks completely with the covering law model and a belief in law-like regularities, it understands causal processes to be more contingent and contextual and therefore generally not necessitated in any law-like way. As CR does not at all embrace determinism in that stronger sense, I do not think CR incurs the problems Dépelteau attributes to dual causal theories that do hold to a more lawful account of causality.

A final thing to notice about the covering law model is that what covering laws relate are events. Events are happenings. Causal mechanisms like what it is about lower social cohesion that produces a higher suicide rate are not themselves happenings. In fact, mechanisms often are not even directly observable. Because they are often unobservable, an empiricist philosophy has little use for mechanisms. Since, furthermore, mechanisms play no role in the covering law model of causal explanation, mechanisms can even be denied reality.

We thus arrive at an ontology that CR labels actualism. Actualism is an ontology that acknowledges only events or happenings. In the social world, a happening would be a variable's assumption of a value or a human behavior or practice. We see this restricted ontology in the so-called practice turn.

Theories of practice ... de-emphasized what was going on in the heads of actors, either individuals or collectivities. Instead, these theories emphasized "practices" understood as routine activities (rather than consciously chosen actions) notable for their unconscious, automatic, un-thought character. (Swidler 2001, 74)

According to Swidler above, we are not to look at unobservables inside people's heads but only at manifest happenings: their overt behaviors or activities. We see the same actualism in the tendency of much relational sociology to reduce everything to transactions, which like practices, are observable chains of behavior. We end up with a kind of behaviorism.

A key part of what CR upholds as a realist philosophy is opposition to actualism. It defends a reality richer than just what happens or that can be observed. Thus, CR upholds a social reality with more than just transactions. Not even Symbolic Interactionism believes just in interactions. It believes as well in interpretations, and interpretations are not transactions. Neither are beliefs, intentions, or emotions. Nor can power or dependency or conflicts of interest be reduced to transactions.

But let me back up. CR is a form of realism but in contrast with positivism, it is not a naïve realism. CR does not believe there is a neat division between theory and observation. Instead, CR takes on the post-Kuhnian insight that all observations are theory-laden. But in opposition to much relational sociology (e.g., Powell and Dépelteau 2013; Tsekeris 2013), CR does not believe in the collapse of the subject/object distinction.

On the contrary, CR was born in the UK, among an interdisciplinary group of progressive scholars heavily influenced by Marx. CR consequently bears strong traces of that influence, including a materialist realism that distinguishes between what people think or believe and what actually is. CR calls what people believe the transitive dimension of knowledge and what actually is or was the intransitive. The transitive dimension, CR allows, is certainly tied to subjects, but not the intransitive. With Marx, CR holds that the world existed before we arrived to conceptualize it and does not change just because our conceptions of it do.

While, like me, many critical realists share with positivism and with most contemporary philosophers (Bourget and Chalmers 2013) a correspondence theory of truth, none of us think, as does positivism, that truth is always as simple as matching observations to theories. According to CR, observations are rarely separate from theoretical conceptions or underlying values. Thus, CR denies both the possibility and even the ideal of theory and value neutrality in science. The acknowledgement of the complexities associated with truth determination is what makes CR not just a realism but, unlike positivism, a critical rather than naïve realism.

If we cannot always separate observations from theory and values, how do we arrive at truth? According to CR, truth does not emerge algorithmically from following some foundationalist methodology. In this sense, CR is anti-foundationalist. CR maintains instead that truth determination is always in part rhetorical, which means it is always fallible. We can get things wrong, which, let me hasten to say, we can only do if it is also possible in principle to get things right. In this respect, CR also differs from a relativist position, which would accord truth equally to all perspectives.

Against relativism, CR upholds what it calls judgmental rationality, which means an ability to recognize that not all arguments are equally good. Some are better than others. Thus, according to CR, our best purchase on the truth of any matter (which resides in the intransitive dimension) is the best argument available (which resides in the transitive dimension).

As the best argument available may change, what we believe (the transitive dimension of knowledge) may change without changing the reality itself (the intransitive dimension of knowledge). Although it is fallible, the best argument available, throughout its ongoing vicissitudes, is all we have we to go on, so that on important matters, it is our epistemic obligation, CR would maintain, for us to attend to it.

Of course, as intimated, perhaps the biggest difference between CR and positivism concerns causality. CR completely rejects the covering law model and the understanding of causality in terms of event-regularities. Like ANT, CR believes that the things of the world all bear causal agency, that is, causal powers to make things happen. Because in the open causal system represented by the world outside a laboratory, the causal powers of different things can interfere with each other in inconsistent ways, CR expects no invariant event-regularities but at most regularities that persist only so long as some contingent conjuncture of causes continues to operate.

Instead of causality always following some homogeneous If-then form, for CR, causality is thick, taking a multitude of different forms. Pushing is different from pulling, and both are different from questioning, dissolving, exiling, catalyzing, unlocking, and a host of other forms of agency captured by our causative verbs. As in the foregoing list, human and higher animal forms of agency are distinct, involving intentionality, and so unlike Latour, critical realists would not speak as if all agency were alike.

2 SOCIAL REALITY: WHAT IS THERE?

North American relational sociology seems very influenced by—or at least resonant with—poststructuralism. McFarlane (2013, 46) in particular seems almost affronted that critical realists would challenge the authoritative “antihumanisms of Althusser, Derrida, Foucault” and the equally authoritative “posthumanisms of Latour and Haraway.” Poststructuralists believe all legitimately can be contested except their own contestations.

As I have observed elsewhere (Porpora 2016a), the way to win an argument in poststructuralist circles is to frame what you oppose as the favored pole of a binary opposition. That placement morally de-legitimizes whatever it is you oppose and thus wins you half the battle. It evidently goes unnoticed by poststructuralists that as the non-binary has meaning only in relation to the binary, the non-binary itself is the top of a binary opposition, making a principled opposition to binary oppositions a performative contradiction.

In any case, there are multiple dichotomies that relational sociologists are concerned for us to overcome. Dépelteau (2013) and Powell (2013) want us

to overcome the subject/object distinction. In addition, Powell wants us to overcome the mind/body distinction, and both—along with Tsekeris (2013)—want to do away with the distinctions between individuals and society and between actors and structures. McFarlane finally considers it illegitimate to distinguish the human from the non-human.

Consistent with Emirbayer's (1997) manifesto, we also are to believe there are no things—or at least no things with their own essential qualities apart from their relation to other ... things, which kind of suggests there are things after all because relations must relate something. It is just that we are not to accord those somethings any intrinsic properties; to do so would be essentialism. As Tsekeris (2013, 89) explains: "Generally speaking, relationalism directly opposes the obsolete substantialist framework where social reality is preferably described as, or uncritically reduced to, a dense and seamless constellation of things (reification) or essences (essentialism), which allegedly possess a very wide range of "intrinsic" or "natural properties—something that perfectly corresponds to (naïve) everyday experience."

CR stands with the "(naïve) everyday experience" McFarlane denigrates against the above deconstructive initiatives. Let us begin with the would-be deconstructions easiest to deconstruct: the mind/body distinction and the distinction between the human and non-human.

When philosophers of mind discuss the mind/body problem, they make a distinction between attribute and ontological dualism. Ontological dualism holds that there are two kinds of substance in the world: matter and spirit. In opposition, ontological monism holds that there is no substance that constitutes the soul or mind; instead all in the world is entirely material. Most people today, including most critical realists, are, like Powell, ontological monists. So if Powell means to affirm only ontological monism, there is no quarrel.

But ontological monism does not settle the more interesting question: Are mental states and processes ultimately reducible to physical states and processes? Put another way, are mental processes something *sui generis* or can what the mind does be reduced to purely mechanical, physiological processes of the brain? Attribute monists would answer this question reductively. Emblematic of such reductionism is Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*, which depicts us as walking test tubes who cannot be blamed if we are filled with bad chemicals that make us do bad things.

On the contrary, attribute dualists hold that although all things are made of matter, there also is emergence across all levels of reality of new forms of causality so that at a certain level there emerge forms of mental processing that are not physical. Thus, although critical realists are ontological monists, they are also emergentists who in the foregoing sense hold to attribute dualism. Does Powell? Or is he a physicalist reductionist? If so, then he must hold we are all causally determined by mindless physical forces. If not, if Powell is also in some sense an attribute dualist, then he has not let go of the mind/body distinction.

How about the distinction between the human and the non-human, which McFarlane wants us to abandon? Here, I would say this binary is rather artificial, as it collapses multiple levels of reality into a single non-human category that encompasses everything from atoms to protozoa to cats and dogs. We critical realists would instead acknowledge more than two levels of reality and follow the lead of Andrew Collier (1999) in attaching greater worth or value to things as they take on more of the qualities of a Thou that can actively participate in what Buber (1971) distinguished as an I-Thou as opposed to an I-It relation. It is for that reason that I attach greater moral worth to my cats than to the fleas that might afflict them.

Although McFarlane does not quite make it a critique, I am sensitive to the contradiction among people like me who love our pets but remain complicit in a collective instrumentalization and commodification of other animals. Certainly, even as a humanist, I think there is a dignity and respect due all creation, especially to the higher animals. I further concede that we have a moral obligation to oppose the suffering of non-human animals, an obligation to which, I confess, I am not fully living up. So I commend McFarlane's championing of animal welfare.

As a critical realist, however, I would still take great issue with McFarlane's anti- or post-humanism. He says, for example, "Only a metaphysical conception of 'the human' can prioritize human suffering vis-à-vis other forms of suffering—however, there are no good reasons to assume that 'the human' is inscribed into the structure of nature, let alone that 'the human' is so inscribed as to be fundamentally prior to any other being" (McFarlane 2013: 47).

It sounds as if McFarlane is suggesting that there are no good reasons to value a human being above any other being, that confronted with a burning house, I might as legitimately choose to save the cat or even the computer over the human being trapped inside. If so, McFarlane exemplifies Smith's (2011) complaint of scholars' posing theories that not even the proponents would honestly stand by in life outside the academy.

But perhaps we need to read McFarlane more carefully. I would agree that if human suffering takes moral precedence over the suffering of non-human animals, it must be due to metaphysical considerations. What are they? While there may be some disagreement among us critical realists, I at least would further concede to McFarlane that "the human" as such is not, as he puts it, morally "inscribed into the structure of nature." Were Klingons and Vulcans to exist, I would judge their welfare also to take moral precedence over that of cats and dogs and computers. I actually am rather confident that most critical realists would agree with me on this point. So it is not necessarily the human as such that critical realist humanism valorizes.

What is it then that might accord humans, Vulcans, and Klingons moral precedence over cats and dogs and computers? Well, first let me interject that as this question concerns what humans, Vulcans, and Klingons intrinsically share that cats and dogs do not, we cannot even have this conversation if we follow a poststructuralist rejection of essentialism. Even to entertain the

question presupposes that there are things like cats and perhaps Vulcans with different intrinsic properties apart from how they may be positioned incidentally vis-à-vis anything else. That the question cannot even be posed within poststructuralism some may see as a virtue. As I on the contrary consider that impossibility a *reductio ad absurdum*, I will move on, pretending agreement that we can in fact carry on this line of inquiry.

McFarlane chides Archer and Donati for not justifying the sanctity that they, like most people, accord human life. I can only presume that Archer and Donati considered the justification self-evident. Although there are now pan-psychists (see, e.g., Wendt 2015) who would accord some proto-consciousness even to rocks, most of us would still distinguish between the non-conscious, the conscious, and the self-conscious. Most of us who would make those distinctions would also go on to say that things like rocks are not at all conscious, and that although higher animals like cats certainly are conscious, they are not fully self-conscious in the way we humans are.

Our self-consciousness, which appears to be highly language-dependent, endows us not only with the purposive agency we share with cats but also a radically expanded symbolic and cultural capacity that, among other things, makes us moral agents. It is this expanded self-consciousness and moral agency that critical realists like Smith (2011) and I (Porpora 2015) would say constitutes the category of personhood. As personhood is a quality that can be instantiated by species other than the human, Vulcans, should they exist, would also be persons as might be dolphins or even parrots.

So what humanism defends, at least in its critical realist guise, is the category of personhood. Certainly, for decades, personhood has been under attack from poststructuralists, who in Foucauldian style like to portray people largely as the fractured effects of discursive practices. CR does not deny that persons are social products, fractured or not, but it does not see persons just as effects. On the contrary, CR holds that once persons come into being, they are enduring centers of conscious feeling, reflection, and creative, moral response. It is the embodied persons we are as a whole that CR regards as our selves, not some ghostly presence inside us.

But it is not just from poststructuralism that personhood comes under threat. If as above we think of persons as beings who think and feel and who respond to those thoughts and feelings, then they must be there to do so. But writing from the perspective of relational sociology, Emirbayer and Mische suggest no one is at home.

We conceptualize the self not as a metaphysical substance or entity, such as the “soul” or “will” ... but rather as a dialogical structure, itself thoroughly relational. Our perspective, in other words, is relational all the way down. (Emirbayer and Mische 1998)

Like CR, one thing Emirbayer and Mische seem to be denying above is the self understood as some ghostly substance or entity knocking around inside us. But instead of talking, like CR, of the self as the embodied person before us,

Emirbayer and Mische talk instead of the self not as what philosophers would call a particular but as a dialogical structure. That sounds equally ghostly or metaphysical. Where is that structure?

Or perhaps where is the wrong question. Maybe what Emirbayer and Mische are suggesting is that the self is not a thing at all. All that exists are dialogical flows and transactions, the passing of thoughts and feelings without a thinking, feeling subject. Let there be no mistake, this idea also is metaphysical; it is Buddhism. Although there is much about Buddhism I admire, including Buddhist-style meditation which I practice, the idea that there can be suffering without a sufferer is incoherent. It likewise makes little sense for our compassion to be directed toward suffering *per se* as opposed to the beings who suffer.

Concrete, embodied persons and other suffering beings are who's, and if they are who's, they are also particulars, that is, things. But Emirbayer's "Relational Manifesto" would have us do away with things. Things are substances that are not eternal, and if they are not eternal, then evidently they are never there. All that is are transactions and flows.

One says wait a minute. Transactions must be transactions among some things, no? Flows must be flows of something, no? If there are relations, there must be relata, no? It all sounds incoherent, but maybe it all is meant as a Zen Koan.

The apparent incoherence is why I do not quite know what Powell (2013, 190) means when he says, "We will understand all objects as constituted through relations—including individuals themselves. In this respect, radical relationalism is radically antiessentialist and nonhumanist." He goes on (p. 191): "all phenomena are composed of relations and all action takes place through relations."

There is a way of understanding Powell that makes sense. Since he refers to them, it seems that however constituted they may be by relations, Powell thinks there also are objects. And actions too. But if so, then it must be just an elliptical way of talking to say all objects are constituted by relations or that all phenomena are composed of relations. From CR's emergentist point of view, higher level entities are composed of or constituted by suitable arrangements of lower level entities. Molecules, for example, are composed of or constituted by suitable arrangements of, that is, relations among, atoms.

So, yes, we can say that everything is composed of relations just as we can say that everything beyond elementary particles is composed of other things or substances. The full truth is that beyond elementary particles, all things are composed of or constituted by suitable relations among substantial things. So our ontology must include both relations and substances.

Of course, that leaves little left of Emirbayer's sharp distinction between substantialism and relationalism. We always need both substances and relations. The Relational Manifesto drains even more if we further admit that (1) once constituted, things like water or persons have their own causal powers independent of their relations to other things; and (2) the constitutive relations among lower level elements that compose higher level things are not exclusively transactions but, like the spatial patterns of DNA, also more static configurations. But we have perhaps dwelt enough on general philosophy. Let us turn finally to social explanation.

3 OF FLOWS, TRANSACTIONS, STRUCTURES, AND ACTIONS

In preparation for this chapter, I reread Emirbayer and Johnson (2008) and realize I have been somewhat unfair to Emirbayer. Although I had read the paper before, it somehow had failed to register with me that in this less visible publication, Emirbayer and Johnson effectively repudiate Emirbayer's relational manifesto, assaulting from a Bourdieusian direction the interactionist fallacy it commits. In place of the manifesto, Emirbayer and Johnson champion the understanding of social structure I am known in critical realist circles for having staked out in 1989. It also happens to be the understanding of Bourdieu to whom, fairly enough, Emirbayer and Johnson credit it, although as I point out, Marx was there first. Of course, less fairly, neither CR nor I get any mention, but that is no surprise.

If my unfairness to Emirbayer has been only somewhat, it is because I am evidently not the only one who has failed to notice Emirbayer's shift. It is unclear if even Emirbayer himself notices—although Emirbayer (2013) suggests so. In any case, as North American relational sociology continues on its way, its originator seems quietly to have abandoned it. In the Emirbayer and Johnson piece, we now have more than flows and transactions. In fact, as below, the word transaction appears now only in critical contexts where Emirbayer and Johnson castigate others—although notably not Emirbayer's own manifesto—for falling into an “interactionist fallacy.”

They have not sufficiently analyzed, that is, the structural forces that realize themselves by means of these transactions and that gain outward expression in and through them. Such an interactionist perspective, shared implicitly even by those who stress power and profits in their explicit analyses, can only take us so far toward an adequate theoretical and empirical understanding of the larger mechanisms that preconstruct, shape, and constitute the deeper truth of those interactions. (Emirbayer and Johnson 2007: 9)

We see here a significant shift. Now, it seems, in addition to transactions, which are essentially interactions, which are essentially behaviors, we also have lying behind them “structural forces,” which are “larger mechanisms” that “preconstruct, shape, and constitute” those transactional behaviors. If the structural forces are analytically distinct from and causally prior to the transactions and the people who transact them, then quietly abandoned is the dissolution of subject and object, individual and society that Dépelteau and Powell consider emblematic of relational sociology. If, furthermore, as Emirbayer and Johnson go on to make clear, the structural forces are organizational relations, we are presented essentially with CR.

Although some critical realists speak of social structure as anything socially emergent like institutions that humans create, Archer (1995), Lawson (1997, 2003), Wight (2006), and I (Porpora 1989, 2015) speak of structure more narrowly as organizational relations. By organizational relations I mean, for

example, class structures, structures of patriarchy, and the relations of mutual threat that each capitalist poses to each other that Adam Smith considered the invisible hand motoring capitalism. This understanding of structure is at least dominant among critical realists.

As ownership, threat, power, and privilege are not behaviors but relational conditions underlying behavior, CR admits more to social ontology than just interactions or transactions or whatever else we might call behavior. Again, that does not mean that CR denies the existence of reciprocal behavior or of any behavior but that it simply resists, like the Emirbayer and Johnson passage above, the reduction of social ontology to behavior.

CR likewise resists the dissolution of the subject/object distinction that Dépelteau and Powell uphold. On the contrary, as I indicated, CR was born under the strong influence of Marx. Thus, fairly canonical in CR is Marx's distinction, which Powell (2013, 197) cites only to dissolve, between the history people make through their activity and the circumstances under which they make it.

I fail to see the dilemmas needing supersession in this distinction. Dépelteau (2013) does object that patterns cannot cause anything, which is sensible, but critical realists do not equate circumstances with patterns (see Porpora 1989). Power, privilege, and conflicts of interest are relational conditions, not patterns. That such circumstances exist objectively and consequentially seems just plain common sense. A rich woman and a poor woman both act, but they act out of different circumstances. Perhaps if we want to follow a Bourdieusian or Foucauldian line, we can even admit that who these people are is deeply structured (inscribed?) by their different circumstances. Fine. There is still a difference between their circumstances and how they as socially structured individuals act within them.

However much circumstances may be the result of past transactions, circumstances themselves are not transactions. When we speak of circumstances, part of what we mean is positionality. Everyone likes that word, even post-structuralists. But positionality has no meaning apart from organizational relationality. The two notions are correlative. A position has meaning only in relation to other positions, giving us a space of social positions, an organization of positions. An arrangement. Social arrangements are what CR means by social structure.

For Bourdieu, social structure within a field is defined by differences in various kinds of capital or resources. As organizational relations, those differences are distinct from the behavior they help explain. CR upholds Bourdieu's conception of organizational relations as something distinct from the behavior those relations condition. Indeed, following Marx, CR in two ways would go even further than Bourdieu. First, like Marx, CR would attribute more to organizing social relations than just differences in capital. There are also as noted a host of other relational properties characterizing social organization like power, dependency, exploitation, and mutual threat.

Second, like Marx and unlike Bourdieu (see Vandenberghe 2013) or Powell (2013), CR is resolutely realist about the ontological objectivity of those organizational relations. For CR, their posit is not simply a useful heuristic. On the contrary, if positing such relations is epistemically useful, it is, CR holds, because those relations ontologically are actually there and actually consequential. It follows that to collapse the behaviors into the objective circumstances is to jettison the explanatory work of the circumstances. Here, again, we may refer back to Emirbayer and Johnson, who nicely cite Bourdieu on what they come to call the interactionist fallacy:

Even some of the finest and most exemplary studies in organizational analysis partake of this interactionist fallacy. Examples of it abound, in fact, at the levels of both theory and research. At the theoretical level, Bourdieu argues that even Granovetter (e.g., 1985, 1992), for example, who is committed to understanding economic action as embedded in social relations, “avoid[s] ‘methodological individualism’ only to fall back into the interactionist vision which, ignoring the structural constraint of the field, will (or can) acknowledge only the effect of the conscious and calculated anticipation each agent may have of the effects of its actions on the other agents,” thus arriving at an approach “which, eliminating all structural effects and objective power relations, amount[s] to proposing a false supersession of the (itself spurious) alternative between individualism and holism.” (Emirbayer and Johnson 2007: 9)

What Emirbayer and Johnson cite Bourdieu as criticizing here is not neglect of habitus, with which North Americans are enamored because it is behavioral and unconscious. What Emirbayer and Johnson cite Bourdieu as criticizing is the neglect of temporally prior structural relations that cannot be reduced to occurrent transactions.

But if as above we are now to accept fields of structural relations as temporally prior to the behaviors enacted within them, have we not then backtracked from what Emirbayer’s (1997, 281) manifesto posed as a dilemma: “whether to conceive of the social world as consisting primarily in substances or in processes, in static ‘things’ or in dynamic, unfolding relations”? Perhaps if Emirbayer does not see his paper with Johnson as a repudiation of his own manifesto, it is because he thinks his transactionalism is distinct from interactionism.

What is distinct about the transactional approach is that it sees relations between terms or units as preeminently dynamic in nature, as unfolding, ongoing processes rather than as static ties among inert substances ... The imageries most often employed in speaking of transactions are accordingly those of complex joint activity, in which it makes no sense to envision constituent elements apart from the flows within which they are involved (and vice versa). (Emirbayer 1997: 289)

There are actually two problems here: (1) a false depiction of mutual exclusion between substance and relationality and between stasis and process; and (2) an attack on a straw man. Take the straw man first. What sociologist speaks

of human beings as inert substances? Certainly not interactionists. The only way to make that categorization seem to stick is by way of the two pairs of mutual exclusion, which seem to force the interactionists into the camp of stasis and non-relationality. In contrast, the transactionist approach appears all flows in which the transactors have no pre-existing features apart from what emerges in the course of their transaction.

Leave aside the unfairness to the interactionists. The suggested transactionist approach, especially as elaborated at the end of the passage quoted above, makes little sense. Do transactors really encounter each other as unsituated blank slates without pre-history, without comparative cultural capital, without positional interests, without anything? Such image is in any case hard to square with the extracts from Emirbayer and Johnson, which following Bourdieu clearly do envisage positioned beings in objective, consequential, non-flowing, structural arrangements prior to and apart from joint activity and process.

The only way to square the two images is to admit that not all relations are flowing activities; that as well as relations, there are also relationally positioned things (substances) that meet for joint activity with pre-existing (i.e., essential) properties; and that stasis and process are always a matter of degree so that all flows are structured flows of something, with some things more enduring or static than others. These concessions are all reasonable and commonsensical but completely at odds with the manifesto and hence less rousing. They accord well, however, with CR.

From Deleuzians, I hear complaints that CR presents too static a picture of social life. As with their dominating concept of assemblage, Deleuzians want what Timothy Morton (2012) calls a lava lamp ontology—all flows without structure or things. Under new guise, these are the same people who brought us postmodernism, and they are still trying to melt all that is solid into air.

But CR does provide for process. The provision goes by the ungainly name of the morphogenetic/morphostatic (MM) model (Archer 1995) but essentially recapitulates Marx. It stipulates that analysis must begin by situating behavior in its context, both cultural and structural (i.e., relational). As people act within that context, they variably change or reconstitute it, producing a new context for subsequent behavior in a dialectical process. As a dialectic is essentially a dialogue, it cannot proceed without discrete interlocutors. For CR the interlocutors are structure, agency, and culture. Hence the acronym SAC, without the constituent elements of which process becomes just an unanalyzable lava lamp.

In the end, CR may well be classified as a relational perspective in sociology, but it is not a monistic one. Like Bourdieu and Marx, CR affirms relations among social positions in a way that makes it not individualistic but, because it also sees individuals consequentially occupying those positions, not holistic either. But however relational CR may be, it affirms a non-reductive social ontology that encompasses more than one category of thing.

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An Original Relational Sociology Grounded in Critical Realism

Pierpaolo Donati

I CONTENTS

This chapter presents an original version of relational sociology (critical realist relational sociology, or CRRS), developed beginning in 1983, which is also called ‘relational theory of society’. It shares with the other relational sociologies the idea of avoiding both methodological individualism and holism. The main differences reside in the way social relations are defined, the kind of reality that is attributed to them, how they configure social formations, and the ways in which social relations are generated (emergence) and changed (morphogenesis). In particular, this approach is suited to understanding how the morphogenesis of society comes about through social relations, which are the mediators between agency and social structure. The generative mechanisms that feed social change lie in the dynamics of the networks of social relations (not simply networks of nodes), which alter the molecular composition constituting structures already in place. The scope of CRRS is threefold. Theoretically, it can orient social research toward unseen and/or immaterial realities (the same relations are intangibles). Empirically, it can show how new social forms/formations are created, transformed, or destroyed depending on different processes of valorization or devalorization of social relations. Finally, it can help us design and implement social policies and welfare services based on networking interventions.

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2 THE STARTING POINT AND DEVELOPMENT OF CRRS

My relational sociology originated as a sociological approach aimed at overcoming the limits of classical and contemporary sociologies with a more general theory able to include partial points of view and, at the same time, to connect them with one another (Donati 1983).

My initial inspiration was the criticism of action sociologies and system sociologies in as much as they are reductive views of social reality. I proposed that such a critique would benefit from the adoption of the category of the social relation as the basic concept that designates the smallest unit of the social fabric and, *therefore*, of sociological analysis. For me, the social relation is simultaneously ‘the great unknown’ and the unifying principle of reality, containing within itself a unique and fundamental property: that of connecting (uniting) the elements of the social sphere while *at the same time* it promotes their differentiation. It is in this property that we find what I call the ‘*enigma*’ of the relation (Donati 2015a), which consists in the fact that it connects diverse terms (or entities) through differentiation processes that are, at the same time, conflictual and integrative.

In the historical moment in which I wrote *Introduction to Relational Sociology* (early 1980s), there certainly existed many proposals for overcoming the opposition between action theories and system theories. A ‘multidimensional sociology’ was discussed involving an alternation between freedom and constraint in both action and order. Theories were advanced that focused on the dialectic between microinteraction and macrostructures, on the possible integrations of self, interaction, social structure, and culture, and so on. But all of these proposals remained focused on dichotomous pairs (agency/structure and micro-macro links) and did not probe the structure of the relational connection between the two poles. Explanations of social relationality made reference to the poles of the relation rather than to the reality intrinsic to the social relations themselves. In many cases the theoretical proposals combined the poles of the dichotomies with a mix between freedom and structural order (which I call *lib/lab*) whereby the social relation was reduced to an instrumental and derived entity, that is, a byproduct of other entities.

The challenge that I set for myself was that of developing a theory that is open to all possible social dynamisms but that is also endowed with a solidity of its own. Briefly, to my view, the consistency of theory must be based on the relationality among the elements that make up the social fabric, and not on some integrationist principle (such as the systemic inertia in Talcott Parsons’ ‘general unified theory’ or Niklas Luhmann’s ‘autopoietic self-referentiality’), nor, at the opposite extreme, on some principle of radical relativism.

My approach relies upon a kind of realism that I name ‘relational realism’ (Donati 1983, 10; further developed in Donati 2011, 97–119). It is intended to be an *alternative* to those relational approaches that are founded on a flat ontology, but it is not an attempt to unify all sociological approaches around the notion of relationship as a replacement category of other categories

(such as system or network). Bagaoui's (2007) criticism according to which I proposed a 'unifying' theory in order to replace all other theories is misleading, since, from the very start, I conceived of my relational sociology not as a *reductio ad unum* but as a general framework to connect the best of all other theories (Donati 1983, 11–12). In order to avoid a unifying theory, Bagaoui (ibid., 173) proposes a "plural relational sociology". While I agree that we must avoid a unifying theory, which would be constrictive and restrictive, I do not think that we should label the relational sociology as 'plural', given that, on the condition that the theory is truly relational, then it should be necessarily pluralistic, provided that it can understand and cope with the essential property of the relation, which is to join the terms that it connects while, at the same time, promoting their differences (what I have called the 'enigma' of the relation: Donati 2015a). It is precisely the absence or rejection of the relation that undermines pluralism.

Certainly, relational sociology can be presented as a general movement and as a general way of thinking, but, in doing so, one runs the risk of identifying relational sociology with sociology at large, since all sociologists speak of relations. After all, the whole world is relational, or relationally constituted. In the natural sciences new researches are now demonstrating that DNA is relational, that chemical and physical realities are relational, and so on. Then, the issue is what does we mean by 'relational'? To my mind, the answer lies in capturing the gist of what a relation is in every specific field. In the social field, 'relational' has a peculiar meaning, which is not seen (observed, conceptualized, etc.) by all. Though many scholars speak of relationality, they are not relational. Let me offer two examples. Vandenberghe (1999) has rightly argued that Bourdieu does not share a proper relational view. Luhmann (1995) has explicitly rejected relational sociology arguing that the category of social relation is 'too heavy' to be placed as the constitutive element of the social. Surely, in his writings he has used a relational logic, but, here is the point: his concept of relation is purely logical, not sociological. Therefore, in my view, it is possible to distinguish between those sociological theories that are properly relational—because they assume the category of social relation as the first general presupposition for sociological analysis—and those theories that, as a matter of fact, make use of the category of the relation, but generally only as a logical or methodological tool, and often derived from other entities.

Therefore my relational sociology does not aim to create a "methodological relationism to parallel the conceptualizations of individualism and holism," as called for by Ritzer and Gindoff (1994, 5), but instead proposes an approach that is an alternative to the oscillation, combination, or mediation between these two opposites. Its underlying assumption is that "society is (not 'has') relations." This means that: (1) the object of sociological investigation is the social relationality that constitutes that object (every object, such as work, political participation, health, the family, unemployment, war, economic enterprise, etc.); (2) every social phenomenon arises from a relational context and generates another relational context. This is the meaning of my statement according to

which *at the beginning of every social reality there is the relation*. I provided a first example of this in reference to the critique of structuralist theories of social reproduction (such as that of Bourdieu) and by proposing a new sociological approach to health and illness (understood as social relations) in contrast to the Parsonian sociology of medicine (Donati 1983, Chaps. 4 and 6).

The social ontology that supported this theory from the beginning has been a kind of realism that I called *critical, analytical, and relational* (Donati 1983, 12). On the basis of this ontology, I developed my relational sociology in three historical phases. During the period 1983–91, I elaborated the theoretical underpinnings, testing them with a series of empirical studies (of which later) (Donati 1991). In the period 1992–2006, I developed a suitable research methodology, called ‘relational analysis’, submitting it to corroboration in empirical research (Donati 2006). From 2007 to 2017, in synergy with Margaret Archer’s critical realism, I posed the question of how to address the changes and destiny of the globalized society from the relational vantage point (Donati and Archer 2015; Donati 2017).

3 THE ARCHITECTURE OF THIS RELATIONAL THEORY OF SOCIETY

The architecture of CRRS rests on three major pillars that are rooted in a realist relational ontology: relational epistemology (knowledge is a relation to a relational reality), the methodological paradigm (relational analysis), and social practice (network intervention). Let us look at them one by one.

3.1 *Relational Epistemology*

The idea at the basis of CRRS is that sociological knowledge consists in understanding and explaining social facts as effects that emerge from relationally contested contexts.

The fabric of social reality—that is, whatever constitutes a ‘social fact’—is neither the action (single or aggregate) nor a supposed system with its impersonal mechanisms, nor simple communication, but the social relation. It is the *sui generis* processual structure of relations that characterizes the emergence of every social form. A couple, an economic enterprise, a voluntary association, a school all exist to the extent to which their actors practice a certain relational structure of belonging and processually generate and regenerate it over time. Social institutions are formed as specific relational contexts that emerge from particular networks of relations and change according to the process dynamic of networks. We can think of how the changing social relations in a local community elicit the decline and then death of the commons (from Marx to Elinor Ostrom: Carlsson and Sandström 2008). We can think of the qualities and properties of relations that diversify the forms of social circles (concentric or intersecting) studied by Georg Simmel. We can think of how the networks within an organization lead to the formation of oligarchical

rule (Robert Michels' so-called 'iron law of oligarchy'). In all of these cases, it is a precise processual structure of relational networks that does, or does not, elicit the emergence of a social fact. The structure is not independent of agency, and the problem is to understand how structure and agency are interacting in the network of social relations. The mediation process on the part of the social relations is of course a dynamic process of a reticular nature due to the subjects' relationality. The social system is a 'condensation' of social networks, that is, we can observe a network as a 'system' only under particular conditions.

Until a couple of decades ago social relations were treated in two principal ways: (1) relations as projections or reflections of actors, generally, individuals, and their actions within dyads and interpersonal relationships (Duck 1993); (2) relations as expression and effect of social structures, statuses, roles, positions in a social system (Ruddock 1969). Little by little, sociologists have realized that we cannot arrive at an adequate understanding of social change through either individualistic theory or holistic theory or even through some kind of mix of the two.

A growing number of sociologists have realized that in order to 'see' the relation, a third point of view is needed, one that is neither individualistic nor holistic, but that considers relations to be its primary object and focuses on relations as the objects that it seeks to explore. This exploration entails second and third order observations, that is, the activation of a reflexivity *on the* relations as such (which I call 'relational reflexivity': Donati 2011, xviii).

Consider friendship, for example. What makes friendship a social reality? Friendship emerges from human persons and only from them, but it cannot be an individual-level fact. We cannot be friends as individuals. To be friends is to share 'something' which is not a material or ideational entity, although it is powered by the exchange of material things, feelings, and reciprocal aids of various kinds. We cannot explain it in terms of individual contributions (as a matter of fact, it requires reciprocity) or holistic factors (in fact, neither of the two friends can live their friendship as an external imposition). Two or more people have created a relationship that depends solely on them, but which has assumptions that do not depend on them and involves things that go beyond their own individuality. This implies a togetherness (a 'we-relationship') that calls into play more than the friends' own individuality.

We can make the same considerations for an indefinite number of other phenomena such as the relational climate in a class of students or in a work team, the kind and degree of trust in families or civil associations, the high or low level of social capital in a local community, and so on. Statements such as: "He was a true father to me," "he is a real friend," "we are loyal colleagues," "more than a neighbor, she is like a family member for me," "I love her like a mother" all indicate a relation that has a precise, real meaning, even if alluded to indirectly.

Over recent decades a growing attention to the category of relationality has emerged, but one that empties it of a meaning of its own. A vast literature calls itself 'relational' today, but, to me, this is a label that, most of the time, covers nominalistic and indeterminate conceptions. As Dépelteau and

Powell (2013, xvi) rightly note: “for now, relational sociology is something like a patchwork of knowledge about social relations that are seen as dynamic, fluid processes.” From my point of view (as I will explain below), most sociologies that focus specifically on the category of the social relation are based on a flat ontology and have recourse to a more or less radical relativist epistemology.

What I call ‘relationism’ in the strict sense blends together structure and action, defining one in terms of the other in the manner that Archer (1995, 93–134) calls ‘central conflation’. The result, as in Anthony Giddens’ theory, is an inability to analytically theorize social interactions as a separate mediating temporal phase between a starting structure and an elaborated structure.

The relationists see relations in terms of a mixture of connected concepts. They argue for conceptual fluidity. Their formulations come close to a pragmatist focus on developing an anti-categorical approach to relationality. Epistemologically, they adopt a relativist approach that treats relations as a circle of interactions that are an end in themselves. In the words of Richard Rorty (1999, 54): “Everything that can serve as a term of relation can be dissolved into another set of relations, and so on forever.” CRRS does not deny the fact that the terms of the relation always refer back to other relations, but the opening to other relations does not happen in an indeterminate or purely coincidental way, consisting instead in moving (transition) from one structural form to another over time. That is why my relational epistemology is based upon a social ontology for which *substance and relation are co-principles of reality*: they work together. In principle, the nature of an entity cannot be reduced to relations, and, vice versa, relations cannot be reduced to substances, unless it is shown that in a particular case something similar has occurred.

Explaining a social fact in relational terms means giving an account of how that fact (for example, the increase in unemployment or violence) emerges from the interdependence between the actors who are in relation in a certain spatial-temporal context; meanwhile, these actors alter their identity and their way of acting in relation to the interdependence between them. The task of relational sociology is to analyze the process through which this structure of interdependence is generated, reproduces itself, and changes. This involves entering ‘inside’ the social relation and seeing its internal morphogenesis, which is structural, agential, and cultural (Archer’s SAC).¹ In order to carry out this analysis, I found it useful to reformulate in relational terms the *multidimensional interchange model* (AGIL) as a methodological tool (see the next section).²

In short, knowing a social relation means observing how the elements qualifying what is required by the relation itself for its own realization (i.e., what is required to make that specific relationship exist) are combined: its situated purpose, the means and norms to achieve it, and the latent value of the concrete relation that one is observing. To determine whether a committed relationship does or does not exist between David and Helen, it is not only a question of knowing the individual expectations of one vis-à-vis the other, and in which way and to what extent their expectations are shared, but it means observing

how their relation is configured as a We-relation (Donati and Archer 2015, 70–71). The relation is a ‘third party’ with respect to the interests, feelings, and expectations of the two partners.

The elements that qualify (configure) a social relation derive from the contributions that the actors inject into a relation through their interactions (reciprocal actions). The point is that their relationality is not simply a matter of a recursive process of transactions, of give and take, between Ego and Alter from which a certain interdependence between the subjects arises. Seen in this way, the relation becomes a circularity that defines the subjects’ identity (as White 2008 claims). Unlike relationist approaches, I maintain that it is possible to distinguish: (1) the distinct contributions that Ego and Alter give to the relation and (2) the contribution of their relationality as such (as demonstrated by Tam 1989). The social relation is the reality that exists ‘between’ the two. The emergence of the relation as a third party does not imply that the self-identity (of Ego and Alter) gets lost in the flux of social interdependence, as many network analyses and transactional sociologies often seem to suggest.³ The relational logic of networking is neither a negation of the subject nor a pure phenomenological circularity. It is, instead, the path for observing, describing, and defining how each agent individually redefines his/her identity in a networked situational context. Realist epistemology observes the relation in order to explore its terms (agents’ actions), but does not annihilate their autonomy. It is in this framework that Cook and Dreyer (1984) formulated the ‘social relations model’ for the study of the family, and Fiske (1992, 1993) and Haslam and Fiske (1999) proposed the ‘relational models theory’.

Obviously, in acting between each other, the actors reflect their social positions (status-roles) in varying ways and degrees. Nevertheless, they can also ignore or change their positions. Everything depends on how the subject (Self) interprets its own position, that is, what it entails and the opportunities for alternative relations that it offers.

Compared to Parsons, my epistemology accomplishes three basic divergent moves: (1) it abandons the idea that there can be a cybernetic hierarchy between the elements that constitute relations; (2) it assumes that, hypothetically, the elements of the relation can interact with one another in all the possible relational combinations; (3) it takes into account the fact that each element has its own external environment (ends and norms also have their own external environments, not only means and values as Parsons claims) (Donati 2015b, 98). The relation’s instrumental component has, as its environment, the physical and technological resources for achieving the goal; the value component relates to the environment of all possible values; the normative component has to do with the environment of alternative norms; the component of the situated goal has to deal with the environment of differing relations that have concurrent finalities.

While I accept Luhmann’s viewpoint (1995) that all the elements of the social relation are contingent and that, therefore, in the abstract, an indefinite number of combinations are possible, I argue that, in reality, only a few of them actually materialize. If this is the case, it means that there are relational reasons

for which certain combinations come about and not others. As Luhmann claims, the generalized symbolic means that are used in relations can be the means of simple communication and not necessarily of interchange (as Parsons maintained). Still, in contrast to Luhmann, I hold that the social relation emerges not only on the basis of auto-poietic logics or operations, but also of hetero-poietic ones.

It is worth underscoring a fundamental difference with respect to the move of excluding the human subject from the social relation, which was begun by Parsons and then taken to the extreme by Luhmann. While for Parsons the unit act unfolds between the material conditions of the action and the environment of the ultimate values without including a subject, and for Luhmann as well, the system operates without a subject through autopoietic mechanisms (the automatic dual distinctions of inner/outer and before/after), for me the human subject is both external and internal to the social action and therefore to the social relation (in different ways, of course). The social relation unfolds between subjects that enter into the relation and redefine it constantly, taking into account all of its environments. In short, *the human subject is both outside and inside the relation*, of course in different ways. This perspective allows us to study social relations using an analytical scheme that is more complex and sensitive to the agents' subjectivity.⁴

The idea that the social relation (not the unit act) is the minimal and qualifying element of the social fabric suggests analogies, which are obviously only conceptual. As the chemical molecule characterizes a chemical substance and in biology the genome specifies the bios of a living individual, so we can say that, in sociology, a specific social relation characterizes a certain social form. For example, a network of friends, a hospital, a class, a family, a software laboratory, a gang, a lobby, a group of human traffickers are all characterized by a specific relational structure that I call the 'social molecule.' Obviously, any literal chemical or biological analogy must be avoided because the 'social molecule' that characterizes the social fabric as such is made up of elements that come from human actions that are relatively free and takes on stability through relational mechanisms (Donati 2015c).

Following this conceptual framework, we can enter 'inside' the social relation and observe how its *sui generis* structure (its social molecule) characterizes an entire social formation and mutates over time—for example, the transition from a modern form to an after(or trans)-modern one (Donati 2015b, 99–103).

We can ask: when is it that the social morphogenesis of modernity happens? From the point of view of relational sociology, it happens when the relationality of its own social molecule finds itself faced with a type and degree of contingency that it is no longer able to manage. Society approaches a breaking point in which agents/actors experience increasing numbers of failures. The collapse of the social molecule that structures it becomes possible. This is happening in the spheres that are modernizing the most. Many emerging phenomena signal the advent of a turning point that is marked by the formation of *another social molecule*, of a *trans*-modern type.

The typically modern relation is characterized by the following combined elements: (G) the goal of the social relation is to select a variation as an expansion of opportunities by freeing it from all ascriptive constraints; (A) the means for achieving this goal can be extremely diverse, but what is essential is that social relations are treated like money because money is the generalized symbolic means of exchange that allows us to render all objects equivalent, removing their constraints; in fact, money is the trigger of a typically modern relationality, rendering social relations indifferent and making their ascriptive character and intrinsic quality disappear; (I) the norms of the modern social molecule are acquisitive rules that must foster the production of variety, valorizing competition in order to produce continuous innovation; (L) the relation's guiding distinction is its indifference toward values (i.e., the polytheism of values); thus, the relation evaluates reality on the basis of values that are always negotiable and fungible, in other words, which are functionally equivalent to other values; the culture of the society of individuals is characterized by liquidity and the decontextualization of relations and is nourished by an a-relational individualistic matrix (L).

On the other hand, the typically after-modern relation is characterized in the following way: (G) the goal of the social relation is to select variations according to the causal qualities and properties of the relations, in particular, generating relational goods whenever it is possible and desirable; (A) the means for achieving the goal can be extremely diverse, but they must be such as to allow for the production of qualitatively satisfying relations; (I) the norms of the after-modern social molecule, owing to the fact of having to promote the non-fungible qualities of social relations, must employ a specific reflexivity (for example, working in a non-profit organization entails a type of relations that are qualitatively different from those involved in working in a for-profit company, and the two normative environments are not interchangeable; (L) the relation is evaluated on the basis of the meaningful experience that it produces differently from other types of relations; this cultural orientation replaces an individualistic cultural matrix with a cultural matrix that allows the human person to transcend him/herself in and through the relation.

In the social relation that we qualify with a certain name, there are both necessity and contingency (Morandi 2010, 2011). The necessity refers to the need to be structured so as to match the agent's purposes; the contingency concerns its situational configuration, which can be articulated in many different ways. For example, the relation that we call 'free giving' is different if practiced in the family or on the part of a charity or a company or by a non-profit organization. The friendship relation is different if practiced among classmates or on Facebook. The citizenship relation is different if it refers to the city in which one resides, the nation, a super-national community, or the entire world.

3.2 *Methodological Paradigm (the Relational Analysis of Society as a Network of Social Networks)*

My conception of the term ‘paradigm’ is not the one put forward by Kuhn. I do not understand a sociological paradigm as a hard, constraining, normalizing, hegemonic or dominant theory, but precisely the opposite, as an open, dynamic, relational point of view. “The relational paradigm analyses social reality from a point of view which is neither that of methodological individualism nor that of methodological holism, but from that which I term ‘the relational point of view’” (Donati 2011, 56). Following Luhmann, I conceive of a sociological paradigm as a ‘guiding-difference’, but, differently from Luhmann, I understand difference as a relation and not as a binary distinction (Donati 2009).

My relational analysis follows five methodological rules, which correspond to just as many phases of the cognitive process (Donati 2006; LSR 2016, 15–18).

1. The researcher needs to spell out what he intends to know. He must choose between questions based on descriptive needs and questions that problematize the object, introducing a paradoxical point of view (descriptive observation or problematizing observation). For example, if the problem is unemployment, one can ask about which configuration the unemployment in a certain geographical area has (descriptive question), or why it is this way and not another way, or why unemployment is increasing while there is economic development (an instructive question because it confronts one with a counter-intuitive phenomenon that is an enigma).
2. It is necessary to define the fact that is being observed as a social relation and, where appropriate, problematized as a social relation. For example, unemployment is not a thing or a state of things, or simply a form of transaction, but a type of social relation that, in order to be seen, requires a ‘relational observation’. Relational observation begins by defining its object of knowledge as a social relation among actors (A and B) belonging to diverse socio-economic-cultural structures, and continuing with the observation of phenomena from the perspective of an outside observer (O) who examines the behavior of actor A in relation to actor B, and vice versa, in order to explain why their interactions produced the effect Y (emergent relation) under certain conditions.
3. The emergent fact is configured as a black box (AGIL) within which the generative process of the fact itself unfolds starting from a series of relevant variables; obviously, the choice of objective and subjective variables is a creative act on the part of the researcher. For example, in the case of unemployment, the characteristics of the work required by the employer as well as the worker’s qualities can be important, but, above all, it is the relation between objective and subjective factors that must be the object of investigation.
4. The social fact has a *sui generis* reality of an emergent nature that derives from processes of morphostasis/morphogenesis (M/M) (Archer 1995, 2013). For example, the use of the M/M scheme makes it possible

to see how the initial structure of the job market was altered by the interactions between the actors and by external and intervening factors in the intermediate temporal phase T2–T3 so as to produce a structure at arrival in which that particular configuration of unemployment, and not another one, emerged.

5. The fifth rule is applied when the research has the practical goal of social intervention to remediate the social problem in question: in such a case, the methodology for devising an ODG (relational Observation–Diagnosis–Guidance) system is applied, which I will explain below. For example, unemployment is observed as a specific social relation in a relational context, an assessment diagnosis is made of the problems posed by these relations, and then a process of relational (not directive) guidance is designed for the involved actors so that the actors themselves solve the problem by altering their relational context.

To put it in simple terms. We begin with the observation that there exists a social fact Y. We cast it as a problem (Why does it exist? How is it possible?). We define it as a relation. We ask why it has emerged. We devise a research design by identifying relevant factors, both subjective (values and attitude orientations) and objective (adaptive conditions, that is, means and norms that are independent of the subjective will), which could have generated the observed fact, and then we put them into a system of relations, the black box, that should offer an explanation for why the phenomenon Y has been generated.

The black box is configured as a network of relations among relevant factors that are, moreover, influenced by their environments, which are, in turn, networks of relations among interests, means, norms, and values that have an impact on the phenomenon that is the research object. For this reason, if generalized, relational analysis leads to the observation of society as a network of networks of relations that changes through the processes of M/M (an example is given in Donati 2017).

3.3 *Relational Practice (Social Interventions as Networking)*

My relational approach envisions the possibility that relational analysis can be useful in designing and implementing interventions aimed at solving social problems in all areas (Donati 1991, part 3).

Social practices consist in activating networks that produce changes generated by the stakeholders interested in solving a social problem assisted by social actors (social workers, catalysts, supervisors, promoters, etc.) who stimulate and guide a process of change by working on the relations. Relational guidance consists in enabling actors to change their behaviors by leveraging their personal and relational reflexivity through the mobilization of new relations. The guidance is not directive but consists in appealing to the natural potentials for change inherent in the networks of relations among the actors. For this reason, it is called *relational steering*, widely used in action research.⁵

These practices are conceptualized as ‘relational observation–diagnosis–guidance systems’ (see the entry for ‘ODG systems’ in LSR 2016, 283–287). They are responses to crisis situations. A certain social policy is an intervention into a state of things that is considered to be unsatisfactory. Each social intervention thus presupposes a definition of the situation that contains an ethical or political value judgment. We can summarize the three phases of the ODG systems as follows:

1. *Relational observation* is a delicate operation because there is the risk that the researcher may observe his/her mind rather than the objective reality. One must be cognizant of the paradoxes of observing systems and have appropriate tools for addressing them. For this reason, the observation of social needs must be based on continual interactions between the intervening system and the target subject. The interactions that make it possible to learn about the situation must seek the maximum of relational reflexivity for all the actors.
2. *Diagnosis* is relational in as much as it seeks to show that the social problem arises from pathological and unsatisfactory social relations. Diagnosis is a special case of description that condenses the general observation of a situation by focusing on the difference between a normal or satisfactory state and a pathological or unsatisfactory condition. Diagnosis is therefore more than linguistic observation–description–communication; it is an elaboration of sense (as meaning and intentionality). Sense is a relation and, as such, should be thought and acted. Expert systems can give important cognitive support in making a diagnosis, but they cannot replace the giving of meaning, which is peculiar to human relations.
3. *Relational guidance* is an alternative to directive interventions (authoritative, conditional, preceptoral, procedural) and to paradoxical interventions (for example, those based on the positive connotation of symptoms); these have been shown to be inadequate to today’s complex social systems, which behave in a counter-intuitive way. Examples of relational programs are all those interventions that, based on a network map, have the goal of activating the natural potentials of networks of relations through an array of different methodologies such as: forms of partnership between public and private actors, whether formal or informal, cooperative or competitive; peer-to-peer production; co-production, dialogic-relational methodologies (such as family group conferences: Seikkula and Arnkil 2006), and so on. To the extent that relations become the object of new ways to enact policies of relational inclusion and investment, they become the fulcrum for many new relational professions, especially in the area of social work (Folgheraiter 2004). An example of application is the relational intervention aimed at making youth gangs desist from committing crimes (Weaver and McNeill 2015).

4 DISTINCTIONS FROM OTHER SO-CALLED RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGIES

To compare CRRS to the great many authors who are called, or call themselves, ‘relational sociologists’ is beyond the scope of this chapter. I will limit myself to the most well known.

Various authors claim that Norbert Elias’ thought represents a first version of relational sociology. I do not believe that this is the case in that his sociology, while speaking of relations (but which sociologist does not speak about relations?), can be more properly characterized as ‘figurational’ (*Prozess und Figurationstheorie*, Bartles 1995). It focuses on understanding the structures that mutually dependent human beings establish and the transformations they undergo, both individually and in groups, due to the increase or reduction of their interdependencies and gradients of power. Thus, instead of analyzing the conducts of isolated individuals—at times personified as geniuses, heroes, prophets, or sages—figurational sociology aims to understand the webs of social ranks. Figuration is a generic term used to represent the web of interdependences formed among human beings and which connects them, that is, a structure of mutually oriented and dependent persons. According to Elias (1956, 234), the social scientist’s task is “is to explore, and to make men understand, the patterns they form together, the nature and the changing configurations of all that binds them to each other.” In other words, the task is to reveal the way in which human beings connect to each other in their alliances and conflicts and the kind of network they form, considering their ambitions for power and status.⁶

In short, this is a pioneering approach to the study of relational configurations that is still awaiting a more complex paradigm able to explain why and how relations emerge as a *sui generis* phenomenon and the ways by which the qualities and causal properties of networks of relations produce certain effects and not others.

Ann Mische (2011) has given an interesting account of relational sociology, according great importance to what she has called “the New York School” active during the 1990s. Unfortunately, she ignored Italian sociology and other approaches such as, for example, that of Bajoit (1992), Laflamme (1995, 2009), Bagaoui (2007), and Vautier (2008). In my opinion, her narrative’s limitations consist in the fact that she does not draw clear distinctions between relational sociology and network analysis. Moreover, she fails to provide a definition of the social relation as such.

Pierre Bourdieu is another author who is often mentioned as a relational sociologist, but various commentators have demonstrated that his is not a truly relational vision of social reality (Emirbayer 1997, 304). As Bottero affirms (2009, 399): “Bourdieu’s approach is relational but does not focus on social relationships, understood as social networks or as an interactional order.” Vandenberghe (1999) claims that Bourdieu’s ‘generative structuralism’ instead represents an attempt to systematically transpose the relational conception of the natural sciences to the social sciences.

Emirbayer's (1997) *Manifesto for a Relational Sociology* is usually cited as the benchmark of relational sociology, but, in fact, this article is focused on the criticism of substantialism and its replacement with a perspective that he calls 'transactional'. The concept of relation is made equivalent to that of 'transaction', which consists of dyadic processes taking place between actors. This move excludes the possibility that one could define the attributes of the constitutive and detachable elements of the relation itself; moreover, it does not allow for the possibility of eventually attributing precise qualities (or characteristics) to the subjects of the relation at the end of each transactive cycle. In the transactional approach, the units involved in the transaction derive their meaning, significance, and identity fundamentally from the transaction; as a result, their own consistency gets lost.

In the prevailing transactional approach:⁷ (1) social relations are constructed patterns of meaning (relational expectations), arising out of, and changing through, the course of communication,⁸ and (2) they generate structures that have no power. Critical realism objects that just the opposite is true: (1) relations are an emergent *sui generis* reality, and (2) relations (as structures generating other structures through morphogenetic processes) have peculiar causal powers (Donati 2015b; Porpora 2015).

Certainly, Niklas Luhmann (1995) is an author whose sociological theory uses the concept of relation on the ontological and epistemological level, but it does so at a purely abstract *logical* level. He refuses to consider the *social* relation as a foundational category of sociology and replaces it with the category of meaning. Since he believes that values and norms are undecidable (Luhmann 2008 [1992]), society tends to give primacy to the instrumental component (the adaptive means) of the social system with respect to completely contingent goals. In this way, the social relation is seen as lacking its own structure and is reduced to a communicative event. The sociological fact that communication always takes place within a relation and contributes to redefining a relation and its context is obliterated. For Luhmann, instead, the symbolic means of communication, freed from value and normative constrictions, can configure social relations (i.e., social forms) without any conditions other than that of self-referential communication structures. Societies are functional, self-reproducing (autopoietic) systems that operate independently of the intentional characteristics of human relations, given the fact that human agents fluctuate in the system's environment. This sociology can therefore not see the empirical qualities and causal properties of those social relations that do not respond to functional logic. Moreover, it prohibits the thought that human actions can somehow intentionally alter social structures and systems.

Harrison White and Charles Tilly use the term relational sociology to refer to the network analysis that they have applied to the realms of culture, history, politics, economics, and social psychology. I cannot comment on Tilly's work here, for reasons of space. However, Harrison White (2008) deserves special attention, both for being one of the most cited authors among the so-called

relational sociologists and for the originality of his journey, which led him from a sociology understood as the analysis of the networks that confer social identities to a strong convergence with Luhmann's thought.

Following Luhmann, White argues that social systems are not constituted by social relations, but only by 'events': "If we assume with Luhmann that all events are fugitive and that they are the elements of social systems, then control becomes the attempt to constrain the possible events." (White 2008, 8). People do not try to control their social contexts by structuring relations, but by constraining events. White's adherence to Luhmann's theory could not be clearer than that. Briefly, for White, society is a web of space-time where people play out their identities trying to take control of the situation *through* their relations in networks and domains. Social relations are the means or the channels through which identities seek control over their social context. Again, the reality of social relations as emergents having their own qualities and causal powers is left aside or treated indirectly.

Nick Crossley's (2011) research understands relational sociology as a version of network analysis. He is interested in the effect of networks due to their structural characteristics. The social relation is an exchange between positions that are, in turn, defined by networks.

A collection of essays (in two volumes: Powell and Dépelteau 2013; Dépelteau and Powell 2013) provides clear evidence that the term 'relational sociology' is now used with a wide range of meanings. As Powell and Dépelteau (2013, 12) rightly point out, the relational paradigm is now played as 'a language game' by many scholars. Surely, we should appreciate the relevant differences. For example, the search for a 'deep' relational sociology able to build up a common framework (called for by Dépelteau 2013, 177–184 as an alternative to the search for a paradigm) differs from the proposal of a nonhumanist 'radical relationism' (supported by Powell), whose epistemology assumes naturalism and monist materialism, adopting an agnostic stance towards realism.

The point on which I want to draw attention is the following. If one wonders, as Dépelteau correctly does, "should we conceive social phenomena as substances (like the social things of Durkheim or solid social structures) or fluid and dynamic social processes?", Emirbayer and his followers reply by saying that relational sociology is an invitation to see our so-called objects (societies, institutions, social patterns, conflicts, social movements, social classes, etc.) in a processual way, that is, as being made of fluid, dynamic relations. My answer is slightly different, because I share the view that relations are not things, but I don't think that we can reduce them to pure processes. To me, social phenomena are emergent effects, that is, outcomes emerging from a relationally contested context. As such they have a reality of their own, which means that they have a structure (a relational structure, of course), which is not a 'thing,' but a configuration possessing its own qualities and causal properties. Ontologically, an entity is real precisely to the extent that it possesses its own causal properties.

Jan Fuhse (2009) initially intended to develop a relational sociology as the study of social networks seen as carriers and generators of meanings for the actors. Later, attracted by the convergence between White and Luhmann, he espoused the idea that networks are communicative events that decide the actors' identities. Communicative events, and not social relations, are conceptualized as the basic units of society. In the sequence of communications, events are attributed to actors together with underlying dispositions. Relational expectations about the behavior of actors toward other actors structure communication and make for the regularities of the communication that we observe as relationships and networks. Relational sociology is thus understood as the study of the relational construction and positioning of identities in sequences of communications (Fuhse 2015a, b).

Briefly, tracing the journey taken by relational sociology in recent decades, we see that the social relation's own order of reality (the structure of the social relation as such) has become increasingly evanescent. The reality of social relations is reduced to processuality, as if social relations were made only by interactions.

Relational sociology is now applied to all living beings and all kinds of things in the natural or artificial spheres without distinguishing the human dimension from the non-human one in the social relation. In this way, as Mützel (2009) has shown, a confluence is created between the sociologies mentioned above and Latour's (2005) actor-network theory (ANT). This is a confluence that rests on a flat ontology and does not stratify the orders of reality so that everything can be related to everything else without drawing any specific distinction, given that distinctions are considered in themselves to be discriminatory. Obviously, the loss of distinctions or their crossing in all directions also causes relations to lose their boundaries and, therefore, their *sui generis* reality. This is the most crucial operation by means of which relational sociology becomes relationist.

The social structure has to do with networks, while single relations are only communicative events through which completely contingent reciprocal expectations can eventually emerge. The prevalent idea is that the relation is a reference (*refero*) of one term to the other one, a reference without constraints and an internal normativity, but also without a subject. Thus, the Weberian idea (reproposed today by Azarian)⁹ of the relation as a stabilized modality of reciprocal expectations endowed with meaning by the acting subjects becomes obsolete. It is not clear what the consistency of the relation, in terms of links, bonds, and connections (*religo*), is. It increasingly resembles a pure communicative event that allows for indefinite linguistic games. The relation is not seen as a *sui generis* emergent structural reality, but as a flow through which individual inputs, resources, communications, and exchanges between actors pass. In this continuous and aimless flux propelled by an increasing number of means of communication (ICTs), all stable identity is lost. The nature (identity) of things and persons becomes the relation itself as medium. In short, relational sociology becomes relationistic because it proposes to dissolve the paradox of the *unitas multiplex* of identities by means of an indefinite recursivity between the nature of the individual elements and the connecting relations.

As Roseneil and Ketokivi (2016, 149) maintain:

trans-action does not assume a final attribution to the elements or other detachable entities. In the transactional or relational approach, the units involved in transaction derive their meaning, significance and identity from the transaction. The basic unit of analysis, then, is not the constituent elements of reality, but rather the dynamic, as an unfolding process (...). For example, one of us (Ketokivi 2008) suggests that the disruptive event of the loss of a partner by death or divorce can either be seen as a separation of two distinct persons whose ways part (substantialist understanding) or as a process in which not only the relationship, but also persons, undergo a transformation that does not leave them the same.

This statement seems banal to me, but it moreover contains a bias because it means that the focus of the analysis is not the change of the relation's structure before and after the destructive event but, rather, the desire to engage in an easy polemic with those who think that social relations are simply the product of individuals considered as immutable substances.

In short, the relational sociologies that I have discussed adopt a pragmatist, and often nominalist, point of view whose focus is the development of an anti-categorical approach to relationality justified by the need to adopt a 'conceptual fluidity' that leaves behind any idea of a substantial reality.

To sum up the basic differences between my realist relational and radical relationist sociologies, I offer Table 22.1.

I am aware that this scheme greatly simplifies the variety of relational sociologies, and does not give account of their valuable articulations. Its intention is to make us think about the possibility of working on a track that avoids both naïve realism and radical constructivism. Here precisely lies the meaning of the relation itself, whose intimate mystery is to mark a distance between the terms that it joins while at the same time promoting their differences.

Table 22.1 The basic differences between a realist relational sociology and radical relationist sociologies

<i>Main features</i>	<i>Realist relational sociology</i>	<i>Radical relationist sociology</i>
Social ontology	Substance and relationality are co-principles of reality (any real entity)	Relationality is reduced to mere communication (of meanings, expectations, etc.) that dissolves any substance
Epistemology	Knowledge is about the structure and dynamics of the social relation (as a changing 'social molecule')	Knowledge is about the social relation viewed as transaction, work, energy, flux
Methodology	The rules of relational analysis (see above)	Analysis of how transactions or communicative 'events' build networks that change the identity of actors and social entities
Practice	Reflexive and steered social networking acted by singular and/or collective subjects in a morphostatic/morphogenetic context	Reflexive and undetermined evolution of social networks acted by any entity (including 'vibrant matters') able to communicate

5 THE VANTAGE POINT OF CRRS

We could say that the advantage of CRRS lies in seeing empirical facts that other sociologies do not see or do not explain. Relational theory probes reality in a deeper way than other sociologies because it uses an analytic paradigm that combines the referential dimensions of the relation (Weber's *refero*) with the structural dimensions (Durkheim's *religo*) of the relation, showing how their conjunction leads to the emergence of a *sui generis* structure (Simmel's *Wechselwirkung*). The emergent effect can be observed on all levels: micro, meso, and macro. To carry out this analysis, we use the methodological instrument of the relational scheme of interchange (the relational version of AGIL).

1. *Types of Welfare.* In the field of welfare studies, the theory of R. Titmuss (1974) is often cited as the paradigm of reference. Titmuss distinguishes between residual welfare, acquisitive-meritocratic welfare, and institutional welfare. On the theoretical level, the CRRS paradigm shows that these three types of welfare correspond to three types of social formations in the AGIL scheme: respectively, residual welfare corresponds to families and informal networks (L), acquisitive-meritocratic welfare to the market (A), and institutional welfare to the political-administrative system (G). The social integration (I) component of AGIL is missing. We ask ourselves: are there social formations that address needs for social integration differently from the other types of welfare? The answer is affirmative. Such formations are identified in civil welfare (or the welfare of civil society), understood as the well-being generated by the community's own voluntary, civic, and associative organizations. Titmuss simply ignored this extremely important sector. Not only: he did not see the inter-relations between the four sectors that are so distinct from one another and, therefore, ignored the many possible combinations of the different types of welfare that can arise from these differentiated (and self-differentiating) sectors (today these combinations include various forms of public/private partnership, mixed form of for profit and not for profit organizations, co-production, etc.) (Donati and Martignani 2015).
2. *Citizenship and rights.* The theory of citizenship referenced by most sociological studies as their benchmark is that of T.H. Marshall (1950) who distinguished three types of rights: civil, political, and social. Based on my relational methodology, it is evident that they correspond, respectively, to the rights to the individual freedoms of the market (A), to democratic electoral rights (G), and to institutional welfare rights (I). The fourth dimension (L) is missing. Relational theory fills this gap by identifying this dimension in human rights. There are many advantages to this move. First, civil rights, which are those typical of the liberal bourgeois culture of the eighteenth century, are distinguished from today's human rights, which instead make reference to the human person in his/

her relational dignity (for example, the right of the child to grow up in a context of family relations rather than in an institution, or the right to the recognition of relations of mutual love between persons of the same sex). Secondly, while Marshall maintains that rights develop historically ‘in single file’, one after the other, the historical-sociological analysis of CRRS shows that this is not true given that in many cases the pathways taken by the development of rights are not linear and arise from combinations that are very different from one another.

3. *The third sector.* On the basis of the aforementioned considerations, relational theory has sought the relational specificity of each social sphere, both theoretical and empirical, especially that of the Third Sector. While American research considers the Third Sector to be the compassionate and philanthropic side of the capitalistic market (equating the Third Sector with non-profits), CRRS has revealed the peculiarity of the relations and networks that characterize civil associations and organizations (Donati 2008). This peculiarity resides in the generation of social capital that consists of trust, cooperation, and reciprocity.
4. *The theory of social goods.* The aforementioned investigations have led to the enucleation of an original theory of relational goods that is different from approaches that follow rational choice (for example, Uhlener 1989). It has been shown that relational goods are distinct from both public and private goods, and consist of shared social relations (not of aggregations of individual choices) (Donati and Solci 2011). These goods are characterized by the fact that they can only be produced and enjoyed together by the participants (Donati and Archer 2015, 198–228). Various forms of social capital (bonding, bridging, linking) and of sharing economies are examples. Today this vision of relational goods is applied to the new commons on the Internet (for example, peer-production and social streets). On the other hand, just as relational goods have been revealed to be specific to the Third Sector and a source of social integration, relational evils that create social disintegration have also been underscored in many fields of research. Most of them are generated by systemic compulsions to an underlying self-destructive growth that produces catastrophes (poverty, massive drug addiction, wars, mass migrations, etc.) through information flows responding to economic and political interests and, ultimately, to the addictive imperatives of globalized capital.
5. *The theory of the Relational Subject.* The convergence between critical realism and my relational sociology has led to the formulation of a new vision of acting subjects as ‘relational subjects’ (Donati and Archer 2015). The relationality of subjects does not entail the same way of thinking (‘we think’) or a necessarily convergent thought (‘joint commitment’), as M. Gilbert claims, or a ‘group belief’ or a ‘shared point of view’, as R. Tuomela asserts, but rather is expressed in a we-relation. It is the relation that unites the subjects, not the fact of having a mind that thinks the same things.

6. *Relational analysis of social networks.* On the methodological level CRRS contributes to a revision of the excessive determinism of structuralist network analysis. A relational methodology (sometimes called ‘structural interactionism’) is proposed showing how social relations mediate between constraining structures and individual choices so that structures are explained as outcomes of relational dynamics in which individual choices play a fundamental role (Tronca 2013). Without resorting to this principle, the network remains a sort of black box because one cannot explain in what way an actor chooses to stabilize or change, in a pre-existing structure, one type of relation rather than another—for example, acting for the common interest of a civil association, organization, or social movement rather than for a narrowly defined individual interest. The use of this methodology in empirical studies has demonstrated the fallacy of E. Banfield’s well-known claims that ‘amoral familism’ is typical of Southern Italy. Amoral familism is widespread throughout Italy and is also found in many other cultures and contexts.

The studies carried out in line with CRRS have led to new results precisely because they have entered inside the structure of relations and analyzed their morphostasis/morphogenesis with an analytical epistemological and methodological framework that is more sophisticated than other sociologies. In this way, the *sui generis* qualities and causal properties of different types of relations in different environments of social life have been revealed. On the level of social policies, CRRS has brought about profound innovations in intervention styles for the resolution of social issues in many areas. For example, it has contributed its own definition of the principle of subsidiarity in conjunction with the principles of solidarity, the common good, and the valorization of the human person. It has contributed to innovating the strategies of equal opportunities and interventions for reconciling family and work. It has oriented policies to fight poverty through the practices of ‘relational inclusion.’ It has overhauled social policies to prevent violent behaviors and forms of addiction. It has redefined social and health services organizations, academic organizations, family policies, and participatory processes that create civic common goods. For a wide-ranging review of all these researches, I must refer the reader to LSR (2016) which contains an extensive bibliography.

6 THE REGENERATION OF THE HUMAN BEING DEPENDS ON SOCIAL RELATIONALITY

To conclude, my relational sociology can be called humanistic in as much as it argues that the destiny of the human being is connected to the future of the social relation. Human flourishing or alienation cannot depend on individual rational choices, on technological progress, on Industry 4.0, or on a materialistic ecologism that assimilates human qualities to those of all other existing beings in the animal and vegetable world, as many people believe, but depends on how society will configure social relationality.

CRRS reveals that society can no longer be ‘immediately’ (not-mediatedly) human in other words, it cannot be human without mediations between the individuals and the social forms that they create. These mediations cannot be delegated to technology, including communications media (ICT), since they constitute a new order of reality, that of social relations, which must be seen and managed in an appropriate way if one wants to generate a ‘society of the human’, that is, a society in which the human should be generated through new mediations. Humanism is no longer synonymous with ‘personalism,’ since what is human and what is personhood are more and more differentiated. Still today traditional personalism distinguished humans from other living beings for their ability to exercise an inner reflexivity and make individual choices of communicated ultimate concerns, in the assumption that the goodness of these features would bring spontaneously the common good. The neo-humanism must acknowledge that this simple concept of person is no longer sufficient to identify the human being. The latter should be redefined from a relational perspective. In the new scenario, a person is human, and becomes more human (that is transcends itself), if and to the extent that she generates social relationships that support the flourishing of relational goods from which she feeds herself in order to be more humane.

In contrast to theories of the post/trans-human or the hyper-human, CRRS emphasizes the fact that the human person does not transcend herself through acting (as the old personalism claims), nor through new technologies that enhance a person’s capacities and frees them from obsolete burdens and constrictions: rather, the human being transcends and realizes him/herself *in the relation* with the Other. However, the relation with the Other is not a pure flux of communicative events in which the human person is dissolved in her personal identity, as the relationists assert. For CRRS, the social identity of a person is constituted through a dialogue between her internal conversation (with herself in relation to the social context) and her ‘relational reflexivity’ exerted on the external relations in which and through which she lives.

With modernity, the world of social relations has been opened like Pandora’s box. All modern social life is marked by a paradoxical ambivalence. On the one hand, modernity exalts social relations as the way by which society continues to expand and develop. At the same time, conversely, every effort is made to control, limit, and regulate social relations and the possibilities they might open up. The theories in each of the human sciences (anthropology, economics, political science, and sociology) can be read as so many different discourses on the ways in which social relations come to be created, destroyed, and recreated.

The modern ambivalence about social relations continues. Thus, whatever can be said of society in the future, we can at least say it will accentuate its features of being ‘a relational society’, subject to the creative and destructive effects of social relations at all levels—the micro, meso, and macro.

The problem of society, understood as a form of association, always becomes something of a double conundrum. On one side, there is the imperative to know how to manage disruptive social relations so as to reduce their relational

evils. The problem, on the other hand, is to continue to foster those relational goods needed to nurture human well-being in every sphere of social life, from the small experiences of everyday life to international relations.

We have reached a point where neither social relations nor society can be conceptualized as immediately human; in other words, the qualities and causal properties of individual actions (their ‘intentionality’) cannot be immediately transferred to social forms, and, vice versa, the qualities and causal properties of social forms cannot be transferred to the individuals without relational mediations. In late modernity, the social is increasingly becoming an ever more intricate tangle of the human and non-human while at the same time the human and non-human elements of society have come to diverge to an extent that is unprecedented in human history. This paradoxical condition can only be clarified by a relational sociology capable of handling the distinctions between the human and non-human without conflating them.

The task of a relational sociology, then, is to point to a different possibility, the possibility of social relations that can better realize the humanity of social agents and give them the opportunity to achieve a good life. The good life (*eudaimonia*), in this vision, consists in participating in the creation and enjoyment of relational goods rather than relational evils. Of course, in my view, relational goods are morally good when they feed a civilizing process. This fact implies that sociology cannot be value-free. It cannot avoid evaluating social processes in the light of ultimate human concerns, which, to me, basically are relational justice, relational freedom, and a relational democracy.

NOTES

1. “[T]he explanation of any social phenomenon whatsoever always comes in a SAC because it must incorporate the interplay between Structure, Culture and Agency, rather than causal primacy automatically being accorded to one of them” (Archer 2016, 122).
2. As is well known, the AGIL scheme was first proposed by Parsons and later discussed by many other authors, including V. Lidz, C.L. Mulford, J. Habermas, N. Mouzelis, J.C. Alexander, R. Münch, and N. Luhmann. For my part, I have elaborated a specific relational version of AGIL taking into account the criticisms made by these authors (Donati 1991, 175–303). In short, this version abandons the cybernetic hierarchy, makes all its components contingent, and makes them interact with one another so as to see a social relation as an emergent from the actions (AGILs) of the actors/agents in a social context.
3. Among the exceptions, see Dépelteau (2015), who opposes any form of social determinism (or relational determinism) where the individuals are dissolved or determined by the relations.
4. Due to limited space, I cannot include here and comment on figure 1 in Donati (2015a, 43), which explains this complexity.
5. As examples, see Weaver (2012) and the welfare interventions for families and social groups at the local level quoted in LSR (2016).

6. I am perfectly aware that in the works on Mozart, the civilizing process, the established and the outsiders, and other studies, Elias proposed explanations of the emergence (and the possible breakdowns) of various social processes or configurations. But, to my mind, these explanations were not supported by an analysis focused upon the qualities and properties of social relations *as such*. Overall, he did not adopt any clear views on the ‘effects’ of configurations.
7. See Jan Fuhse (2009, 2015a, b).
8. In other words, social relations are not seen as ‘emergents’ properly (they are simply flows of communicative exchanges). As in the case of Luhmann’s theory (which has been so influential on scholars like Harrison White and his followers, e.g. Jan Fuhse), to conceive of social relations as a question of meaning and communication does not provide a framework capable of resolving questions of structural causation from the emergentist viewpoint (Elder-Vass 2007).
9. Reza Azarian (2010, 326) asserts: “[Social relation] ... is due to the existence of these mutual expectations that the parties find common ground for continued interaction and that the relationship between them not only becomes a relatively durable and thus observable flow of interaction but also a more or less patterned and orderly flow of meaningful, reciprocally oriented behaviour along familiar paths with an accumulated history—a feature which gives rise to the probability that, as Weber points out, enables each party to expect a certain behavior from the other party and plan his own action on the assumption that the other will act in a certain expected way” (italics in the text). In reality, Weber spoke of ‘possibility’ and not of ‘probability.’

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Deconstructing and Reconstructing Social Networks

Jan A. Fuhse

I INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, ‘relational sociology’ has become a rallying cry for diverse theoretical projects (Crossley 2010a; Dépelteau and Powell 2013; Donati 2011; Donati and Archer 2015; Emirbayer 1997; Mische 2011; Powell and Dépelteau 2013). They share little more than being centered on the term ‘social relations’, without even agreeing on its meaning. In this chapter, I argue for a particular project of relational sociology: to provide a theory of social networks, in connection with (and reflection of) empirical network research. And I give an overview of my own attempts to formulate such a theory of social networks.

The basic idea is to conceptualize social relationships and networks as webs of expectations that underlie observable patterns of communication. As such, relationships and networks are symbolic constructions and dynamic over time. Relational sociology deconstructs conventional, structuralist notions of social networks and reconstructs them as structures of meaning emerging, reproducing, and changing in the sequence of communicative events. I advance this position in a number of claims:

1. Relational sociology reflects on what social relationships and networks are, and what role they play in the social world.
2. Not all social structures and cultural patterns should be reduced to relations.
3. Relational sociology springs from social network research, and remains tightly linked with it.
4. Diverse social structures and cultural patterns result from the sequence of social events, and underlie it.

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5. Social events can be conceptualized as self-referential communication.
6. All social structures and cultural patterns are stabilized expectations derived from past events that structure future events.
7. Social relationships and networks are composed of relational expectations about how particular actors are supposed to behave towards specific others.
8. Relational expectations result from the attribution of communicative events and underlying relational dispositions to actors.
9. Social relationships and networks are structures of meaning (relational expectations) mapping observable regularities in communication, and making for them.
10. Communication draws on culturally available models ('relationship frames') to construct the expectations in relationships.
11. Social categories make for the ordering of ties in a network, but also depend on networks as patterned accordingly.
12. Social networks are imprinted with relational institutions making for the pattering of social ties by structurally equivalent roles.
13. Actors in social relationships and networks can be individuals, but also collectives or corporates.

In line with the overall concept of this handbook, I focus more on epistemology and social theory (claims 1–9), than on substantial arguments (10–13). In a concluding 'outlook' section, I pick up on areas of current and future development.

2 THE CLAIMS

1 Relational Sociology Theoretically Reflects on What Social Relationships and Networks Are, and What Role They Play in the Social World.

As Ann Mische writes in her conceptual and historical overview, '(The New York School of) Relational Sociology' was born in the 1990s in New York City (2011). It centered around Harrison White at Columbia University, and Charles Tilly and Mustafa Emirbayer at the New School for Social Research, with several authors around them: Paul DiMaggio and Viviana Zelizer (Princeton), Ronald Breiger (Cornell), Kathleen Carley (Carnegie-Mellon), Andrew Abbott, Roger Gould, and John Padgett (Chicago), Randall Collins (University of Pennsylvania), Eric Leifer, and later David Stark and Peter Bearman (Columbia). Many of them had already worked with White at Harvard University in the 1970s and 1980s, and now gathered again. Their geographical and institutional concentration brought about two younger generations of relational sociologists: Karen Barkey, Emily Erikson, David Gibson, Frédéric Godart, Neha Gondal, Eiko Ikegami, Omar Lizardo, John Levi Martin, Daniel

McFarland, Paul McLean, Ann Mische, John Mohr, Tammy Smith, Mimi Sheller, Margaret Somers, and many more.

Out of the dense interaction at New York graduate schools, workshops, and mini-conferences, a unique approach developed (Fuhse 2015a; Pachucki and Breiger 2010; see Fontdevila in this handbook). Many relational sociologists came out of structuralist network research (social network analysis; SNA). But they started to see, and to study, social networks not as mere structures, patterns of ties. Instead, social networks are interwoven with meaning: They consist of ‘identities’ linked to each other in ‘stories’ (McLean 2016; Somers 1994; Tilly 2002; White 1992, 2008). Social networks feature particular domains of cultural forms: norms, values, symbols, jargon, or narratives. They are imprinted by social categories, roles, and institutions. My own approach builds on these advances, but modifies them in a number of ways.

Emirbayer’s ‘Manifesto for a Relational Sociology’ (1997) was written out of this general movement (see Liu and Liang in this handbook). It shares with it the general impetus: to complement social network analysis with theoretical reflection (see Erikson in this handbook). In the 1980s, White became dissatisfied with the notion of ‘tie’, basic to all research on social networks (Mische 2011, 82). Ties are usually just seen as existent or non-existent (1 or 0 in a network matrix, or lines in a graph). The social world itself rarely features such clear-cut relationship entities between actors. And to the extent that relationships exist, we have to inquire how they come about (gradually, rather than jumping ‘on’ and ‘off’) and what they consist of. White found his answer in the general incorporation of culture into mainstream sociology: Networks are structures of meaning. They consist of narratives with their construction of identities (relative to each other).

We cannot ‘objectively’ determine the meaning of ‘relational sociology’. Pierpaolo Donati was earlier than Emirbayer in proposing the label, though mainly in Italian academic discourse (2011; see Donati in this handbook). Emirbayer himself saw ‘relational sociology’ as an overall tradition of viewing the social world in terms of relations (and transactions). This includes the New York movement, but also structuralist network research, Bourdieu, Elias, Foucault, Goffman, Marx, Simmel, and American pragmatism (1997, 286–288). Therefore, it would be preposterous to claim that all relational sociology has to adhere to the New York program. But with the overall confusion about the label, I see the project as pursued by White, Emirbayer, and others as a useful yardstick to assess various relational sociologies on offer. What are social networks and relationships? And what role do they play in the social world? Certainly, my own work tries to answer these questions.

Why should we care that much about relationships and networks? Based not on theoretical inspection, but on a host of empirical research, we know that networks are connected to social inequality (Granovetter 1973; Lin et al. 1981), to collective action (Diani and McAdam 2003; Gould 1995), to artistic and intellectual creativity (Burt 2004; Collins 1998; Crossley 2015), to the construction and dynamics of large-scale social structures like politics and the economy (Padgett and Powell 2012), and to a lot more social phenomena.

Social networks are important features of the social world. However, most existing sociological theories neither accord a central role to networks, nor tell us why they matter, and how. Ideally, we arrive at a framework that integrates the empirical findings from network research in a wider theoretical perspective.

2 Not All Social Structures and Cultural Patterns Should Be Reduced to Social Relations.

If we see social networks as connected to inequality, collective action, creativity, politics, economy, and so on, these have to constitute separate aspects of the social world. Not everything social can be ‘relations’, as some relational sociologists argue (Powell 2013). There have to be non-networks and non-relationships as relatively independent features of the social world—if we want to examine the impact of networks and relationships, and the causal factors leading to them. Otherwise, we could only argue that ‘everything is somehow connected to everything else’. We would conflate everything social into the term of ‘relations’, without knowing much about the connections. To avoid this conflation, we have to build on precise and clear-cut notions of social relationships and networks, rather than vaguely refer to all sorts of social (and non-social) phenomena as ‘relations’ or ‘associations’ (Latour 2005).

Of course, everything is somehow connected to everything else. However, as sociologists, we must arrive at meaningful statements of lower complexity, such as: ‘Cohesive social ties among potential activists are a prerequisite for their effective collective mobilization.’ This means to analytically disentangle various aspects of the social world, or rather, to cut through it. In the case of collective action, our theoretical perspective provides the knife that allows us to separate (real or imagined) grievances, their framing, social ties, mobilization, collective identification, and the eventual actions of protest conceptually. This separation allows us to see that some of these features are tightly connected to each other, but only loosely or indirectly coupled to others. For example, social ties directly depend on physical space, whereas framings and collective identification are influenced by available cultural repertoires. Whether we cut social phenomena fruitfully to arrive at meaningful and non-trivial theoretical statements, is a matter of logical consistency of the theory as much as of gearing our concepts towards empirical research, and feeding its insights into our theoretical apparatus.

3 Relational Sociology Springs from Social Network Research, and Remains Tightly Linked with It.

Relational sociology, at least in its New York-based version, retains strong links to empirical research. Theoretical constructs are meant to provide concepts for empirical observation and formal-analytical examination. Sometimes, as in White’s theory, empirical orientation works at the expense of theoretical

consistency and integration, with concepts such as story, domain, style, and institution only loosely connected. White and the authors around him aim less at an abstract theoretical description of the social world than at providing theory for research—theory that is able and willing to learn from empirical findings.

Among the various epistemological positions in the social sciences, relational sociology lies close to ‘analytical theorizing’, as advocated by Jonathan Turner (1987). It remains, by and large, faithful to Karl Popper’s critical rationalism. Theoretical statements should lend themselves to testing, to be discarded or modified in the absence of empirical support. Relational sociology allows for more induction than Popper. What can we observe empirically? And how does it fit into the overall perspective linking patterns of social networks with forms of meaning? This leads to the available methods of social inquiry having an impact on theory-building. For example, we can collect quantitative data on social relationships between individual actors, as well as between corporate and collective actors. It is much harder to determine patterns of (comparable) ties among material objects and individuals at the core of actor-network theory (ANT; see Papilloud in this handbook). Therefore, relational sociology shies away from incorporating them systematically, in spite of theoretical overlaps with ANT (Mützel 2009).

At the same time, relational sociology retains a healthy dose of constructivism. It knows that theoretical concepts are linguistic constructs and unable to capture the complexity of observed phenomena (Wittgenstein 2009 [1953]). In particular, the categories found in the social world need not match the regularities of social interaction (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994, 1414). Therefore, we have to continuously adapt our concepts to new findings and methods.

Relational sociologists have adopted a variety of constructivist approaches to arrive at a more nuanced description of social structures. Emirbayer (1997), Erikson (2013), Martin (2011), and Nick Crossley (2010a) build on pragmatism and symbolic interactionism (see Hall, Crossley in this handbook), while I connect to Niklas Luhmann’s theory of communication, among others (see Guy in this handbook). All of these call us to investigate the processes of construction (or negotiation) that lead to particular social phenomena, like networks, social categories, or institutions. This means that we cannot devise theoretical constructs as we please. We have to reconstruct how, and why, they constitute relatively independent features of the social world.

4 Diverse Social Structures and Cultural Patterns Result from the Sequence of Social Events, and Underlie It.

Relational sociology takes actors (identities) and their behavior to follow from social relations and networks (Emirbayer 1997, 287). This is often interpreted as a social ontology built on relations, following Ernst Cassirer (Emirbayer 1997, 282–283; Mohr 2011). However, christening social relations as ontic entities does little to reflect on their construction, and on their connections to other aspects of the social world. After all, there have to be other features of the

social world. If everything is built on social relations, what ontological status would we have to accord to these other features?

I have argued above that social phenomena, including social relationships and networks, are constructed. How are they? And where? Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann envision social construction to take place in the minds of actors (1966). This is certainly true. But (1) it would take us back to individualist ontology, or full-circle: individuals make relations (through their cognition), and relations make individuals, including their cognition;¹ (2) whether or not individuals hold particular thoughts remains unknown to us, and therefore beyond the scope of ‘analytical theorizing’ (see claim 3); and (3) two actors would never arrive at a subjective understanding of their relationship, and roughly agree on it, without communication between them.

For these reasons, I opt for a ‘processual ontology’ of the social world. It consists, first of all, of social events taking place. These events leave traces that in turn affect subsequent events. We observe these traces as ideas, frames, social categories, institutions, symbols, and cultural repertoires, but also as social structures, including relationships and networks, as well as social inequalities, formal organizations, roles, collective phenomena like social movements and street gangs, and fields of society (politics, economy, etc.). Instead of Cassirer, we can turn to Alfred North Whitehead for such a processual ontology (1978 [1929]). Around relational sociology, Abbott (2016) and Collins (2004) advocate processual ontologies of the social world. Emirbayer (1997, 283) and Tilly (2005, 6–7) argue for ‘transactions’ as the basic stuff of the social, building on John Dewey and Arthur Bentley (1973 [1949]). As does François Dépelteau in his ‘deep relationalism’ (2015; see Dépelteau in this handbook). Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Daniel Nexon offer a ‘processual-relational’ theory of international relations (1999).

Many sociological theories build on processual ontology. According to symbolic interactionism (and to Collins), interaction produces meanings and group structures. Max Weber and Talcott Parsons take social action as the core process leading to large-scale social structures. Exchange theorists argue that exchange creates asymmetric structures of obligations, including networks. Ethnomethodology and conversation analysis focus on the performance (‘doing’) of social rules in interaction. Luhmann envisions diverse social systems to evolve in the process of communication. If relational sociology now develops processual ontologies, it only picks up on what many sociological theories have argued for long: social structures are not stable, but have to be enacted and reproduced. Which also means they emerge, change, and potentially wither away.

Hence, the social world is characterized by a duality of structures and events. Social networks are but one type of structure emerging, reproducing, and changing in the sequence of events.² Social structures and cultural patterns, on the one hand, and social events, on the other, co-constitute each other. This duality is more fundamental than that of persons and groups (Breiger 1974) or that of culture and networks (Breiger 2010). It underlies these, because persons, groups, culture, and networks are all instances of the structures produced in social events, and underlying them. Culture and networks, as well as persons

and groups are intertwined precisely because they process in the same sequences of events. They continuously have to deal with each other.

5 Social Events Can Be Conceptualized as Self-Referential Communication.

If social structures are constructed in the sequence of events, this places certain requirements on their conceptualization. Not people’s minds, but the events themselves have to serve as the locus of construction. Therefore, they have to process meaning—in most perspectives a privilege of people’s minds (e.g. action theory, pragmatism, symbolic interactionism). Every event can only pick up on the meaning processed in previous events. In this sense, events are self-referential, referring back to previous events. For example, academic texts have to build on previous ones, just as court decisions draw on a long tradition of legal disputes (and on written laws). Note that the subjective processing of meaning is bracketed here, even though it also has to take place. Authors and judges have to know previous academic and legal discourses to produce texts and decisions. But we can only infer what they know, and maybe intend, on the basis of these texts and decisions. Sticking to what we can observe, we can conceptually focus on the communicative events themselves, rather than on supposedly underlying subjective knowledge and reasoning.

We have such a conceptualization of social events in Luhmann’s theory of communication (1995 [1984], 2002). He clearly distinguishes subjective thinking and communication as two distinct types of operations, with both processing meaning co-dependently. Sociology is to focus on communication because social structures and cultural patterns consist of communicated meaning, not of subjective thoughts. Luhmann sees communication as always taking place within social systems: face-to-face encounters, formal organizations, protest movements, and functional subsystems like politics, science, law, and the economy (2013 [1997], 87–89, 131–133). In contrast, I loosen the conceptual pairing of communicative events and systems. Communication always builds on, and processes, a number of social structures and cultural patterns. This includes some phenomena we can model as systems, but also networks, cultural institutions (including language), and the identities of actors (Fig. 23.1). All of these intermingle in a complex architecture, with constant friction between

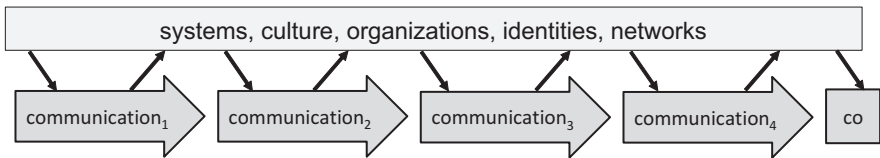


Fig. 23.1 Duality of communicative events and social structures

different layers of the social world, and with change resulting from this friction.

This concept of communication is an outlier in sociological theory and contrasts with the more established notions of behavior, action, practices, and interaction. However, we find similar stances in conversation analysis (with its methodological focus on the sequence of communicative events) and in Foucault's discourse analysis. Within relational sociology, Emirbayer's and Tilly's use of the concept of transaction (see under claim 4) and White's concept of 'switchings' (1995) similarly hint at the processing of meaning in social events, not actors. In a later paper, White picks up on Luhmann's concept of communication as compatible with his theory (White et al. 2007).

6 All Social Structures and Cultural Patterns Are Stabilized Expectations Derived from Past Communication that Structure Future Communication.

How does communication lead to social structures and cultural patterns, and how do they, in turn, affect future communication? I have already written about events leaving 'traces' that future events pick up on (see claim 4). This is rather vague. More precisely, Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, and Niklas Luhmann conceptualize social structures as 'expectations' (Luhmann 1995 [1984], 96–97; Parsons et al. 1959 [1951], 19–20; Weber 1981 [1913], 159–161). These arise from social events, and they guide subsequent events (action for Weber and Parsons, communication for Luhmann).

For example, a piece of furniture to sit on comes to be called 'chair'. This is now an expectation that future communication can build on. It can denote something as a piece of furniture to sit on by simply calling it 'chair', with the expectation of widespread understanding. Similarly, sequences of communication come to weave a social structure called 'state', with the expectations of tax payments and obedience to laws tied to it, but also expectations of public institutions of learning, of well-paved streets, and of responsiveness to citizens. The state, like any other kind of social structure, is a complex of expectations that crystallize and reproduce in the course of communication, and that structure future communication.

Most kinds of social structures combine cognitive and normative expectations, in Johan Galtung's terminology (1959). Citizens are cognitively expected to pay (most of) their taxes, just as they did last year, in the planning of budgets. But they are also normatively expected to do so, and face sanctions otherwise. In Weber's and in Parsons's theory, expectations are held subjectively by the individual actors involved. Picking up on Luhmann, I conceptualize expectations to be communicated, rather than thought. For example, a price tag communicates the expectation that a certain price should be paid for a product, whether or not the vendor subjectively expects her customers to pay this much (it might well only serve as a token price to start negotiations). Similarly, a scientific paper can communicate findings as true (with the expectation that future

publications pick up on it), regardless of whether its authors believe in the findings. The subjective expectations of the vendor and of the scientists remain obscure. But the price tag and the scientific paper communicate expectations for everyone to see, including the academic observer.

The interpretive tradition provides another way of putting this: communicative events offer a ‘definition of the situation’ (Thomas 1966 [1927]). Subsequent communication does not have to agree with this definition, but it has to deal with it. For example, the price tag defines that a certain amount of money must be paid for a product. Customers can then start arguing how much they are willing to pay. But they cannot well ignore the price tag which sets a narrow course for events to follow. ‘Yes/no interrogatives’ are an extreme case (Raymond 2003). Though in the form of questions, they define the situation and set a context, leaving only little leeway for answers. Consider the question: ‘Have you stopped beating your wife?’

Unlike in the original formulation by William Thomas, we do not have to locate the defining of situations in people’s minds. Later authors like Robert Merton (Merton 1958, 477–479) and Erving Goffman (1990 [1959], 20–21) offer formulations more in line with the approach here: situations are defined in communication, and constantly renegotiated. Price tags and yes/no interrogatives exemplify this communicative defining of situations, and their ongoing negotiation.

7 Social Relationships and Networks Are Composed of Particular Expectations About How Particular Actors Are Supposed to Behave Towards Specific Others.

Social relationships and networks are a type of social structures. Therefore, they have to be patterns of expectations, or definitions of the situation, processed in communication. I suggest conceptualizing them as ‘relational expectations’ (Fuhse 2009, 2015b). These pertain to the behavior of particular actors towards particular others. Two friends, two lovers, or two enemies, are expected to behave towards each other in friendly, loving, or hostile ways. And these behaviors supposedly differ from those towards most others. I invite my friends, not just anybody, to my birthday party. Ideally, I become intimate with my partner, and quarrel with my rivals. In contrast, every customer in the store is expected to pay the same amount of money for a product, as indicated by the price tag. Social ties make a difference in the social dimension—their expectations hold between particular actors, as opposed to indiscriminate others.

In the communication between two actors, a web of expectations develops. Do they share interests and secrets? Do they regularly go to the movies together? Will alter call more often than ego? Do they kiss and become intimate? These expectations make the relationship between them different from all others. They are ‘relational’ expectations (both cognitive and normative, see under claim 6) in that they concern the behavior of alter and ego towards each other. They are based on a ‘definition of the relationship’ (McCall 1970, 11):

How do alter and ego relate to each other? What kind of relationship do they have? In repeated communication between them, alter and ego constantly renegotiate this relational definition of the situation, which implies incessantly changing expectations about their communication.

We have to distinguish such relational expectations from general cultural expectations (e.g. the meaning of chair), from morals (the norm not to interrupt others), and from expectations tied to systems like the economy (prices) or the state (laws, citizenship). Also, relational expectations differ from those connected to the identities of actors. If Lucy likes going to the movies, this forms part of her socially constructed identity. In contrast, if Lucy wants to go to the movies specifically with Greg, this becomes part of the relational expectations between them. Finally, expectations in social relationships are informal, as opposed to the expectations in formal organizations. A rank-and-file soldier is expected to follow the orders of her lieutenant as part of her formal role, no matter who the soldier and the lieutenant are. This does not forbid particular relational expectations to develop in the communication between lieutenant and soldier. These have to differ from their formal roles to be termed a ‘social relationship’.

8 Relational Expectations Result from the Attribution of Communicative Events, and of Underlying Relational Dispositions, to Actors.

How do relational expectations develop, stabilize, and change in the course of social events? According to Luhmann, communication consists of three parts (1995 [1984], 141–143; Fuhse 2015b, 43–44). The first consists of information, that is, the content of whatever is said, written, or otherwise signified.³ Paul Watzlawick and his co-authors call this the ‘report aspect’ of communication (1967, 51). For example, alter talks to ego about the weather. This might lead to a conversation about clothing or about climate change. The weather, clothing, and climate change would all feature in the information component of communication. Information often refers to something external, outside of the situation of communication (weather, clothing, climate change). Broadly speaking, the accumulation of information leads to a body of knowledge, to culture, that subsequent communication can draw on.

The second component is called ‘Mitteilung’ by Luhmann, usually translated as ‘utterance’. Here, communicative events get attributed to actors. This attribution leads to the questions of how, and why, this communicative event came from this actor in this situation. The reference point is internal to the situation. It pertains to the uttering actor, but also to the relation between her and the actor(s) addressed. Therefore, I prefer the term ‘message’, which points more directly to the ‘relationship aspect’ of communication (Watzlawick et al. 1967, 52). Why did alter talk to ego about the weather? Perhaps she wanted to engage

in polite chit-chat with a colleague. Or she is interested in getting to know a neighbor. Obviously, the ‘message’ of a communicative event, just like its ‘information’, depends on the situation, and on what was communicated previously. Luhmann adds a third component: the ‘understanding’ of information and message. Communication is not, like Weber’s concept of action, complete when some actor sends it out of internal considerations. Rather, communicative events have to be interpreted to leave a trace, to make a difference for subsequent communication. True to his supra-personal concept of communication, Luhmann does not locate understanding in people’s minds. The meaning of a communicative event is established by how it is picked up, or not. Follow-up communication can lean more towards the information side, by talking about the weather, or it can focus on the message component, leading perhaps to an invitation to a café because of the rain. Usually, both components are processed to some extent, simultaneously producing, reproducing, and changing, bodies of knowledge, identities, and relationships. It should be noted that the meaning of an event is not determined by one immediate reaction but in the sequence of events (Schneider 2000). Also, it can remain uncertain, in flux, even contested, for a while, without a clear-cut definition of the situation (with regard to knowledge, identities, and relationships) emerging.

For social relationships and networks, the message component of communication is of primary interest (Fuhse 2015b, 47–49). Communicative events are attributed to actors, which leads to their construction as focal points of communication with particular capacities and dispositions. Social relationships and networks attach to these identities, but they add something. When I give a talk at a conference, I come to be seen as pursuing particular lines of reasoning, and as smart or stupid. Such an identity, resulting from the attribution of the talk to myself, is not yet relational—it is only relative to other identities (e.g. relatively smart or stupid). However, my talk or something in it can also be interpreted with regard to the relationships to other people. For example, I might praise a colleague in the audience and distance myself from another. In turn, a third colleague might ask me a highly critical question in the discussion. All of this leads to the attribution of ‘relational dispositions’, and in consequence to relational expectations about how my colleagues and I stand to each other.

Any communicative event is routinely interpreted not only with regard to its information and to the identities of speakers or writers but also with regard to the relationships between the actors involved. And this leads to social relationships and networks as a web of expectations that guides future communication. Unlike the information component, the message component of communication is often implicit. Two people talking about the weather, or the colleague with the critical question, rarely mention social relationships. A declaration of love, friendship, or enmity, is the exception rather than the rule. More often than not, relationships are ‘done’, rather than explicitly invoked.

These practices—talking about the weather, asking critical questions—are then checked against ‘vocabularies of motive’ (Mills 1940): Are they compatible with superficial acquaintance, or with collegial esteem? Relationships are tricky to construct, and difficult to observe.

9 Social Relationships and Networks Are Structures of Meaning (Relational Expectations) Mapping Observable Regularities in Communication, and Making for Them.

These considerations provide social theoretical foundations for White’s assertion that social networks are interwoven with meaning (Fuhse 2009). Ties in a network are not structural entities that either exist or not. Rather, they are dynamically constructed bundles of expectations, all of them unique to the particular relationship. The identities of the actors involved, and the expectations between them, result from the processes of constructing these meanings, or definitions of the situation, in communication. In turn, they structure future communication. This makes for the interplay of ‘meaning structure’ of social networks with regularities of communication among the actors involved. In the following paragraphs, I sketch how a few forms of meaning are drawn upon in networks, mapping them and imprinting them in turn: relationship frames like ‘love’, ‘friendship’, and ‘patronage’; social categories like gender or ethnicity; relational institutions and roles (e.g. kinship roles); and collective or corporate actorhood.

10 Communication Draws on Culturally Available Models (‘Relationship Frames’) to Construct the Expectations in Relationships.

Communication does not have to develop relational expectations from scratch. We have a repertoire of cultural models for relationships at hand: love, friendship, collegiality, kinship, and so on. All of these ‘relationship frames’ provide a package of expectations to establish in personal ties (Fuhse 2013). Such cultural models are constructed and disseminated in the mass media (novels, journals, movies, TV series, etc.) and by adopting and adhering to them in actual relationships. Frames like ‘love’ or ‘friendship’ offer piecemeal solutions to the inherent uncertainty: How do alter and ego stand towards each other?

Relationships are in principle autonomous in their definition of the situation. This definition and the expectations tied to it are only established in the communication between alter and ego. However, dyadic relationships usually build on culturally available models, having a hard time at radically diverging from them or at coming up with entirely new ways of relating. As a result, communication between alter and ego idiosyncratically combines institutionalized and improvised relational expectations.

As argued above, the message aspect of communication and the attribution of relational expectations often remain implicit. We check ongoing communication

for signs as to how alter and ego relate to each other. For the interpretation of these signs, we rely on the available cultural models for relating, and on the vocabularies connected to them (McLean 2007). Alter asks ego for a date? He pays the bill? Offers a ride home? Much behavior falls into typical packages. This makes it—and the reactions to it—easy to interpret. By conforming to these packages, we mark the relationships as falling into a particular type. Zelizer calls this kind of ongoing negotiation of relationships as conforming to cultural models ‘relational work’ (2005).

So, when we detect ties of a social network empirically, we really tap into a complex set of expectations and communicative processes. With relationship frames of ‘love’, ‘friendship’, and so on, ties are distinguished on the level of meaning, and they should come with roughly similar practices (types of communicative events) and expectations. They are mapped as different ‘types of tie’, for example in blockmodel analyses (White et al. 1976). No two relationships are ever completely alike, even when framed similarly. But as relationship frames prescribe particular behavior, and the relationships themselves are regularly checked against these scripts, they are likely to resemble each other more within any given frame than across them. Communication sorts itself by cultural models and conforms to them, by and large. Therefore, we do not err too much if we follow these classifications in our analyses. However, we have to be aware that the meaning of any given relationship frame can vary widely across social contexts, be they historic eras, countries, class, or ethnic groups. Even communes can differ profoundly in their usage of the ‘love frame’ and in the resulting network patterns (Yeung 2005).

Finally, relationship frames prescribe how relationships mesh with wider network structure. Friendships tend to be transitive, with the friends of a friend to be treated amicably. Love is intransitive and exclusive. If love progresses to marriage, the bride and groom are to be incorporated into each other’s family network. Patronage networks and feudal pyramids rely on the clients or vassals to be loyal to only one patron or liege lord, with them, in turn, subordinate to patrons (or lords) higher up the ladder. As these examples show, relationship frames are also connected to social categories like ‘friend’, ‘lover’, family roles like ‘mother’ and ‘nephew’, ‘clients’ and ‘patrons’, ‘vassals’ and ‘lords’. Social categories and the typical relationships between them make for a cultural imprint of network patterns.

11 Social Categories Make for the Ordering of Ties in a Network, but also Depend on Networks as Patterned Accordingly.

Network patterns and social categories are connected to each other. Empirical research shows a marked tendency for homophily of personal ties within categories (McPherson et al. 2001). We form our friendships, and we fall in love, with people of similar age, socio-economic status, ethnic and educational background. As Fredrik Barth argues, the category acts as a social boundary, imprinting the interaction both within and between categories (1969; Fuhse

2012a). Following the arguments above, we can argue that social categories come with particular expectations about the behavior of their members in relation to each other. As with relationship frames, these expectations are not always adhered to. Romeo and Juliet, or more recently, many interracial couples, exemplify the social turbulence caused by violating the norms connected to them. As these examples also show, the expectations tied to categories are subject to change over time, with many social divisions losing much of their weight over the past decades.

These arguments resonate with the literature on social and ethnic boundaries (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Wimmer 2013). Symbolic categorizations of ‘kinds of’ people seem pervasive in social life, and they still make for considerable socio-economic inequality. As Tilly argues, social categories are legitimized by narratives; they effectively bar outsiders from interaction with an ingroup; and they are used to ‘hoard opportunities’ among its members, for example access to information or jobs (1998). Much empirical evidence exists for the mundane practices through which people are categorized (e.g. linguistic profiling) and barred from jobs or housing (Massey 2007).

Social categories do not always make for cohesive networks of its members. For example, love relationships are heterophilous with regard to gender—most love ties and marriages still run between men and women. Again, the interaction within and between the gender category is imprinted with culturally pre-defined expectations. But here, ties across the categories are expected (Fuhse 2009, 65–67; Seeley 2014). In general, social categories make for a pattern of structural equivalence, but not necessarily with cohesive subgroups (White et al. 1976). The expectations with regard to interaction tied to social categories make for different network patterns, depending on the type of tie (love, friendship, rivalry) and the cultural imprint of the categories at hand.

In turn, social categories can only convince if, and to the extent that, actual network patterns conform to them. For example, in Germany up until the 1970s, marriage between Catholics and Protestants was frowned at, and frequently sanctioned by family and local community. Nowadays, we have too many cross-confessional marriages for this rule to hold. Similarly, homosexuality has become more visible in Western societies and become more acceptable, especially in urban areas. Social boundaries cannot be constructed at will, but depend on many other factors such as geographical dispersion and professional trajectories, as well as narratives in the mass media, which lead to more or fewer ties within and across categories.

12 Social Networks Are Imprinted with Relational Institutions Making for the Patterning of Social Ties by Structurally Equivalent Roles.

Relationship frames and social categories are both instances of a particular class of institutions. In general, institutions are cultural models (‘recipe knowledge’) for the organization of communication (Berger and Luckmann

1966, 72–74). Institutions include handshakes, dating rituals, marriage and the family, formal organization, the nation-state, money, law, and science. All of them are readymade scripts for how to deal with others. They are generalized expectations and solutions for the inherent uncertainty of communication. Such institutions form part of the general repertoire of meaning shared and widely applied in a social context, called ‘culture’. Some of them prescribe rules for how to deal with general others in particular situations, such as the handshake or dating rituals. Others pertain to ways of observing, classifying, and judging phenomena, such as money, law, and science. Relational sociology is most interested in institutions that provide models for how to relate to each other, such as marriage and the family. We can call them ‘relational institutions’ (Fuhse 2012b).

Impulses for the incorporation of institutions into relational sociology come chiefly from Paul DiMaggio (1986; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). According to DiMaggio, institutions emerge endogenously in a field out of the uncertainty and mutual observation of actors (isomorphism). Such institutions include general rules of behavior in the field, but also a differentiation of positions and the regularity of the relations between them. DiMaggio argues that we can discern such positional ordering by way of blockmodel analysis (1986). For example, he identified a core of metropolitan theaters in the network of mutual awareness and orientation of non-profit stages in the USA. Helmut Anheier and his co-authors found authors in the German city of Cologne to be organized around a prestige elite and another elite group occupying the organizational center (1995). As a result of the emergence of institutional rules in a field, actors are assigned to positions (like ‘organizational elite’) with typical relations between these. Ideally, relational institutions should be traced from their impact on network patterns, but also studied qualitatively in the discourse around the words and symbols attached to institutions.

The bundles of relations of positions to other positions in the field are called ‘roles’ (Dahrendorf 1968 [1964]). They can emerge endogenously when communication creates systematic positions and relations to them. For example, a preferential attachment process can lead to sociometric stars, but also, negatively, to outsiders. Alternatively, roles are assigned on the basis of cultural models (institutions). For example, kinship roles are heavily culturally prescribed. Actual network patterns always reflect these two tendencies of ‘role making’ and ‘role taking’.

Obviously, relationship frames like patronage and marriage, as well as social categories like gender and caste groups, are relational institutions: cultural models for the organization of social relationships. Once adopted, they lead to the assignment of roles like patron and client, girl and boy, wife and husband, or the manifold role categories of the caste system. White terms social networks characterized by such culturally prescribed expectations ‘institutions’ (1992, 116, 136–138; Mohr and White 2008). Unfortunately, this leads to conceptual confusion; social networks consist of relational expectations about the behavior of particular actors towards each other. The notion of institutions should be

reserved for models organizing these. Through the mass media and other kinds of organized discourses, these institutions can be reproduced and diffused apart from their adoption in social relationships. Therefore, they retain a degree of independence from any observable network, just as the communication in the network is free to adopt, discard, or modify these cultural models. We can analytically and substantially distinguish institutions and networks in spite of their strong interplay. Roles occupy an intermediate theoretical ground between these concepts. They frequently result from the adoption of institutional models. But they can also emerge endogenously, perhaps leading to a new cultural pattern to be picked up in other relationships and networks (Fuhse 2012b).

13 Actors in Social Relationships and Networks Can Be Individuals, but also Collectives or Corporates.

The constructivist perspective leads us to see actors not as essential building blocks of the social, but as anything to which communication gets attributed, and relational expectations get attached. Crucially, communicative events have to be seen as emanating from some identity, as its utterance or message to some recipient(s). This does not require that the social scientist sees the communicative event as objectively ‘caused’ by the identity in question, but that the identity serves as projection point in naturally occurring communication. As a result, the identity is regarded as carrying certain capacities and dispositions for action, and it can be addressed in speech, letters, or publicly voiced demands (Fuhse 2015b, 53–55). We can think here of individuals, but also of street gangs, terrorist groups, social movements, political parties, economic corporations, universities, churches and sects, and of nation-states.

In some cases, communicative events are attributed to various types of actors at once. For example, the killing of a rival gang member will be seen as the deed of particular individuals, but also of their gang. Here, various types of identities, and of relationships between them, are at play simultaneously. In other cases, we ‘understand’ that the event comes only from the corporate actor, not from individuals speaking or acting. The press release of a company will be seen as reflecting the company’s stance, and not necessarily its press officer’s.

What we attribute actorhood to differs through history and by cultural context. Deities and spirits, sometimes even animals and dead people, used to be seen as actors in the social world. Modernity has dismissed these, instead installing formal organizations (including companies, voluntary associations, and administrative units), social movements, and nation-states as actors, but with a privileged position for individuals. In this sense, actorhood is an institution, a rule that prescribes what we attribute communicative events to, and what can become an actor in social relationships and networks (Fuhse 2012b, 378–390; Meyer and Jepperson 2000).

Whatever is constructed as an actor in the social world, also gets entangled in social relationships and networks. Gangs have long-standing rivalries. Nation-states are linked through alliances, sometimes even ‘friendships’, but also

through competition or straight-out enmity. The same holds for the relations among political parties (and other civil society actors) as well as for football clubs. Companies engage in long-standing collaboration or competition, up to hiring each other's creative personnel, sabotaging rival projects, or stealing technological knowledge. The communication between corporate and collective actors constructs not only their identities (the capacities and dispositions associated with them), but also 'relational expectations', or social relationships, between them. As a result, we can analyze their social networks analogously to those between individuals (Laumann 1979; Hindess 1986).

The attribution of actorhood to a social phenomenon depends in part on the internal patterning of ties. Only if a company, a social movement, a street gang shows a certain coherence in its behavior, this gets attributed to the collective rather than only to individuals. For this, centralization and leadership help. In turn, the relations to other collective or corporate actors have an impact on the internal structure. For example, conflict can lead to an increase in the internal solidarity and cohesion in the feuding parties, but also to their disintegration. A lack of recognition and conflict can be just as bad: a powerful street gang vanishes without a local rival to fight (Short 1996, 223). The internal processes and networks in collective and corporate actors interdepend with those in overarching networks to other collective and corporate actors.

3 OUTLOOK

Apart from these basic building blocks, and within them, the theory remains very much 'under construction'. Let me highlight three areas of development:

(1) Methodologically, the approach proposes to study the structural pattern of social relationships in conjunction with the identities, expectations, relationship frames, categories, institutions, and other forms of meaning interwoven with it. This means to combine formal network analysis with qualitative-interpretive methods (Fuhse and Mützel 2011). We already have a number of studies, and systematic propositions for, doing so in relational sociology (e.g. Crossley 2010b; Desmond 2014).

I suggest focusing less on the subjective meaning of actors, as derived from qualitative interviews. Rather, we need methods to study the ongoing construction, reproduction, and change of social relationships and networks in communication. Here, studies can build on the tradition of Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, and interactional sociolinguistics. All of these focus on the processing of meaning in sequences of communicative events. Within relational sociology, McFarland (2001) and Gibson (2005) have pioneered the combination social network analysis with the interpretation and quantification of the relational aspects of communication. We have to follow these impulses to arrive at a thorough methodology for how to study social networks in communication. This involves the interpretation, typification, and quantification of communicative events in

their relational meaning, and formal methods dealing with sequential network data, rather than with ties fixed as 1's and 0's over time (or cross-sectionally).

(2) Apart from its interest in institutions, relational sociology focuses its ambition on the meso level of social constellations, and on the study of social inequality with the interplay of categories, networks, and status. It has remained mostly silent about large-scale structures of society like politics, economy, or science. Where do they come from, and what is the role of network constellations within them? A number of authors wed network research to field theory, both by Bourdieu and in other versions (Anheier et al. 1995; Bottero and Crossley 2011; DiMaggio 1986; Emirbayer and Desmond 2015; Martin 2011; Powell et al. 2005; White et al. 2004).

However, we lack a good theory of what constitutes the mutual orientation of actors in fields of society, with Bourdieu's theory of various types of capital (economic, cultural, social, symbolic, political, etc.) unconvincing in a number of ways. Also, the social constellations in fields differ fundamentally. Science is characterized by disciplinary compartmentalization and by hub structures resulting from preferential attachment. Politics, at least in Western democratic regimes, seems structured by a 'natural dualism' (Duverger) of government and opposition. This kind of polarization results from the logics of reciprocity, transitivity, and ideological homophily, rather than preferential attachment. It seems that different rules of network formation are inscribed in fields. Given that these can switch (for example with political regime change), we can suspect that they result from institutionalization as much as from inherent logics of these fields.

(3) With its dual interest in social networks and meaning, and with the analysis of naturally occurring communication, relational sociology is well positioned to deal with large corpora of non-reactively generated data—'big data'—for example in the Web 2.0. We can study how social constellations change in discourse, how they affect the ideas and cultural constellations developed, and how they are affected by them. In this vein, relational sociology now studies cultural relations—the links between concepts or symbols—alongside and in conjunction with social networks (Bail 2012; Mohr 1998; Roth and Cointet 2010; Schultz and Breiger 2010). By now, we have a sophisticated account of social relationships, how they develop over time, and why they matter in the social world. Unfortunately, we lack a similarly elaborated notion of 'cultural relations'. What does it mean for two concepts to systematically co-occur, or to be used by the same actors? Where do these kinds of cultural relations come from, and how do they matter? To theorize socio-cultural constellations, and to systematize and inform empirical research on big data, we have to go beyond a merely intuitive concept of cultural networks—just as relational sociology systematically theorizes the research on social networks.

Theoretical approaches are valuable through both the answers they give and the problems they open up. Even if far from finished, I hope that the approach sketched here provides fruitful ways of thinking about, and conceptualizing social constellations. Social networks are seen as both interwoven with meaning

(expectations, identities, institutions, etc.) and dynamic (constructed and negotiated in the sequence of communication).

Not all the substantial arguments offered are necessarily connected to this theoretical framework. For example, the relational sociologies of Crossley (see Crossley in this handbook), Emirbayer (see Liu and Liang in this handbook), and Martin (2009, 2011) incorporate many of the same ideas, even if fundamentally building on subjective meaning. White (see Fontdevila in this handbook), Somers (see Doucet in this handbook), Mohr (1998), Tilly (see Demetriou in this handbook), Fuchs (2001), and Padgett (Padgett and Powell 2012) offer relational sociology akin to mine. I differ from them by building on Luhmann's theory of communication (see claims 4–7, but also consult Fuchs 2001; Padgett and Powell 2012; White et al. 2007), and by devising social relationships and networks as patterns of expectations (see claims 5–7). On this basis, I flesh out how social networks are connected to various forms of meaning (see claims 8–12).

Apart from construction sites (with considerable patchwork), sociological theories are also tool kits. From these, empirical researchers have to draw the tools that fit the phenomena under investigation, and the research questions they ask. Of course, theories should be both coherent and intuitively plausible. But their value cannot only be decided by abstract theoretical argument. Hopefully, some researchers find these arguments plausible (and coherent), and they help them to make sense of empirical data, or even to devise empirical studies.

NOTES

1. See John Padgett and Walter Powell's formulation: 'In the short run, actors create relations; in the long run, relations create actors' (2012, p. 2).
2. I elaborate under claim 6 how social structures can exist in a social world composed of processes: as 'expectations' linking communicative events. Strictly speaking, the 'process' consists of events connected through expectations.
3. The notion of communication is not confined to verbal exchange, but encompasses anything that is 'understood' as communication—as comprising 'information' and 'message'. A frown, a handshake, even deliberately ignoring somebody, all make for communication just like verbal utterances and written texts.

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Networks, Interactions and Relations

Nick Crossley

As this book shows there are many varieties of relational sociology. In this chapter I outline the approach that I have been cultivating in recent years (Crossley 2011, 2014, 2015b, 2016), briefly sketching certain central claims of that approach whilst also developing a few new strands. Specifically I want to: (1) further open up the philosophical underpinnings of my approach; (2) consider some of the mediations which extend social interactions and relations through time and space; (3) stress the need for relational theory to be complemented by relational methodologies (and empirical research); and (4) consider briefly what this might entail. The chapter tackles each of these aims in turn. I begin, however, with a summary of the central claims of my approach.

1 RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY

Relational sociology conceives of the social world as a network of interaction between (in the first instance) human actors. Interactions can be ‘one shot’, that is, between actors who have never previously met and, as far as they know and can realistically anticipate, will never meet again. In many cases, however, actors have a history of interaction and anticipate that they will interact again, and this affects their present interaction. In this case we may speak of a relation or tie between them. A tie or relation is a lived history of interaction between two actors, coupled with mutual anticipation of future interaction, which affects current interaction between them.

Most positive interaction involves an exchange of ‘goods’, albeit often intangible.¹ Actors benefit from contact with one another, they enjoy interacting, and this incentivises future contact between them. This, in turn, generates interdependence and thereby a power balance, in Elias’ (1978) sense, between

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them. Each depends upon the other for certain goods and is inclined to accede to the will of the other if they believe that not doing so might lead to the withdrawal of these goods. The strength of this power depends upon the value of the goods in question and the ease with which they might be found elsewhere. Where the value is low and/or the goods are easily procured elsewhere the power is slight. Similarly, the degree of asymmetry can vary considerably. When each depends equally upon the other power is balanced. However, it is still present. Most if not all social relations are characterised by a balance of power (*ibid.*).

I have prioritised interaction between human actors. However, certain patterns of interaction and relations between human actors can give rise to higher order, ‘corporate actors’, such as governments, trades unions, pressure groups and business corporations. Relations between such corporate actors are also integral to the relational conception of social life. Corporate actors qualify as actors to the extent that they generate decisions in a way which is irreducible to the human actors involved in them, have mechanisms for the implementation of those decisions and (in many cases) enjoy a legal status and possession and control of resources which are, again, irreducible to their human members (Hindess 1988).

Actors interact with objects in their material environments, use and transform those objects/environments and are constrained by them. Human relations are, as Merleau-Ponty (1971) puts it, ‘mediated by things’ and we must take account of this. Given that sociology is the study of human societies, however, and given both the importance that we attach to meanings, culture and points of view and the fact that we only have access to human meanings, culture and points of view, I do not conceptualise such non-human objects as actors, in the manner of actor-network theory (e.g. Latour 2005). Rather, I view them as resources, tools, obstacles and/or environments which mediate inter-human interactions and relations. Certain animals may constitute liminal cases, if and where they interact in meaningful ways with human actors, but such relations constitute a specialised area of sociology rather than a focus which sociologists in general need to incorporate. For the most part our interest is in networks of interaction and relations between human and/or corporate actors, in material environments, with the constraints and opportunities they afford, and involving material objects which serve variously as tools, resources and so on.

A relational ontology is a processual ontology. Interactions unfold through time and so too, therefore, do the relations and networks which they generate. Relations and networks may remain relatively stable over time but only relatively and only as a result of ongoing interactions which reproduce them—interactions which might equally transform them. New relations are formed and existing ones sometimes modified or broken. Active ties become latent and latent ties are reactivated. Change is sometimes dramatic but gradual change is a constant. The social fabric is always in process—always in a state of becoming.

2 INDIVIDUALS AND SYSTEMS

Networks of interaction and relations might be conceived, for some purposes, as ‘systems’ and we have much to learn from systems theory. However, there are dangers in systems theory, to which sociology has proved vulnerable in the past and which relational sociology opposes. The key danger is the tendency to hypostasise ‘the system’, attributing it with pre-requisites or a historical telos and the means and agency to achieve such ends. Functional explanations, which claim that certain institutions exist or events happen *because* they serve ‘the system’, provide one example of this. Certain versions of Marxism, which postulate ‘laws’ of historical development and believe that the communist society alluded to by Marx is a historical inevitability, provide another. Such teleological explanations are problematic because they rely upon an unexplained and indefensible notion of ‘inherent purpose’ in history and society and/or invoke a causal process which works backwards through time: later events or states of affairs are invoked to explain others which preceded and brought them about. ‘The system’ is reified in such accounts, assumed as a starting point of analysis and granted a degree of inevitability.

Proper systems thinking, by contrast, conceptualises a system as an emergent outcome of interactions which is contingent upon those interactions and sensitive to variations within them. It may be possible to identify ‘functional prerequisites’ which must be met if the system is to survive in its recognised form but the existence of such prerequisites in no way guarantees their fulfilment and there is nothing special or inevitable about the present form of the system. Systems may be more or less robust but their existence is always contingent upon the interactions from which they emerge and they are always vulnerable to change or collapse. Likewise ‘direction’ in history; interaction may drive a society in a particular direction for a time but there is no inevitability to this and no necessary denouement. Societies can and do ‘lose the plot’, sometimes taking up another, other times languishing without direction.

A second problem with many sociological approaches to systems, from Althusser (1969) to Parsons (1951), is their tendency to exclude flesh-and-blood human actors from their inventories of the parts of their systems. They focus rather upon roles and norms or modes of production, base and superstructure and so on. We need to be cautious in relation to humanism and critical of some variants of it. However, if we put flesh-and-blood actors out of the picture altogether, as certain structuralists, holists and systems thinkers are inclined to do, many aspects of systems become very difficult to explain, not least the changes and conflicts which are endemic within them. Norms, roles, modes of production, practices and so on are abstractions based upon observation of stabilised patterns of human interaction and we cannot explain either how they emerge, how they change or how they decline without reference to the human actors involved in them. Furthermore, to return to the above point, without an account of human actors we are more inclined to reify or

hypostasise ‘the system’, failing to see it for what it is, namely an emergent and contingent product of human interaction. Abstractions can be very useful but they become misleading when we lose sight of the messy realities from which they are abstracted.

There is a danger in appealing to flesh-and-blood actors, however, that we resort to a form of individualism, ontological or methodological, which is no less problematic from a relational point of view. There are many problems with individualism, too many to summarise here. It must suffice to sketch two broad problem areas.

Firstly, individualism, in all its forms, ignores emergence. A society is not a mere aggregate of individuals. Interactions, relations, networks and culture are real. They have effects and require investigation. Interaction between two actors has properties and dynamics which are irreducible to either of them. The actions of *i* affect those of *j* and those of *j* affect those of *i*. They form a system whose properties are distinct from those of either party taken in isolation. Moreover, the addition of a third actor changes the system again, structurally, adding new properties, dynamics and possibilities, which are again irreducible (Simmel 1902); likewise when more actors are added and a social network, involving multiple actors, takes shape. Social networks have a wide range of properties which are irreducible to their actor-nodes, and a large number of studies have pointed to the importance of those properties in shaping interactions and their outcomes (Borgatti et al. 2013; Scott 2000; Wasserman and Faust 1994).

Furthermore, individualism ignores the culture which exists *between actors*, connecting them. Culture is crucial to relational sociology, as to sociology more generally (Crossley 2015b; McLean 2016). We must explore the formation, reproduction and transformation of culture in human interaction, unpacking its relational essence. What Wittgenstein (1953) says of language, namely that it would have no purpose for a solitary individual, if it is even conceivable that a solitary individual could create it (which is doubtful), is true of all aspects of culture. Cultures are properties of collective life. They arise within collectives, mediate and in some part constitute relations within those collectives (McLean 2016).

These are arguments against ontological individualism. They point to aspects of the social world which are irreducible to individuals. They are also arguments against methodological individualism, however, because they suggest that we cannot limit the focus of our analyses to individuals and their actions but must also find ways of capturing and analysing interactions, relations, networks and culture.

The appeal of individualism is bolstered by ‘common sense’ empiricism. Individuals seem real because, qua bodies, they are directly perceived. Relations, networks and even interactions seem less real because they are not (Crossley and Edwards 2016). We can see flesh-and-blood individuals directly but we cannot see relations or networks, at least not in the same way. Empiricism has been overturned in other sciences, however, and sociologists must take this

step too. Interactions, relations, networks and culture are no less real than individual human bodies even if, strictly speaking, they cannot be directly observed. They manifest empirically by way of their effects and these effects must be studied (*ibid.*).

My second criticism of individualism is that it takes the individual actor as a given upon which all else is built: a prime mover. I suggest, by contrast, that social actors, at least in the form that we generally think of them, are themselves emergent properties of social interaction. The actor assumed in most variants of individualism, even those which claim to return to ‘the state of nature’ in order to explain society, enjoys capacities which are clearly cultural and therefore dependent upon interaction for their very existence; capacities which are acquired by social actors through interaction with others. Human beings are largely helpless at birth, completely dependent upon others for their material welfare and survival, and even if some of their subsequent development is a natural process, only conditional on the protection and care of others, much of it involves learning from others. From practical skills and ‘body techniques’ through language use and the reflective thought it enables, from moral and aesthetic sensibilities to the formation of a sense of self and identity, the individual actor is as much an emergent property of social interaction and relations as the culture their agency depends and draws upon.

Even ‘the organism’ which predates (and becomes) the social actor must be conceptualised relationally, and not only because it originates in (sexual) interaction and forms within the womb of its mother, nor indeed because its status as a living being depends upon a continuous process of exchange with its material environment: taking in oxygen, food and water; expelling waste. Evolutionary theory suggests that many of our hardwired attributes, particularly those relating to sociability, were shaped by an evolutionary process in which our primate ancestors lived in relations of interdependence with others, that is, networks (Wilson 2013). Living in groups or networks conferred an evolutionary advantage. It afforded protection and the opportunity to, for example, hunt bigger, protein-rich prey. Those of our primate ancestors who lived in groups stood a much better chance of surviving, reproducing and therefore becoming our ancestors. Group life also made demands, however. Individuals had to be sociable to live amongst others. Those who were not would have been cast out and thus very likely perished. Furthermore, more cooperative, more sociable groups enjoyed a better chance of survival and therefore of passing on their genes to their offspring. Fitness improves survival and reproduction probability in the evolutionary process and in our case that meant fitting into a collective mode of life. In other words, social relations shaped the evolutionary process which gave rise to the human species and thereby played a role in making us what we are at a basic biological level.

It is important to add here that the social actor, as generated within social interaction, is not created once and for all but rather, returning to process, continually nourished and reproduced (or not) in ongoing relations and interactions. Her thoughts, as Mead (1967) observes, are effectively dialogues with

others or at least internalised representatives of others. Her self-hood and identities, themselves processes, are reproduced and supported in relations of mutual recognition (*ibid.*). And her sense of reality is routinely reproduced in everyday interaction (Berger and Luckmann 1971). Furthermore, as Durkheim (1952) suggests in his discussions of egoistic and anomic suicide, meaningful contact with others is integral to an individual's sense of purpose, and the relatively stable norms generated through such interaction play a key role in maintaining realistic individual expectations, thereby contributing to the individual's happiness and psychological balance. Individual psychological balance is a function not only of processes internal to the individual but also of the many forms of support, stabilisation and control they receive from others in the networks to which they belong.

3 SUBJECTIVITY AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY: A PHILOSOPHICAL DIGRESSION

The critique of individualism presented above can and should be extended beyond the sociological and into the philosophical realm. Specifically, a thoroughgoing relationalism requires that we reject the flawed but popular conception of human subjectivity and consciousness as a private 'inner world', a view dating back to Descartes (1969) at least, which grants the individual certain and immediate knowledge of their own self and mental life whilst questioning whether they can ever enjoy access to the mental life of others. From this point of view the social world is an aggregate of individual monads, each, *qua* monad, closed to the others. I do not have space to offer a full critique of this view here (see Crossley 1996, 2001, 2011) but it would be instructive to sketch out a few important points.

Firstly, consciousness is not a substance but rather a relation. As Husserl (1991) argued, it is always consciousness-of something other than itself and thus comprises a connection between two poles: intentional awareness and that of which it is aware. Methodological caution prevented Husserl from embracing the implication that this involves connection to a world beyond consciousness (he famously brackets the question of the reality of the world beyond our consciousness) but others, such as Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Mead (1967), who hold that perception is at the root of consciousness, have no such equivocation. Each argues that perceptual consciousness arises from an interaction between body and world and comprises a sensual relation of one to the other. Consciousness attaches the actor to the world.

Furthermore, (perceptual) consciousness is not an inner representation of an outer world, an 'inner theatre', as Descartes also suggests. I do not see the tree before me 'in my head'. I see it before me, over there. The space of my perceptual consciousness is not between my ears but rather between myself and the tree. Consciousness does not set me apart from the world, as Descartes' analysis suggests. It projects me outwards towards and attaches me to the world. Indeed, to reiterate, it is attachment to the world.

All thought and emotion are intentional from this point of view and should be conceived as ‘threads’ connecting us to the world, to borrow Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) imagery. Love, anger, hate, fear and so on each have an object and connect the individual to that object, projecting the individual outward into the world. They are modalities of attachment to the world. Furthermore, whilst they may involve sensations and feelings these are only elements in a bigger structure in which the whole body is involved. Love, anger and more cognitive states such as understanding and knowing are not ‘inner events’, separate from the wider life of the body. They are forms of conduct—ways of handling, being-in and connecting to the world.

This argument parallels that of Wittgenstein (1953) and Ryle (1949). Both argue (against Descartes) that the meaning of ‘love’, ‘envy’, ‘understanding’ and other such mental predicates cannot rest upon reference to private inner states because they belong to a public language which is acquired within and from a community. If the meaning of a word entailed reference to a private state then it could never be taught or learned because a teacher could never point that state out to a learner. Each would have access to their own states only. Our psychological language is public and the conditions of its use and meaning (including any referents) must be public too therefore. Merleau-Ponty (1962) adds to this that whatever ‘private sensations’ might be involved in our mental lives derive their meaning from the overt behaviours which accompany them and the public contexts in which they occur. On its own a racing heart is not fear. It only becomes fear when accompanying a situation defined as frightening and other perceptual and behavioural responses which define that situation thus. In other situations it might signify love or the exhaustion following hard exercise.

The significance of this argument is that our subjective lives are embodied and therefore public or rather intersubjective. Minds are not, as they were for Descartes (1969), inaccessible from ‘the outside’. My confusion, excitement or joy do not exist only for me but for others too, who perceive them directly. Indeed, they might be more obvious to others than to me. Being excited, to take one example, does not necessarily entail reflexive awareness that one is excited and one might be too immersed in the excitement to notice or correctly diagnose it—whilst to others it is obvious. We can fail to understand and be wrong about ourselves as surely as we can successfully understand and be right about others. We subject both ourselves and others to observation and interpretation and we use much the same methods in both cases. Understandings of self and other, both of which are subject to periodic revision, are woven (and rewoven) from the same cloth. They are not, as Descartes’ suggests, different in kind.

Not that our relations to one another are relations of contemplative knowledge, at least not in the first instance. The gestures and wider behaviour of the other are, as Merleau-Ponty (1985) suggests, communicative. They register for me, at least in the first instance, by way of my response to them. The other’s smile does not exist for me, in the first instance, as an object of reflective

contemplation. Rather it draws a reciprocating smile from me. I am affected (perhaps infected) by their happiness prior to and independently of any reflective awareness I may achieve of it. To reflect upon and think about the other is to step back from a more primordial encounter of mutual affecting—what Mead (1967) calls a ‘conversation of gestures’.

It might be objected that, as Goffman (1959) shows, we routinely manage our impressions, selecting which aspects of our subjective states to make public. This is true but the ‘private self’ involved is an emergent product of earlier interactions and intersubjective relations. It is a product of privatisation. Children learn both how to keep certain things to themselves and that they should do so. They speak/think out loud before learning how to do so silently and to themselves. Moreover, the self-consciousness that motivates and informs ‘impression management’ is itself acquired through interaction with others, as Mead’s (1967) important work shows. Self-consciousness is coupled with consciousness of the other (Schutz 1966); to be self-conscious is to be conscious that others are conscious of one; and the origin of this twofold structure is social interaction in childhood (Mead 1967).

In addition, as Cooley (1902) argued, the actor is often her own blind spot and is dependent upon feedback from others in the process whereby they build a sense of self. Selves are formed, reproduced and transformed in ongoing processes of interaction in which alters feed their impressions of the actor back to her; the so-called ‘looking glass self’. Selfhood, to reiterate, is an emergent property of interaction, social relations and networks. Social life is not the effect of a coming together of individual selves. Rather selves take shape in the hurly burly of social life (that is, interaction).

4 TIME AND SPACE

These discussions may seem to suggest that relational sociology is a variant of what is sometimes referred to as ‘micro-sociology’, dealing exclusively with dynamics and structures of small scale interactions and networks. The social ‘macro-cosm’ is relational too, however. Relational sociology scales up and reflecting upon how it does so is a useful way of challenging the assumption, evident in some accounts, that ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ are somehow different in kind.

I have already suggested that networks of human actors, in some cases, combine to form corporate actors, such as trades unions, firms and national governments, which interact with one another, forming their own relations and networks. This is one way in which the micro scales up. The global order is, in some part, constituted by interaction between corporate actors: for example, trade deals between governments and trading across national borders between firms; military treatises between governments; and so on. The micro is nested within the macro on this account: human interaction and networks (in some cases) generate corporate actors who, in turn, interact and form relations and networks at a ‘higher level’.

Secondly, as ‘small world’ studies show, networks, including networks of human actors, can involve hundreds of millions of nodes and still have sufficiently short path lengths to enable coordination and other observable systemic properties (Barabási 2003; Crossley 2008; Newman et al. 2006; Watts 1999). However ‘big’ in terms of nodes, the structure of such networks keeps their paths short and integration therefore high. A breakout of a deadly virus in one corner of the world causes fear in every other corner because we know that the world is sufficiently connected, with short enough paths within its network for those viruses to diffuse very quickly through the entire global population. And what is true of viruses is true of information, gossip, fashions and other such mobile aspects of social life. The network concept and many of the network-related processes and dynamics of interest to relational sociologists do not necessarily lose their application when we scale up to the national or even international level.

Thirdly, beyond corporate actors, the collectives of interest to social scientists, including social classes and ethnic groups, can and should be defined in relational (network) terms. They are, to put it crudely, distinct network clusters or positions. Social class, for example, is not an individual attribute but rather a ‘position’ within a system of social relations (i.e. network). Different theories of class conceptualise this differently. To take the classics, for example, Marx defines the proletariat by reference to their relation with the bourgeoisie (to whom they sell their labour) and vice versa; Weber (and also Bourdieu 1993), by contrast, focuses upon the process of differential association which clusters individuals with similar levels of resources and life chances within (class) groupings. In both cases, however, patterns of social relations are central. Moreover, Weber’s approach is generalised to all forms of status differentiation by Blau (1974, 1977) in his conception of society as a multidimensional ‘social space’. Differences count as statuses and axes of social space, for Blau, insofar as they can be shown to exert an independent effect upon patterns of interaction and relationship formation.

The final means of scaling I will consider centres upon media of interaction. Reference to interactions and relations suggests micro-sociology to many, I suggest, because interactions are conceived as localised and short-lived in both their execution and their consequences. Back in the depths of history this may have been so but amongst the many inventions which have punctuated that history are some, from transport and communication technologies to money and recording technologies, which extend the reach of social interaction through both space and time. To do full justice to this argument is beyond the scope of this chapter but a few examples would be instructive.

Money is an interesting example. In a pre-monetary economy based upon exchanges of favours the reach of social interaction is relatively short and short-lived. If John does a favour for Jane then he may expect a favour in return but it will have to be Jane who returns the favour, or somebody else close to her, and this will limit the timing and place of repayment. It is possible that Jane has done a favour for Joe and can call upon him to repay her favour to John for her

but the circle is unlikely to spread much wider and John is only likely to get his favour repaid if he remains in close geographical proximity to Jane. Her debt to him means nothing outside of their limited social circle. Likewise, there is a time limit to the repayment; at the very least the debt will die with Jane and it may perish sooner if the parties forget about it or fall out. If Jane pays John for his services with money, by contrast, then he can spend the money whenever he wants, wherever his currency is accepted (or can be exchanged). He can add it to money earned elsewhere, enabling a bigger purchase, or he can save it. His favour to Jane does not bind him to her but rather opens up the possibility of further transactions far removed in time and space from her. Moreover, it connects his interaction with her to further interactions in which he spends the money she paid him. Indeed, the exchange and circulation of money creates a vast network in which events localised in a particular time and space can cascade through both, having significant effects at a considerable distance from their origin. Money, in this respect, modifies human relations, extending their reach through both space and time (this is discussed at length by both Giddens 1990 and Habermas 1987).

The time dimension of communicative acts is similarly extended through various recording devices, from the written word, through photography, film and audio recording to new digital storage technologies. Such devices allow what might previously have been fleeting communications to achieve a potentially permanent existence and to continue to have effects long after their moment, and indeed to have effects across a much wider geographical range. At the same time, however, they permit greater scrutiny and, as Walter Benjamin (1968) says of art in ‘the age of mechanical reproduction’, perhaps reduce the aura of communicative acts.

Likewise, there is space: improved transport links and communication technologies, from carrier pigeons to Web.2, all remove the barriers which once confined social relations within relatively small spatial limits, permitting truly global links and collapsing the world to much a greater extent into a single network ‘component’.²

I have only offered the briefest of introductions here to these various forms of scaling up from micro to macro. They are a crucial focus, however, if relational sociology is to succeed because it is necessary for sociology to span both the macro- and the micro-cosm and, more importantly, to challenge the idea that there is any hard and fast distinction between them.

5 METHODOLOGICAL RELATIONALISM

Sociology is regularly subject to new theoretical challenges and paradigms but most leave the practice of empirical research untouched. The labels and language change but everything else remains the same. Relational sociology must go further. It can and should have methodological implications. If we accept the claims of relational theory then we should endeavour to act upon those claims in the ways in which we design and execute our research, finding

methods which allow us to explore interactions, relations and networks in all their complexity.

This is all the more important when, as Andrew Abbott (1997, 2001) has argued, contemporary sociology is hampered by a disconnect between theory and empirical practice. For Abbott, the primary disconnect is between theories focused upon human action and methods focused upon variables. This critique is important and could be extended (beyond Abbott's quantitative focus) to a great deal of qualitative research, but I want to extend it here by focusing more explicitly upon relationality. If we believe that interactions, relations and networks are important then we need methods that allow us to capture these relational structures.

The main problem we must confront is the individualising tendency of many of our current methods, especially questionnaires and interviews. They not only elicit information at an individual level but elicit information about individuals: their perceptions, beliefs, behaviours and so on. Even where social structures, such as class or gender, are captured they are typically treated as and reduced to individual-level variables. Class is not captured or treated as a structure of relations but rather reduced to an attribute of the individual, something they 'have'. Information about individuals is important, of course. However, if we only ever gather information about individuals then, by default, we reduce the social world to a mere aggregate of individuals. The interactions, relations and networks which relational sociology prioritises drop out of consideration.

It is important to distinguish between data gathering and data analysis in this context, and also between data elicited at the individual level and data regarding individuals. Questionnaires and interviews are not the only ways of gathering sociological data and it is important to encourage use of other means. However, they can be used to gather relational data—data which can be analysed in relational ways. And they may often be the best or only means available to a researcher. More important than the way in which data are gathered, however, is the nature of the data itself. Relational sociology demands relational data, that is, data which bears upon 'relations' (including interactions and networks) and which can be analysed relationally.

Much of my own work has used social network analysis (SNA) and I will take this as my key example. Before I do, however, I want to briefly review a number of others. This is by no means an exhaustive list of relational methods. I introduce these methods simply to illustrate what I mean by relational method and to (hopefully) initiate and facilitate debate on this topic.

There have been relatively few attempts within sociology to devise a systematic method for studying social interaction empirically but one obvious and successful approach is conversation analysis (CA) (Hutchby and Woofit 2008). Informed by ethnomethodology, CA explores, in minute detail, the ways in which partners to (usually linguistic) interaction coordinate their activities. Analysts typically transcribe exchanges, using a very detailed coding system specific to the approach, then analyse the interaction as it unfolds, moment by moment. The two main foci of analysis in much of the published work in this

area have been the ways in which turns are negotiated (sequencing) and the use of ‘membership categorisation devices’ (ways of categorising individuals). For present purposes, however, what is of interest to me is the fact that CA analyses real-life interaction as it unfolds, treating it as a contingent accomplishment of those party to it. Conversation doesn’t ‘just happen’ and its course is not determined or neatly mapped out by social norms. Interlocutors engage interpretively with one another, negotiating not only the substantive topic of their interaction but also the organisation of the interaction itself. The interest of many conversation analysts is narrowly technical. This arguably limits its relevance, as it stands, for relational sociology more generally. However, to reiterate, it is one of relatively few attempts to empirically analyse social interaction and it is therefore important.

One of the objections that some have made to CA is that it tends to focus upon relatively brief stretches of interaction, focusing only upon those factors informing interaction which are directly visible (or audible) within it (those factors captured in the aforementioned transcription). CA advocates sometimes respond that theirs is an empirical discipline and that they cannot ‘factor in’ factors for which they have no empirical evidence. They have a point but there are perfectly legitimate ways of identifying the effects of ‘unobservables’, by way of triangulating different methods. Furthermore, in many cases we can advance our understanding of even small stretches of conversation by considering them within the wider context of interaction to which they belong, a context better explored by way of one or more of the observation approaches used by some sociologists, including participant observation (PO).

PO takes many different forms. Many of the very early ‘classics’, such as William Foote Whyte’s (1943) *Street Corner Society*, remain particularly instructive for relational sociology in my view, however, as they afford particular attention to patterns of interaction (Who interacts with whom? When? How? For what purpose? etc.) and the ways in which they concatenate into local social structures (without losing sight of the impact of more distant interactions, such as government decisions and economic dynamics, on their local sites). Whyte and other others writing in the tradition from which he comes were fascinated by issues of social structure, which for them meant patterns of interaction and relations. Their studies are therefore important exemplars of relational observation in practice. The claims to naturalistic observation made by some participant observers may be problematic but there is no doubt that the method allows us to capture the ‘doing’ of society as an interaction order. As with CA, the focus is upon what happens between people—upon interaction and relations.

Similarly, historical archives often capture traces of interaction and relations (e.g. in letters, minutes of meetings, rosters of attendees at meetings and newspaper descriptions). We generally encounter actors in action and embedded in situations and relations in archives, which is more useful from a relational point of view. And, of course, archives sometimes allow us to track interactions over longer periods than we can typically manage with PO, focusing upon significant

events, turning points and outcomes that an ethnographer of the time would have to have been very lucky to capture. We can pick our moment and are not limited to one moment. Like PO, however, archival analysis captures social life as it is done, and therefore necessarily in a relational mode.

PO and archival analysis aren't necessarily relational. As with interviews and questionnaires it depends upon how they are carried out. They have good relational potential, however, because unlike questionnaires and interviews they do not abstract actors from the situations of interaction that are of interest to relational sociology but rather observe them within those interactions. Or at least, to reiterate, they create this possibility.

PO and archival analysis potentially generate rich relational data. However, when these data concern multiple actors in complex networks they quickly become unwieldy. A network involving a mere 10 actors potentially involves 90 directed or 45 undirected ties,³ for example, and the many complex configurations that might form within such a network are very difficult to spot or describe, let alone explain with any degree of rigour by qualitative means. This is where and why SNA can be very useful.

The variants and possibilities of SNA are far too extensive to even hint at here. It must suffice to say that SNA is a set of mathematically based techniques for recording, visualising and analysing relational structures (networks). It can be used as an aid in qualitatively focused narrative accounts. It can, at least in some of its forms, be incorporated into standard quantitative, survey approaches. But the analysis of networks, their impact, formation and dynamics can be the central focus of research study itself.

SNA illustrates the ways in which interaction and relations give rise to structures with properties which are irreducible to the actors involved in them and which have impacts upon those actors, individually and collectively, which create both opportunities and constraints for them. Networks can be bigger or smaller, for example; more or less dense; more or less clustered; more or less centralised (according to a number of different measures of centrality); with a bigger or smaller diameter. They may be more or less divisible into distinct factions. All of these properties have been shown to create opportunities and constraints, in certain contexts, for those involved in them. Likewise, individual nodes can be more or less central, in accordance with a variety of different measures of centrality, can find themselves in different regions of the network and might have a more or less dense network, all of which again creates opportunities and constraints for them. Networks are not givens, however. They form, change, decay and only remain stable, when they do, in virtue of interactions which perpetuate their structures. SNA also allows us to capture and explore this fluidity.

By way of illustration consider the graph in Fig. 24.1, which maps the network of key players (musicians and support personnel) in the UK's Two-Tone music world (as of 1981) (this graph was drawn and the various measures which follow derived using Ucinet software (see Borgatti et al. 2002)). There are 178 nodes in the network and therefore potentially 15,753 undirected ties (if each node had a tie to every other node). In fact, however, each node is tied to 15 others, on

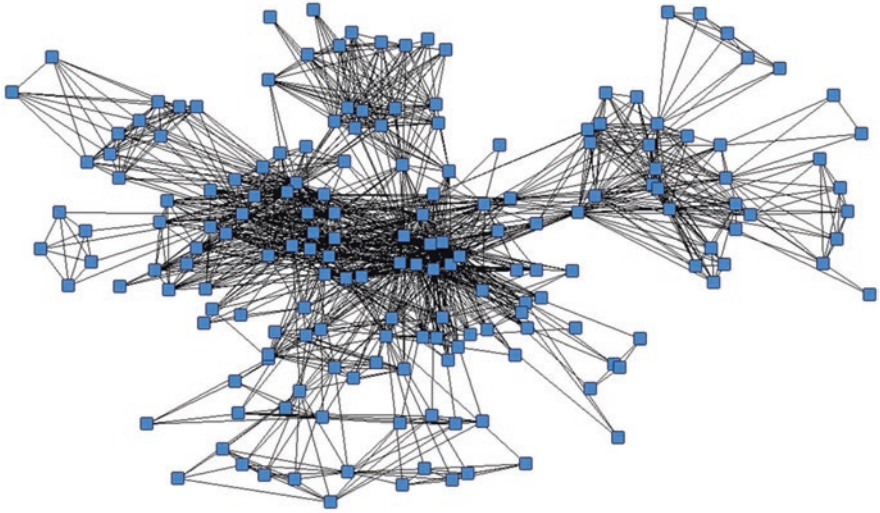


Fig. 24.1 The UK Two-Tone music world

average (average degree = 15) and only 8% of all potential ties are realised (density = 0.08). This might sound low, which would be interesting and perhaps theoretically troubling as I have suggested elsewhere that the successful formation of music worlds is more likely where density is relatively high (Crossley 2015a). However, we can see from the graph that the network appears to be formed from a number of quite dense clusters, an observation which is reinforced by a relatively high clustering coefficient (0.77). Whilst only 8% of all potential ties are realised that figure is 77%, on average, for the personal networks of each of the individual nodes. At an individual level, therefore, each node is likely to have experienced the various constraints and opportunities associated with high density and, on my account, with the mobilisation of new music worlds.

In addition, there is strong evidence of a core-periphery structure—that is to say, we find a small number of nodes (33) with a relatively high density (0.64), which form the core of the network, and a much larger peripheral subset of nodes only sparsely connected to one another (0.05) and slightly more densely connected but still not very densely connected to the core (0.1). This both suggests that there are dense patches within the network, where we might expect more of ‘the action’ to happen and, in doing so, hints at inequalities in the network.

I am only scratching at the surface here. There is a great deal more that one could do to analyse this network. My intention has merely been to illustrate something of what a network analysis might involve, and thereby to demonstrate one possibility for what a relational approach to sociology might look like in practice.

Where CA seeks to explore the details of specific interactions, SNA captures the broader structure of relations within which such interactions typically occur. Both are important, neither should be privileged over the other and

ideally we would capture both in a relational analysis, alongside the context which PO and/or archival analysis could furnish. Whichever ‘slice’ of this relational configuration we are able to capture in practice, however, the central point is that we are focusing empirically upon the relational configurations which comprise the social world, translating relational theory into empirical practice. If relational sociology is to be anything more than another passing theoretical fad then this is what we must do.

Before I conclude this section on methodology I want to make a brief point about simulation and specifically agent-based modelling (Gilbert and Troitzsche 2005; Railsback and Grimm 2012). One of the key methodological challenges which relational sociology faces arises from the difficulty of capturing interactions, relations and networks, or perhaps of capturing the specific interactions, relations and networks which we would like to analyse. We can’t always be there, at the right moment, and there may be hundreds or thousands of more or less simultaneous ‘theres’ which we need to capture. The popularity of questionnaire surveys and interviews undoubtedly rests upon the fact that it is usually possible to assemble a sample of respondents from a target population who are willing to be temporarily extracted from the usual contexts of their lives in order to speak to a researcher or tick the boxes of their questionnaire. This may not be ideal but it is practicable.

However, if we have an idea about the way in which particular types of interaction, within particular network configurations, concatenate to generate particular outcomes, something that it is very unlikely that we would be able to actually observe, then we do now have the possibility of testing our idea by way of simulation models. Agent-based models allow us to create virtual populations in which specific types of interaction take place and to observe their (often unexpected) outcomes. There are reasons to be sceptical of such models but that is true of any research method and, used appropriately, agent-based models provide a further tool for the implementation of a properly relational research programme.

6 CONCLUSION

There are many versions of relational sociology (some more compatible with one another than others) and each raises a host of complex issues. In this chapter I have offered a brief introduction to several key issues associated with one particular version (see Crossley 2011 for an elaboration). Theoretically this approach prioritises interaction, relations and networks, arguing that both ‘actors’ and ‘structures’ emerge from these more primordial elements. In the final section of the chapter, however, I have argued that relational sociology must move beyond theoretical arguments if it is to make a real difference, changing the way in which we practice sociology, methodologically, and thus the type of research findings that we generate. I have suggested a number of methods which might be useful for this purpose but there are more and I would hope that the development of relational sociology over the next few years will involve, amongst other things, an effort to identify, adapt and use them.

NOTES

1. I limit my focus here to positive interaction, excluding relations of conflict and outright domination, and bracketing out Simmel's (1906, 1955) important observation that most relations involve a mix of positive and negative elements. The negative aspect is important, as Simmel (1955) suggests, but I do not have space to do justice to it here.
2. A network component is a subset of nodes in a network, each of which is at least indirectly connected by a path. If i has a tie with j , j with k , k with l and l with m , for example, then j , k , l and m all belong to the same component because any one of the them is connected to any other by a path (of other nodes and their connections). In some networks we might find a cluster of nodes each connected to one another but having no ties outside of the cluster. They would form a distinct component in the network, as would any node who enjoyed no ties to anybody else (an 'isolate'). A country whose population members enjoy no contact with anybody beyond their national border would be a distinct component in the global network but it is unlikely that any such country exists today (perhaps there are a few communities in the Amazon rainforest) and the ratio of within to between country ties is constantly shifting in favour of the latter.
3. Undirected ties are mutual by definition and thus only counted once for each pair of actors: for example, if k 'lives with' j then j necessarily 'lives with' k , or rather j and k live together. Living together is an undirected tie. However, j may like k without k necessarily liking j . Liking is a directed tie, it may flow in one direction (j to k) without flowing in the other (k to j) and we must independently observe both directions.

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From the Concept of ‘Trans-Action’ to a Process-Relational Sociology

François Dépelteau

I THE FUNDAMENTALS

This chapter is part of a series of publications dedicated to the advancement of one type of relational sociology (Dépelteau 2008, 2013, 2015a, b, Forthcoming). As explained below, the name of this relational sociology has kept changing from ‘radical’ to ‘deep’, ‘transactional’ and finally ‘process-relational’ sociology. These changes reflect the processual(!) nature of this approach in-the-making. I see it as a development where I have tried to interact with relevant and respectful critiques in constructive ways, meaning by being willing to make changes rather than simply and always defending previous choices and ideas. Somehow, I think all these labels are relevant in their own ways, and I will keep using them when it is helpful to explain what is this process-relational sociology. The choice of the right words is a crucial and difficult exercise in sociology. Finding the right balance between being precise and accessible seems to be a difficult challenge in this respect. I also see this conceptual labour as an endless work-in-progress where the reactions of critiques can help a lot.

Essentially, this approach is an attempt to move beyond social determinism and co-determinism in sociology. Ideal-typically speaking, social determinism explicates human action, interest, habitus and so on as effects of causal powers of external social forces such as societies, social structures, social currents and cultures. Note that these forces are not social actors but social ‘substances’—or they are considered as such for analytical purposes. In short, ‘crystallized’ social structures, cultures or societies are considered as being external to the individuals and as having some causal powers over

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them. They determine their actions, minds, desires, emotions, habitus and so on. Co-deterministic sociologists see the historicity of the social as the outcome of interactions between the same kind of external social forces and the ‘agency’ of the actors.

Like others, I think there are many problems with these two worldviews, mostly coming from the assumption that these social forces can ‘self-act’ on or ‘inter-act’ with individuals—once again for real or for analytical purposes. From G. Tarde to H. Blumer, B. Latour and many others, this type of assumption has been contested since the beginning of sociology basically for appearing unrealistic, being founded on some sort of metaphysical logic, and/or reifying social phenomena.

In brief, we think that social fields (‘interactional fields’, ‘networks’, ‘associations’, ‘social worlds’ or ‘figurations’) constantly emerge and evolved through interactions. We agree that these social processes are obviously more than their co-producers—even if they cannot exist without them. Obviously, multiple social fields are created throughout the interactions (from couples to social movements, genocides and global economies), and this is what we study in sociology. We also agree that social patterns can be found in one social field through time or when social fields of the same kind are compared (families, states, revolutions, etc.). One will find similar and ideal-typical identities, roles, norms, forms of relations and so on. Finally, except for small fields such as conversations, couples or nuclear families, most of the individuals have little or no *noticeable* effect on the mutations of large fields.

However, and once more, we affirm that logically and empirically speaking social fields cannot self-act on or inter-act with individuals. Even after their emergence, and even if we can discover social patterns, they have no causal power over them. I can certainly co-produce a family through time by interacting with my parents and my sister (and be influenced by them), but fields are social effects, not interactants. For example, it is impossible to have a conversation with a family. The family exists as a social process but not as a ‘substance’ like an uncle, a brother or the television in the living room.

Hence, besides social determinism and co-determinism, there was always a third option available in sociology through the works of social thinkers like G. Tarde, H. Blumer, H. Becker, A. Strauss, N. Elias, C. Tilly, K. Knorr-Cetina, B. Latour and recent relational sociologists such as I. Burkitt, O. Kivinen, O. Pyyhtinen, T. Piironen and P. Selg. This list is far from being exhaustive, and when put together in this way, these social thinkers do not propose a ‘paradigm’ or a coherent ‘theory’. Nevertheless, the main point is that they suggest worldviews where sociology is fundamentally the study of social processes as constant and dynamic effects of relations between multiple interactants.

The starting block of my version of this type of relational approach is one conceptual distinction proposed by J. Dewey and A. Bentley (1949). In fact, I use three of their concepts as basic tools for this process-relational sociology. In a nutshell, we are talking about three ways to see relations when we produce knowledge: ‘self-action’ (A Π B), ‘inter-action’ (A Π B; B Π A) and

'trans-action' ($A \vee B$). To make sure I will not be accused of deforming their concepts, I will repeat it: I adapt these three concepts to the 'objects' of sociology to move beyond social determinism (based on the study of 'self-actions' of social 'substances' on individuals) and co-determinism (mostly based on the study of 'inter-actions' between social structures and agency in contemporary sociology). These three concepts were already associated to relational sociology by M. Emirbayer in his 'relational manifesto' in 1997, but he did not really develop this idea. Instead, he based his relational sociology on Bourdieu's theory (see the chapters of Liang and Liu and Porpora in this handbook). A long while ago, J. Spiegel (1970) also used these three concepts in an ambitious book called *Transactions* where he offered an integrative framework for human sciences. The book did not find any significant audience and its framework became outdated. Very recently, and in their own ways of course, P. Selg (2016a, b, 2017) and S. Hillcoat-Nalletamby (2017) also based their work on the notions of 'trans-action', 'inter-action' and 'self-action'. In one way or another and more or less explicitly, other relational colleagues have also been influenced by J. Dewey's and A. Bentley's concepts (see Chap. 1 in this handbook).

From there, I can summarize the key ideas of this relational sociology with several points:

- The relevance of this relational sociology comes from its capacity to offer a realistic and pragmatic mode of perception of our social life. By doing so, it could offer the kind of social compass we need in this messy social universe.
- This mode of perception and orientation may reinforce the relevance of sociology empirically and pragmatically speaking, mostly because the understanding of social relations is enhanced in comparison to deterministic and co-deterministic sociologies. This is about comparing three ideal-types of sociology based on three different ideal-typical perceptions of relations. Once more and with more details,
 - Social deterministic explanations refer to 'self-actions' of A on B, where A—as an actor, a social 'thing' or an 'independent' variable—is simply 'external' to B; and where B—as a 'culturally doped' individual or group, a 'structurally determined' actor or a 'dependent' variable—is simply determined by an external force (A) without affecting it. Typically, positivistic sociology is founded on this type of unidirectional and behavioral relations. It can also be connected to the old dream of discovering universal relations of 'self-actions' of A on B called 'social laws'. E. Durkheim's explanations of the social causes of suicide or more recently the 'pure sociology' of D. Black are good examples of this type of sociological approach.
 - Co-deterministic explanations refer to 'inter-actions' between A and B, where A and B act on each other as 'essences', identities and/or properties which are somehow independent from the relations—at least 'analytically speaking'. One typical example is the predominant idea in

sociology that the ‘causal powers’ of ‘crystallized’ social structures inter-act with the ‘agency’ of social actors, as if—for real or analytically speaking—there would be two forces colliding on each other like balls on a billiard table, and as if these ‘forces’ would be what they are and do what they do outside their relations in one specific social field. The most important feature of co-determinism in sociology is the preservation of the deterministic idea that social patterns (social structures, institution, etc.) pre-determined the actors, *and* that those actors are not simply or always determined by the causal powers of the formers since they have some ‘agency’ they can use. Some social thinkers claim we need an analytical ‘dualism’ to understand this sequence of interactions (like R. Bashkar and M. Archer), while others ‘conflate’ the two forces (A. Giddens for instance), but fundamentally, they all adopt co-deterministic worldviews.

- Following the path opened by J. Dewey and A. Bentley, I think sociologists should study relations as ‘*trans-actions*’. It basically means that *sociologically speaking* A is what she is and is doing what she is doing because she is ‘trans-acting’ with B, and vice versa.
- In other words, A and B are *interdependent*. Of course, we can imagine individuals outside of any specific interactions (I should say ‘trans-actions’). I can picture my ‘sister’ as a distinct person. However, as interactants (I should say ‘trans-actants’), people are not independent. This person cannot be a ‘sister’ without her ‘brother’. As a sister, she is interdependent in terms of identity, actions, feelings and so on. We know A and B are two different persons, but A is the wife of B and act as such, and B is the husband of A and act as such, only when they interact (or trans-act) by co-producing a social field called a ‘couple’. When they are involved in other social fields (or literally, ‘trans-actional fields’), they are (doing) something else as clients in a restaurant, parents, employees, swimmers, readers, soldiers, murderers, victims, friends and so forth.
- In this logic, the historicity of human social life—or the capacity of human beings to co-produce their social life—is the outcome of specific and processual ‘trans-actions’ from which social fields (couples, empires, wars, conversations, etc.) constantly emerge, evolved and dissolve here, there and everywhere. And this is what we are invited to study with this relational sociology.
- As mentioned, throughout this energetic social universe social patterns can be identified. From the point of view of the observers, those are similar relations happening through time and space. Sociologists have developed many concepts (social structures, institutions, roles, norms, etc.) and methods (such as variable-analysis) to reveal those social patterns or regularities. These patterns can be seen because they exist outside of the observers, even if the imagination, the mistakes, the beliefs, the interests, the desires, the lies and so on of the observers can become predominant

and reduce the influence of real patterns in the production of the known. However, even when the research is done well, the observations of social patterns are always based on the exclusion or the neglect of multiple differences and metamorphoses we cannot see or do not focus on.

- Sociologists do not commit any fault by focusing on social patterns unless they see only similarities and reproduction in the social universe, and/or if they reify these patterns. Evidently, the knowledge of social patterns is necessary for all of us. Our social life would be impossible if we did not know about social patterns. However, (relational) sociology should not be limited to this type of knowledge. The social universe is complex, dynamic and quite messy. It is all about vibrant, energetic and multiple ongoing social processes. Therefore, we are at high risk of being in serious trouble when we neglect the complexity of social life.
- As already mentioned in Chap. 1, we never get involved twice in the same social process (in the same 'couple', 'family', 'classroom', etc.). Everything is changing all the time, including ourselves. This is hard to accept since we are looking for some sort of stability often to reassure ourselves. One of the challenges of process-relational thinking is to help us to move beyond our primary need for reassuring stories about stable worlds governed by external forces, and to realize that we can improve our control over social processes by being more 'detached' from these needs and their related fears.
- This social universe is a dangerous place for many of us; and, generally speaking, we are not doing very well in terms of relations. In brief, our capacity to live in 'society' is diminished by multiple quests of self-affirmation and a high level of egocentrism. We visibly have a hard time to accept that we are interdependent with other human beings and non-human interactants. This type of sociology might help us to improve our social intelligence. With other relational thinkers (again, see Chap. 1), I even think there is some emergency to think 'deeply' in relational ways since many of our actions are self-destructive, socially and environmentally speaking.

Beside these concerns and hopes, there is a lot of work to be done and problems to be solved with this type of relational sociology. As I suggested before, one of them refers to label and conceptual issues—in brief, choosing the right words. For example, by taking the concerns of critiques into account and by talking about 'interactions' rather than sticking to the weird but more precise word of 'trans-action', I took the risk of diluting what is meant here by the notion of 'relation'—as P. Selg kindly told me in a conversation in 2016. This is unfortunate since, once again, I base this sociological approach on one specific definition of social relations inspired by J. Dewey and A. Bentley (1949). Anyhow, wrongly or rightly, I decided to use more conventional words such as 'interaction', 'interactants' and 'social fields'.

To make a short story about the name of this relational sociology, at first I wanted to use ‘radical’ relational sociology to reinforce the idea that I am radically relational. I am looking for a ‘pure’ relational sociology based only on relations between human and non-human interactants. I want to see where it leads us. In this ‘radical’ logic, there is no possible compromise with deterministic or co-deterministic sociologies. There is no ‘level’ (‘micro’, ‘meso’ or ‘macro’) and no ‘social substance’ with causal powers. But politically ‘radical’ colleagues like C. Powell said I am not ‘radical’ in the way they understand it—which is true. So, I courageously moved to ‘transactional sociology’ in reference to J. Dewey and A. Bentley’s concept of ‘trans-action’. This notion has been well received by some (see Selg 2016a, b, 2017; Hillcoat-Nellamby 2017), but it was also seen as being too ‘economic’ by other colleagues, or it was too far away from typical concepts used by sociologists, as I. Burkitt noticed (2016). Losing some of my courage or becoming more conciliatory, I started to use ‘deep’ relational sociology. But then, some mentioned the notion ‘deep’ implied ‘levels’ of social reality (‘micro’, ‘meso’ and ‘macro’)—which is clearly not my intention.

I recently decided to go for ‘process-relational’ sociology. This one might be more appealing and relatively accurate. Yet I am afraid there is no perfect labelling choice even if I still feel good about my last choice since it highlights the connections with compatible works such as the processual philosophy of A.N. Whitehead (2010) and the way it is introduced by R. Mesle (2008); the processual and relational sociologies of M. Emirbayer (some parts of his relational manifesto at least); some key dimensions of the processual or figurational sociology of N. Elias; some aspects of the processual work done by C. Tilly—especially as it is presented by C. Demetriou (in this handbook); some general principles of the processual sociology advocated by A. Abbott (2016); and the recent ‘processual’ sociological imagination proposed by O. Pyyhtinen (2017a, b, 2015).

Whatever it is called, this is an invitation for an exploration by fellow travellers. Indeed, trying to see our social universe in a different way is, somehow, like doing what the ‘theorists’ of Greek antiquity were doing when they travelled to other cities and returned home to tell to their citizens how other people live in other places (Nightingale 2009). This ‘process-relational’ approach is an invitation to compare it to other (relational) sociologies, and to eventually make some revisions in terms of fundamental sociological ideas and practices. With their recent research on the family farm resilience, I. Darnhofer and colleagues (2016) provided a good illustration showing how relational explanations can do a better job than structural explanations and the study of the agency of the actors. In their respective chapters in this handbook, P. Selg and S. Hillcoat-Nallétamby also showed the relevance of this approach.

I am conscious that we are challenging established ideas and practices. Sometimes, the ‘theorists’ of Greek antiquity were killed by their audience when they returned home and their reports were seen by others as threatening

the social order of the city. The good news is that sociology is a 'civilized' field and nobody will be killed. The bad news is that one exposes oneself to harsh critiques by rejecting determinism and co-determinism. The hope is that we can have fruitful comparisons and honest discussions on the best approach where we all try to improve sociology as a common good.

Clearly, the influence of J. Dewey is predominant in my approach. At this point, I will just add general comments about what it means for this relational sociology. Ultimately, this is about choosing the best conceptual tools to understand social phenomena and deal with social problems. That is why this notion of 'trans-action' is so important, but I am also 'pragmatic' for other reasons. We, as reflexive animals, are constantly embedded in multiple and relatively or dramatically vibrant social processes. In this sense, *the* question is: What kind of sociology can help us to improve our collective control over the social processes we are involved in? Ultimately, this is how the relevance of relational sociology should be tested. In this sense, I agree with some ideas raised by A. Doucet in this handbook. Ideally, relational sociology should be a praxis and not just an academic theory.

2 ANOTHER DOOR

Saying that 'good' sociology is based on unidirectional relations of causality from the 'objects' to the 'subjects' is reducing the observers to the status of pure effects, as if the 'objects' would simply self-act on the observers. Like M. Weber, T. Parsons and A. Gouldner explained before, implicitly or explicitly we always use a 'theory' to make our 'empirical' observations. Since guiding ideas are always active, we should make them explicit and work on them as openly and rigorously as we can. That is why conceptual work matters so much.

Besides, like many others, my engagement with relational thinking started with the rejection of some background assumptions shared by many colleagues, and some concepts, methods and practices deriving from these assumptions. In my case, it is mostly about the rejection of social determinism, co-determinism and to some extent variable analyses as the best and main type of explanations in sociology. But if I knew what I was rejecting at the beginning, I did not have any new approach in mind to replace predominant guiding principles.

Then, I read the first pages of *What is Sociology?* by N. Elias (1978) and his other major texts. This is when I started to see a third option beyond social determinism and co-determinism. His critique of 'egocentric' thinking was particularly informative. We are not surrounded by hard social 'things'. We are involved in various 'figurations', some of them being long and precarious chains of interactions like the 'civilizing process'. Even social positions, which are seen as so 'structured' by many of us, are fluid and relational, defined and redefined through trivial interactions such as gossips between the 'established' and the 'outsiders'. Elias also showed how even the 'balance' of power between absolute monarchs and their 'subjects', or between the captains and their staff in the old British navy, was processual and relational, constantly open to

ongoing or potential fluctuations. I had and still have many reservations about N. Elias' work (I am not an 'Eliasian'), but his texts helped me to discover another sociology which was beyond dichotomies between the society and the individuals. I started to see the 'society of the individuals' rather than the 'society and the individuals' or even worst, the 'society versus the individuals'. Roughly at the same time, I became aware of the 'relational' or 'processual' ideas of P. Bourdieu, C. Tilly and M. Emirbayer.

Even so, the discovery of relational sociology appeared promising and confusing. It appeared to me that these relational or processual moves were done with some hesitation and too many complications, as if some intellectual habitus were difficult to get rid of for these brilliant sociologists. This problem became clearer after reading J. Dewey and A. Bentley and their distinction between 'self-action', 'inter-action' and 'trans-action'. Later, struggling to understand A.N. Whitehead, G. Tarde and B. Latour and their strange concepts was also very helpful. (Reading P. Lenco, S. Tonkonoff and O. Pyyhtinen made me realize that the next step could be to carefully read G. Deleuze and M. Serres.)

All in all, the main issue I had with the emergence of relational sociology centres on the structuralist legacy which appears to limit the relational turn in sociology. Maybe I am too severe and demanding. But it is difficult to improve an approach without recognizing its limitations. For example, P. Bourdieu announced his sociology was 'relational' at the end of his career (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), but his late texts seem to carry some limiting 'structuralist' legacy in many ways. Many readers noticed this fact. Through a comparison with Elias figurational theory, I identified his theory more as a soft deterministic or a co-deterministic theory than a clear relational one, even if there is a potential relational reading of his work (Dépelteau 2013). Of course, this is not a problem for relational sociologists who preserve the idea that social structures have causal powers. But then, what is the originality and the relevance of relational sociology? Would it be just a label we use to name pre-existing theories like Bourdieu's theory or critical realism?

I also found many promising moves made by C. Tilly (2016) in terms of relational-processual thinking. However, my first impression was that we can still feel the legacy of structuralism in his work. For example, his insistence on discovering 'social mechanisms' can be read as a soft form of social determinism. In this handbook, C. Demetriou proposes a strong and convincing relational interpretation of C. Tilly's social mechanisms. This is very useful and maybe he is right. Maybe Tilly was more relational than I think. Or maybe we are assisting to some relational interpretations or reformulations of pioneers like P. Bourdieu and C. Tilly. In one way or another, these discussions are very important and productive when we do not try to defend or attack a theory, but we analyse and *use* it for what it is—nothing more and nothing less than one tool among other tools.

Another good case for this type of discussion is critical realism. It has been related to the evolvment of relational sociology—mostly through the works of P. Donati and M. Archer, but also by D. Elder-Vass and D. Porpora. At the

'beginning', I was not aware of the texts of the pioneer of relational sociology P. Donati since I had no access to Italian literature (I still cannot read it). After reading him in English (Donati 2011), I can say I would have found it also too 'classical' for similar reasons—regardless of all the *good* ideas one can find in his texts. In short, the dualism between the causal powers of social structures and agency one finds in critical realism appears to be more a source of recurrent problems than a productive perspective for a 'new' sociology. That is why I started to publish on relational thinking by criticizing the work of M. Archer, which I still consider to be one the cleverest illustrations of a co-deterministic theory one can find (Dépelteau 2008). She also wrote good theoretical pages in her many texts which will help us for years. But the problem is that co-determinism has been predominant in classical and contemporary sociology, before and without relational sociology. Maybe we are wrong and it is still relevant to develop this kind of perspective. However, I suggest that critical realism offers another version of co-deterministic sociology rather than a 'deep' or clear relational sociology. Of course, critical realists can claim to be 'relational' if they wish, but it might be problematic to be 'relational' or 'processual' and defend the need for 'analytical dualism' at the same time. Saying that social structures are relational effects, but they should be seen as being separated forces with causal powers over the individuals—the same individuals who constantly co-produce them—creates many unnecessary complications noticed by many sociologists. In fact, this 'analytical dualism' is superfluous to be 'critical' and 'realist'.

Let's come back to the label issue. The choice of words usually reflects important ideas and worldviews. Like many colleagues, I started to use the label 'relational' sociology after reading the 'relational manifesto' of M. Emirbayer (1997), which does not mean that I am a disciple of him or that I based my work on him as it has been somehow suggested by Donati and Archer (2015). There is no such thing as an 'American relational sociology' which would be built around M. Emirbayer's work. I was impressed by several ideas suggested in his manifesto, particularly his distinction between non-relational sociologies with 'social substances' and relational sociologies based on 'processual' thinking. I think this idea should be taken very seriously, with no contradiction or compromise. In this sense, I am more 'radical' than M. Emirbayer. It is about fluid social processes *or* solid, 'crystallized' social 'substances'. As M. Emirbayer said, this is a fundamental 'dilemma' with two clear and distinct options. Saying that sometimes social processes are fluid and sometimes they are 'solid' is a wishy-washy solution. By definition, processes cannot be 'crystallized' *and* fluid. Ice is not water.

From there, we can make connections with past and contemporary literature based on clear processual thinking and look for processual concepts and methods. Besides, many sociological explanations can be 'relationalized' (or 'processualized'), and by doing so, we get rid of many unnecessary problems. For instance, we can reformulate well-known E. Durkheim's 'substantialized' explanations on the division of labour or on suicide in process-relational ways (Dépelteau 2017); or we can see all the so-called structural constraints associated

with slavery plantations in a relational way, by analysing interactions between human and non-human interactants only (Dépelteau [Forthcoming](#)). From there, we start to open another door. Real metamorphoses can be envisaged rather than putting old wine in new bottles.

3 BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THIS RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY

In the next section, I will present the basic principles of this relational sociology in the simplest way possible. Generally speaking,

Process-relational sociology is relational because it is founded on the idea that social life is all about relations (or ‘interactions’, which should be understood as ‘trans-actions’).

In this sense, I agree with the following principle given by N. Crossley—except that I propose to integrate non-human interactants, I call ‘networks’ ‘social fields’, and I do not make any distinction between the notions of ‘relation’ and ‘interaction’ (for now at least):

The most appropriate analytic unit for the scientific study of social life is the network of social relations and interactions between actors (both human and corporate). (Crossley 2011, 1)

It is a relevant starting point, and obviously we cannot stop there. Who would disagree that social phenomena refer to relations? What does it mean exactly? Interactions between what? What is special or different about relational sociology? Do these interactions ‘crystallize’ themselves through repetitions and acquire some causal powers over the interactants as co-deterministic sociologists argue? Or should we simply stay at the ‘micro’ level and see societies, institutions and ‘social structures’ as emerging phenomena without any causal powers? Many other key questions could be added here.

I think we should stay away from any wishy-washy or complicated solutions to these fundamental issues. Sociology should be based on solid and clear foundations in terms of fundamental principles and concepts. Once more, this is where the introduction of the relational ‘manifesto’ of M. Emirbayer can be very useful. Relational sociology starts with the identification of an ontological and fundamental ‘dilemma’, and other elementary sociological principles, concepts and methods derive from the initial choice we make:

Sociologists today are faced with a fundamental dilemma: whether to conceive of the social world as consisting primarily in substances or processes, in static ‘things’ or in dynamic, unfolding relations. (Emirbayer 1997, 281)

In this respect, being ‘relational’ is a mode of perception where couples, families, corporations, social movements, empires, and so on are fluid, vibrant and evolving social processes. They are constant effects of interactions between

two interactants or more; and as such, they cannot self-act on or inter-act with individuals. It does not mean they do not 'emerge' for real. It means they are not 'external' from their interactants since they constantly 'emerge', are transformed or dissolved through their interactions. My (inter)actions are certainly influenced by my perceptions of 'my' couple and a 'normal' couple, by evolving emotions happening throughout the relations, by some habitus and memories of past experiences, by some strategies, goals, desires, and so on. But all of this is about various dimensions of action happening within a social process that I co-produce with another person.

Again, these ideas are provocative for many colleagues who think that the 'social order' or 'social reproduction' should be explained by some causal powers of 'crystallized' social substances like social structures. After their emergence through initial relations and by being reproduced, social structures would be part of an objective context which imposes itself on individuals. None of them can change it by themselves, and they are subject to the causal powers of pre-existing social structures they most likely did not even choose. All of this seems to make sense at first sight but for other sociologists like me, this type of relation between social structures (or cultures, institutions, etc.) and individuals is impossible. Molecules of air emerge from the assemblage of oxygen and nitrogen and, once formed, they have effects of their own, but their existence is the effect of their assemblage, not its cause. It seems the same argument is valid for social structures. The sum might be 'larger' than the parts but it does not imply that the former determines the latter. Why should we think we need to give causal powers to the whole to explain its existence? This is a strange idea we found in old functionalist theories a long time ago. A 'society' might 'need' specific relations between certain interactants to exist, but it does not imply the former produces and determines the latter. In the same way, social patterns ('structures') can and should be explained as social effects.

We are not saying the 'social' does not exist, that it is purely 'subjective' or constructed at will by independent individuals. Many sociologists are saying we are not limited to two options as many of us seem to believe: 'objectivism' or 'subjectivism', theories based on determining social structures or theories founded on free will, social determinism or co-determinism, and so on. There are always other doors one can open when the previous ones lead to the wrong place. In this case, we start to see another door when the 'association', the 'social' and the 'society' are not causes but constant effects. Like the 'associology' foreseen by B. Latour, and like bio-logy is the study *of* life, this socio-logy is a science *of the* social rather than *by the* social, which includes studying the human capacity to live together that we call 'society'. The society is a capacity, a precarious effect of relations, not an external social 'thing'. In this respect, with this sociology, any analytical principle, concept or method giving causal powers to social 'substances', as 'things' self-acting or inter-acting with individuals, should be reformulated in a relational-processual way.

If this sociology cannot be the study of the causal powers of social structures (societies, etc.) or the study of interactions between social structures and agency, what is it? We can reformulate the processual 'object' of sociology in this way:

*Process-relational sociology is the analysis of the emergence, the transformation and the disappearance of multiple smaller and larger dynamic social fields happening through interactions between human and non-human interactants.*¹

Without adopting all its ideas and concepts, this mode of interpretation of the social universe is close to A.N. Whitehead's process-relational philosophy. As noticed, it is also close to the sociology of 'assemblage' of B. Latour who was inspired by the same A.N. Whitehead. It is also close to G. Tarde and G. Deleuze, and the recent work of S. Tonkonoff (2017) who is also influenced by G. Tarde, G. Deleuze and M. Foucault. It can be compatible to the 'joint acts' of H. Blumer, the 'social worlds' of H. Becker and many ideas and concepts of A. Strauss, to the figurational sociology of N. Elias as presented in the first part of *What is Sociology?* (1978), the processual sociology of O. Pyyhtinen (2016), the transactional approach also defended by Selg (2016a, b, 2017). This incomplete list shows that this option is not coming out of the blue in sociology.

In previous publications, I have developed several general principles and concepts allowing us to see our social universe with this 'deep' process-relational approach. Unfortunately, like many other relational sociologists, I did not work on the development of relational methods. This type of work will have to be done if any kind of relational sociology should become fully relevant (Erikson 2017; Crossley 2017; Morgner 2017). In other words, these 'deep' relational worldviews, principles, concepts and methods will have to be improved through empirical analyses. All the elements of this approach (worldviews, principles, concepts, methods and empirical observations) should be interdependent. This development should look roughly like Fig. 25.1 (assuming all the arrows correspond to trans-actions, and that sociologists and their texts are crucial interactants in the production of the known):

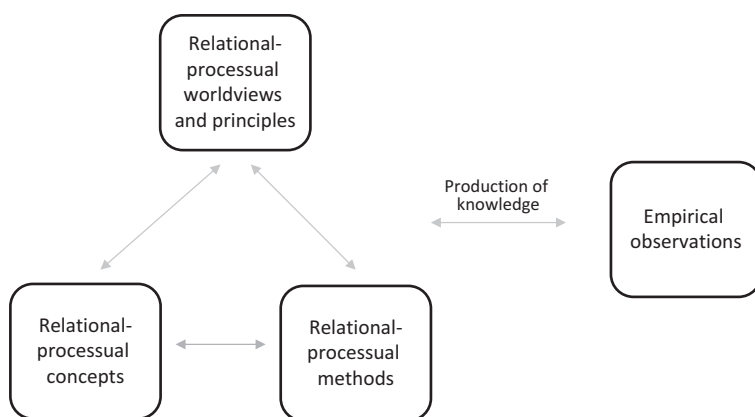


Fig. 25.1 Worldviews, principles, concepts, methods and observations

4 OTHER BASIC PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS

4.1 *Modes of Production of the Known*

Sociological modes of production of the known are assemblages of general principles, worldviews, key concepts and related methodological tools made and used by sociologists to understand our social life. Marxism, functionalism, Weberian sociology, feminism, symbolic interactionism, system theories and rational choice theories are good examples.

Typically, these modes define: who and what are the main actors or forces of our social reality (rational actors, social classes, gender groups, social movements, reflexive individuals, structurally determined actors or culturally doped ones, social 'substances' self-acting on the actors or interacting with the agency of individuals, and so on); what are the main types of relations between the actors (processes of communication, class struggles, power relations, domination, functional interdependency, and so on); what is the main type of social totality in which the actors live (societies as nation-states, types of societies, world economies, networks, figurations, social systems, social fields, and so on); and what are the main effects of the interactions on social totalities (changes within the social system, revolutions, reproduction of the social order, reproduction followed by change sometimes when agency is active, and so on).

Generally speaking, this process-relational sociology offers the following answers to these four basic questions about our social life.

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Answers</i>
1. What are the main actors?	Multiple human interactants motivated by various dimensions of action (also interacting with non-human interactants). The main types of interactants and dimensions of human actions are empirical problems to be resolved by empirical analysis.
2. What are the main relations between the actors?	Various modes of interaction (friendship, love, conflicts, strategic alliances, power, exploitation, domination, etc.). The main mode(s) of interaction in one social field is always an empirical and contextualized problem to be resolved by empirical analysis.
3. What is the kind of social totality in which the actors live?	Various fluid and more or less interconnected social fields. The types, the degree of stability, and the level of interconnection of social fields are also empirical and contextualized problems.
4. What are the effects of the interactions on the social totalities?	Emergence, transformation or disappearance of social fields.

4.2 *Social Fields, Sub-Fields, Interactions and Metamorphoses*

Our mutating social universe is made of multiple, fluid and variably interconnected social fields called 'couples', 'families', 'corporations', 'states', 'wars' and so on. These social fields constantly emerge or re-emerged in roughly similar or different ways, or collapsed through interactions between interactants.

As network analysts have shown in many ways, we can ‘map’ the interactions which make social fields. In the Fig. 25.2 below, we have an imagined social process involving four interactants (A, B, C and D) and two social fields (a couple made by A and B; a group of friends made by B, C and D). Please note that time is not taken into account in this figure. It will be integrated later. Space and significant non-human interactants should be added as well, when it is relevant to do so. As a heuristic tool, the next Fig. 25.2 simply represents some possible interactions between the human interactants and some of the other important features of human social life. To be more specific, an *interactant* (‘trans-actant’) is a human or non-human entity interacting (or transacting) with another (or other) interactant(s) in at least one social field. In short, we can adapt and use the three Meadian concepts to see how perceptions of the ‘Self’, the socialized ‘Me’ and the creative ‘I’ are key dimensions of actions, as well as other typical dimensions such as the goals, values, interests, emotions, habits, perceptions of Other(s) and perceptions of social field(s). All these dimensions are always activated through interactions—or related to some of them (with the not-so-internal ‘conversations’ fuelling the Self). The relative importance of each dimension is always an empirical question and should never be imposed by the theory. Nothing is ‘independent’ here, and therefore sociologists should avoid separating these dimensions in their analyses as though these dimensions are forces existing before or outside the interactions.

Interactions also vary in terms of intensity, duration, space, modes of interactions (conflicts, cooperation, etc.) and level of creativity. This theoretical framework is not really ‘new’ since its concepts are present in many other theories, and, of course, the framework needs much more development, notably through empirical research.

Once more, we commonly perceive social fields as ‘entities’ or social ‘substances’. This representation is convenient in many ways, at least in terms of communication. It is useful to use expressions or labels such as ‘my couple’,

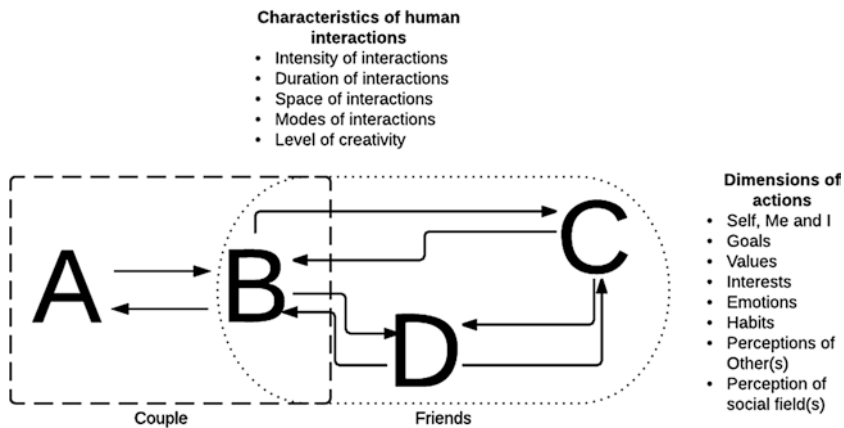


Fig. 25.2 Characteristics and dimensions of interactions and actions

'this family', 'the French society' or 'this corporation'. However, this relational thinking insists that any social 'entity' is brought, kept into existence or destroyed by the association of constitutive sub-'entities', which are themselves the outcomes of relations between 'smaller' constitutive (sub-sub-)'entities'. More concretely, each so-called 'entity' (a family, a ceremony, a conversation, etc.) is a social field and a process of its own, evolving through a chain of interactions where we can identify sub-fields, sub-sub-fields, and so on. For example, a family is made and kept alive through ceremonies, rituals, habits, games, conversations, sexual relations, breakfasts, cleaning the house, helping each other, respect or fights over rules, norms and roles, and so on. Each of those sub-fields is also happening through chains of interactions. At the bottom of a sociological analysis, we see human beings who are themselves fields of interactions between cells, organs and so forth. At this point, sociologists should give the lead to biologists. Besides, biological explanations of human behaviours should not be discarded 'by principle' by sociologists. When it is relevant to do so, the knowledge produced by the sociological and the biological fields should trans-act through productive discussions and comparisons. The same policy of cooperation should apply to the knowledge coming from other relevant disciplines like psychology.

Sociologically speaking, interactants are always empirically *interdependent*. Once again it means that 'A is what it is and does what it does because A interacts with B, and vice versa'. Note that an interactant can also *be perceived as* a self-actant when the observer focuses on selected sequences of the interactions as in ($A \rightarrow B$), like in 'The government X proposed the law Y' or 'John decided to quit Jane'. However, self-actants are always interactants, as M. Weber, H. Blumer, H. Becker, N. Elias and so many others explained with different concepts. Therefore, any selected 'self-action' should be inserted in its chain of interaction before one can provide any explanation about this or that social event.

As observers, we always focus on some events: typically, the self-actions or several trans-actions we consider to be significant ones *to answer to our research question*. In addition, it is impossible to see all the interactions involved in one social field unless we drastically limit the observations in terms of time and space. How could I see all the interactions that has made the couple X over the last year? Finally, we are usually involved in relatively long and complex chains of interactions involving multiple social fields. In brief, whatever method we use, we are condemned to limit our observations by focusing on significant interactants and interactions in cognitively reduced social fields. Theoretical, conceptual and methodological choices related to this cognitive reduction of social life are crucial ones; they should be constantly evaluated and re-evaluated before, during and after the research. In this respect, the known is always a partial and imperfect representation of the reality. The main goal is that the former gets closer to the latter thanks to the multiplication of experimentations, comparisons and discussions. A balanced combination of rigour, modesty, curiosity and respect for something none of us will ever see (the Truth) is also required.

Sociological work is even more complex because interactants typically move from fields to fields. In the Fig. 25.2, when B interacts with A, he is the ‘husband’ of A and the co-producer of a ‘married couple’. This ‘couple’ was created by them; it exists only as long as they co-produce it; and it can be destroyed at any moment by the death or the departure of A or B. Even if it is a small one and the effects of their actions are predominant for the ‘whole’ in comparison to what they do in larger social fields, neither A nor B controls the couple even when power relations are unequal. In many events, even slaves could negotiate, escape or simply kill the master during the harsh days of slavery plantations in the Americas. Besides, like slavery plantations and any other social field, couples can be altered or destroyed by external interactants. Therefore, all of this is too vibrant to be predictable. Playing with ‘variables’ and looking for correlations and probabilities lead to ‘scientific’ publications and relevant knowledge we can all use to make better choices. As a simple example, knowing that most people will not tell me the truth about all their problems when I casually ask them ‘How are you?’ is very useful in daily life. However, by nature, this kind of knowledge is based on the reduction of the complexity of real social life (by excluding or not seeing many interactants), and by being ‘probabilistic’ (not explaining all the ‘cases’, and not being able to predict any specific action). Thus, none of us can use this probabilistic knowledge to control even small social fields like couples—therefore imagine the difficulties for states or global economies! It is relational and social processes are always unique. We never tread twice in the same process. For instance, A might be very nice with B because she loves him and wants to stay with him. But B’s social life is not confined to their interactions. In Fig. 25.2, when B interacts with D and C rather than with his wife A, he becomes a ‘friend’ and the co-producer of another social field called a ‘peer group’ or ‘group of friends’. Friends can convince B that his wife is ‘bad’ by lying or revealing secrets he did not want to know; they might convince him to leave her. If foreign interactants would come from another continent with more efficient technologies, would capture B, put him on a boat and bring him to a slavery plantation at the other end of the world to produce sugar, the previous social fields would suddenly vanish; B would become a ‘slave’; and his actions would be interdependent with other interactants called ‘masters’, ‘whips’, ‘plants’, ‘insects’ and other ‘slaves’. He might die quickly from exhaustion or torture, escape to another social field called a ‘quilombo’ (in Brazil), or destroy the slavery plantations with other ‘slaves’ by being involved in another social process called a ‘slave revolt’.

Those examples are not anomalies which should be simply ignored to the benefit of ‘regularities’ revealed by means, averages, standard deviations and correlations. All kinds of interactions happen all the time and everywhere. Being captured by aliens is what happened to millions of people in Africa during the European colonization of the Americas. These days, wars, genocides, revolutions, terrorist actions, economic crises, political crises and so on are recurrent processes which transform or destroy the lives of many people. It can

happen to all of us. Other processes like divorces, environmental disasters, the rise of social movements (such as the populist ones in Europe and the USA), or even more 'normal' interactions such as reading books or having a child, can also make our social lives complex and unpredictable. In sum, relational sociology can provide a more realistic representation of our social universe by showing social patterns and tumultuous processes of confusion, disjoint, disorganization, rupture, failed re-organization, anomie and so on. Contrary to what is often said, it is somehow misleading to believe that individuals interact in pre-existing and pre-structured social fields. They interact continuously in moving fields which are undergoing processes of emergence, 'invisible' or visible metamorphoses, or disbanding. The 'structures' of the social are never as stable and solid as they appear to us or as we wish them to be.

Another common argument is based on the idea that we need to think in terms of pre-existing social structures if we want to avoid the fallacies of free will and individual responsibility. In the relational worldview I propose (with others), interactants are clearly not free, they never act in a social vacuum, and their past experiences influence their present actions through the processual memories they build and re-build about those experimentations. Once again, reducing sociology to two options between social determinism or co-determinism and voluntarism is a poor argument. There are other options.

This type of relational sociology is not a grand theory which reduces the complexity of social fields to a general formula that sociologists try to corroborate through empirical tests. And it is not really a 'grounded' theory as if, again, the mind of the observer would be filled by 'impressions' coming from 'pure' observations. It starts with a set of open and process-relational worldviews, principles and concepts which are designed to follow the interactions more than to pre-define them by imposing a theory to the reality. As mentioned, the goal is certainly not to predict interactions even if relational analyses can reveal some real and relevant temporary social patterns and test hypotheses.

The significance, size, duration and other characteristics of one social field, and its empirical questions and answers, are determined by the interactants and their relations. For example, the size and duration of a state, the level of violence within its territory, the emotions related to nationalism and so on are all relational outcomes. The observers should follow the interactions and the traces left by their relations. However, as far as sociological knowledge is concerned, all these characteristics partly depend on the question asked by the researcher. For example, if I want to know about the effects of education on nationalist perceptions and values in one state, I should be blind to violent relations between criminal organizations or political corruption. Some sub-fields and interactants (like the department of education, books and teachers) become significant ones (if they are in this process) while others disappear from the picture. Once more, the known emerges from trans-actions between the observers, some tools (the research questions, theories, concepts, methods, etc.) and the observed. For sociologists, the idea is to make relevant choices, to keep an open mind and always be ready to adapt or even abandon

whatever focus and/or tool they are using when the observed interactants and the traces of their interactions resist to the focus and tools used initially. They should also be careful before announcing the discovery of a pattern and remain conscious that it comes from the neglect of differences and that it is a temporary one.

The *connections between social fields* form another important empirical question. These connections are typically due to the following processes:

- As interactants, we are the co-producers of multiple social fields (like the interactant B in our previous Fig. 25.2 who co-produces a couple and a group of friends). By doing so, and as network analysts showed many times, interactants can bridge different social fields through the exchange of information; by bringing ideas, emotions, values and resources to another field; discussing strategies; and in many other ways. For example, co-producers of churches have been also key co-producers of social movements and counter-movements on many occasions; they brought ideas and resources from field to field on a recurrent basis. In Poland, the communist regime collapsed after alliances came from interactions between various interactants belonging to various fields (liberals in universities, Catholics and their churches, students and their associations, workers and their trade unions, etc.) (Osa 2003). A. Mische (2009) showed similar connections to explain the end of the military regime in Brazil in 1985.

This sociology is based on a *'flat' ontology*. It recognizes only one 'level' of social reality: interactions between interactants. In this sense, it is different from the two other ideal-typical modes of sociological ontology called social determinism and co-determinism. Based on my experiences in congresses and classrooms, many sociologists are quickly opposed to a flat social ontology without really trying it, by saying that it leads us to 'methodological individualism' for instance. In one way or another, by rejecting the idea that social structures determined us, we would not be able to see how the individuals are social beings. One can repeat this critique from text to text, the fact is that—of course!—interactants are 'social'. (Who is denying this fact in sociology?) People are *interdependent*, and as such, they constantly interact with other human beings or non-human entities. This strange critique is often based on a reductive cognitive conflation made between the concept of 'social' and the idea of external social forces self-acting or inter-acting with individuals and groups. In this logic, one could be conscious of the social nature of human beings only by being a social determinist or a co-determinist. This is not true.

There is another concern that a flat social ontology would be blind to power and social inequalities. Again, it is often believed that we cannot see this important feature of social life if we do not see social structures with causal powers. In fact, it is very easy to see that power relations and access to resources are unequal in many social fields by observing specific interactants and relations (for example, see Selg in this handbook). I would like to add that we are not

helping oppressed people by telling them social structures self-act on or interact with them. This is quite depressing for those who are not part of the critical elite of the society to learn that they are basically powerless due to a structural lack of resources, and that power is a 'substance' you possess more or less depending on pre-existing structural positions. By definition, it is difficult to imagine how 'powerless' people can change a 'pre-structured' order favouring 'powerful' elites, especially when you are deprived of economic, cultural, social and political 'capitals'—of pretty much everything. On the contrary, studying how the 'oppressed' of the past or the present time found or are finding ways to change undesired social fields might be more realistic and encouraging. Once more, even highly repressive and unequal fields such as slavery plantations have been challenged and destroyed thanks, in part, to slaves' resistances and strategies, Haiti being the most spectacular example. Considering the pre-existing 'structural' disadvantages of the slaves in these fields, this is the kind of historicity that is impossible to explain with social determinism, and quite difficult to explicate with co-determinism. We can understand these processes much more easily—even if it is not easy—by following the interactants and the traces they left. For the better and the worst, until we put an end to human life, or until it is destroyed in one way or another, we constantly co-produce this social universe in multiple relational ways. In conclusion, a major part of its historicity is on *us*, interdependent people.

NOTE

1. This definition has also been adopted by S. Tonkonoff in his book *From Tarde to Deleuze and Foucault* (2017).

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PART IV

Specific Issues and Concepts
in Relational Sociology

Relational Agency

Ian Burkitt

The famous quotation from Marx's *Grundrisse* that 'Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand' (Marx 1973, p. 265), outlines a very general definition that, for me, is key to relational sociology. A society, economy, or an organization are not entities in and of themselves, nor are they collections of individuals and their actions: they are the sum of the interrelations between individuals. Furthermore, individuals do not pre-exist social relations and then enter into various forms of relations; as a social species humans always exist in various forms of relation—a tribe, a group, a clan, a family, a social organization—that have a social and historical character, and, as such, individuals (and the objects with which they interact) take on their identities within these social relations. This is the basic point in Emirbayer's (1997) *Manifesto for Relational Sociology* and it is also expressed succinctly by Donati (2011), who says that for relational sociologists, '*in the beginning there is the relation*' (p. 17, original emphasis), and that from this 'subjects and objects are defined relationally' (p. 18). However, from this basic starting point relational sociologists begin to diverge in terms of the actual theory and methods involved in developing a relational perspective. Theoretically, relational sociologists like Emirbayer (1997) and Dépelteau (2013, 2015) seek to develop a perspective informed by John Dewey's transactional pragmatism, while others draw on Elias' figurational approach (Tsekeris 2013), network analysis (Crossley 2011), or critical realism (Archer 1995; Donati 2011). In practice, most thinkers draw from an eclectic array of theory to build a relational sociological approach, and I count myself among that number.

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What I seek to do in this chapter is to set out my own approach to relational sociology that draws on elements from Marxism, figurational sociology, and pragmatism, but I will also take into account some empirical work done by network analysts. However, the main aim of the chapter is to use my approach as a framework in which to reconceptualize human agency. Since the 1970s, influential sociological theories of agency have centred this power on the capacity for reflexivity, something that is expressed in different ways by both Giddens (1979, 1984) and Archer (2000, 2003). These two approaches tend to separate agency from the more general concept of action, as they understand agency to be based in the conscious capacity for knowledgeable reflexivity (Giddens) or reflexive deliberation (Archer), whereas other forms of action can still be interventions in the world that have an effect but may be performed without knowledgeable reflexivity or unconsciously. What I will do in this chapter is to use pragmatist understandings of agency to conceptualize reflexive agency as a moment in action more generally, which may have non-conscious origins, that is always set in relational contexts of interaction and interdependence. I begin, though, by outlining my position within relational sociology more generally.

I THE MANIFOLD NATURE OF SOCIAL RELATIONS

In saying that society expresses the sum of interrelations in which individuals stand, Marx was not claiming that societies were homogenous and integral entities that are in any way unified or whole. Indeed, many sociologists have recently pointed to this problem with concepts such as ‘society’, for this tends to suggest that we are studying some bounded and clearly demarcated entity that has a unified identity. Anderson (1983) has claimed that related concepts such as ‘nation’ are nothing but ‘imagined communities’ that are created by the media and various interest groups. This allows us to deconstruct such entities as the ‘British people’, the ‘black community’, or the ‘gay community’, showing how, in practice, these supposed entities are actually not bounded but porous, and how they are internally divided by other forms of relations, such as class, gender, and generation. However, we need to be careful in thinking of these communities as constructed solely in imagination or ideology, as there are real relations that exist in social formations that these concepts are attempting to grasp and articulate. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx’s comment about society being the sum of interrelations in which individuals stand is prefaced by a critique of Proudhon, who, according to Marx, saw the difference between capital and product as illusory and therefore subjective, obscuring the social relation between product, labour, and capital, thus reducing a historic form of society to a subjective abstraction.

At the same time, Marx was not arguing that the sum of interrelations could be simply characterized as a particular ‘society’ that operates according to a single, internal logic, but that at any one time in history there exists different forms of social relations that cannot be reduced to any one form of these relations. Contrary to the view that Marxism seeks to reduce all social relations to

the base of capitalist economic relations, in *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels (1970) criticize utilitarianism for the ‘stupidity of merging all the manifold relationships of people in the *one* relation of usefulness’ (p. 109, original emphasis). What distinguishes capitalism is not that all other social relations can be reduced to capitalist economic relations, but that in this mode of production capitalist relations tend to dominate all others, so that ‘all relations are subordinated in practice to the one abstract monetary-commercial relation’ (Marx and Engels 1970, p. 109). In speaking of people’s ‘manifold relationships’ Marx and Engels refer to relations like speech and love—to communicative, interpersonal, and intimate relations—along with the ‘meaning *peculiar* to them’ (p. 110, original emphasis). In this respect, Marx commented how, in capitalism, people’s families may be used to tie them to the capitalist economic system, in terms of the need to work long hours to support one’s family. The one form of relation subjugates the other, yet they are still separate forms of relation with different meanings attached to them. This does not mean that these relations can be reduced to their meanings or to subjectivity (and meaning is not wholly subjective in the sense that it is culturally and socially intersubjective), but rather forms of social relations have different meanings attached to them, such as personal ambition and monetary reward in the workplace or love and mutual emotional support in the family or intimate relations. Today, these manifold social relations express themselves differently, as Eva Illouz (2012) has shown in respect of love, in that contemporary love relations based on interpersonal attraction are mediated by consumerism in terms of the money that can be spent on how a person looks, their clothes, personal grooming, and on dates in restaurants, bars, and clubs. In new ways, commercial relations are dominating intimate relations.

In social theory the term ‘social structure’, or just ‘structure’, has often been used to characterize the sum of the different aspects of manifold relations, such as the structure of the capitalist economy or the class structure. However, the term structure means nothing but the recurring pattern in certain aspects of the manifold relations between people, which in practice are changing all the time. The problem with the term structure is that it conjures up images of a fixed and stable framework and obscures the constantly changing and fluid pattern of social relations. The image of individuals confronting social structures that are outside of their control is a powerful one because, as a single individual, we do not create or control the patterns and processes that result from manifold social relations, such as the relations of capital and finance, the labour market, or global political conflicts. Despite this image, we never confront social structure as a single individual because we are always nested within some form of manifold social relations, whether these are interpersonal, such as family or peer group relations, or the more impersonal or official relations of work, economics, or politics. As individuals we may come to feel more distant or alienated from *some forms* of manifold social relations, like work or politics, finding greater fulfilment in friendship, sport, or family, and their associated meanings and values.

A key concept here is Elias' (1978) notion of 'interdependence', in which he claims that, as humans, we are all reliant on one another for meeting emotional and sexual needs, but in highly complex and diverse societies with an advanced division of labour we also fulfil different economic, social, and political functions. In these interdependencies there emerge power relations as some attain greater positions of power or control of key resources, but in highly interdependent societies there is also greater constraint over other people and groups, even the most powerful ones, particularly around the control and use of the means of violence. This has implications for agency, because how we act, the powers we accrue, or the constraints upon us, do not rest on our relation to an abstract structure but on the nature of our interdependence with others and how this shapes our mutual interactions. This is another reason why relations cannot be reduced to 'shared meanings' as they involve a range of interdependencies that are physical, meaningful, emotional, practical, economic, political, and social: all of which involve the various things we do for each other—support and constraint, satisfaction or frustration of need, and fulfilling certain roles and functions.

Two examples of how social relations are reformed and how social change occurs, altering power relations in society, serve to illustrate these claims. Both are conducted on the basis of a detailed network analysis of the various relations between individuals and groups drawn from various documentary sources and other in-depth studies, the complexity of which I cannot reproduce here in my review of this work. Both are non-Marxist studies, but they do reflect the more complex understanding of class relations and the state that Marx displayed in his historical studies, particularly *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1977). However, the conclusions of both studies serve to illustrate the points I am making here about the nature of manifold social relations.

First, Stark (1996) has studied the transition in Hungary from a centralized state socialist system to a post-socialist society and economy after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. What his study shows is that even before 1989 there were parallel and contradictory relations operating in Hungary, forming a society in which various domains were never coherently integrated. Instead, there was a multiplicity of social relations at work that did not conform to the officially prescribed, hierarchically controlled pattern of relations in the Soviet-style state, particularly the operation of informal markets and exchange relations that filled in for the shortage of goods in the command economy. Thus, when the socialist regime collapsed, it did not leave a vacuum in its wake, as networks of social relations were already present within and across existing organizations that expanded and were reformed to replace the old state system. For Stark, this means that social change is not the passage from one order to another, but rather it involves the rearrangement in the pattern of how multiple social orders are interwoven. Put into the terms I have been developing here, it shows how a society is the sum of manifold social relations—some officially recognized by the state, others more unofficial and interpersonal—that involve interdependencies which operate according to their own particular

meanings, or to a conflict or dialogue of different meanings. Stark's conclusions also give us some indication of what happens in relations of power during social change: again put in my own terms, it is not that one global form of social relation emerges that then reformulates the whole of society, only to be replaced by another form that then changes the overall pattern of interrelations, as in the change from a Soviet-style socialist society to a capitalist one. Rather, there is a rearrangement in the manifold social relations of society so that ones that were previously unofficial now become the official, more dominant ones, and can begin to multiply or to influence, reshape, or subjugate other types of relation.

According to Stark, what began to emerge in post-socialist Hungary was a form of recombinant property where actors responded to uncertainty by diversifying assets and redefining and recombining resources. Recombinant property occurs in what he calls 'metamorphic networks' where ownership of resources crosses organizational boundaries, including the public and private domains of ownership, so that assets are interdependent. This means a specific form of Hungarian or Eastern European capitalism emerged, giving lie to the notion that there is one global form of capitalism: instead, we need to say there are 'capitalisms' rather than 'capitalism'. Furthermore, what Stark has to say about the role of actors in these efforts at recombination has relevance for the pragmatist understanding of agency I want to build here. So, in the act of recombination, actors redeploy and redefine (or re-cognize) 'available resources in response to their immediate practical dilemmas' (Stark 1996, p. 995). This does not condemn actors to repetition or retrogression, 'for it is through adjusting to new uncertainties by improvising on practiced routines that new organizational forms emerge' (p. 995). Additionally, the redefinition of available resources happens through a form of 'organizational reflexivity' that occurs 'when actors maneuver across a multiplicity of legitimating principles and strategically exploit ambiguities in the polyphony of accounts of work, value, and justice that compose modern society' (p. 995). I will elaborate more on this pragmatist view of agency and reflexivity in the second part of this chapter.

For now, the second study I will consider is Padgett and Ansell's (1993) analysis of the rise of the Medici family in fifteenth-century Florence. They use a detailed network analysis drawn from a variety of different historical sources to show the intricate interconnections that allowed the Medici to become the dominant family and party in their day, centralizing the state around them. For Padgett and Ansell, the state began to centralize at this time when one group emerged out of the competing actors to establish rules for interaction that applied to all the other groups. This was true of the Medici, in particular the rise to power of Cosimo de' Medici, on whom power was to be centred. According to Padgett and Ansell, it was not that Cosimo was a particularly strong or charismatic leader with clear goals and strategies that led to him gaining power, but instead his party and its advantageous position in the social networks of the time emerged around him. Only when this had occurred did Cosimo apprehend and begin to strategically use the political opportunities of

the social network that surrounded him. It is true that the Medici were a more coherent group and could therefore take more decisive action than other powerful families and parties of the time, but that was because they kept marriages into the family exclusively within the elite group. However, unlike many other elite families, they did do business with the rising mercantile class of 'new men', inadvertently placing themselves at the centre of different class interests that were connected only through the Medici. This meant a large percentage of the 'new men' supported them politically as active partisans, even though in practice the Medici did not represent their interests.

Padgett and Ansell (1993) conclude that in taking advantage of their position within social networks, the Medici were incrementalists because they did not pursue domination from the beginning, carefully plotting their rise to power by setting clear goals: instead, they took advantage of opportunity and fortune as it arose within a network coalescing around them. Thus, in analysing relations of power, we must go beyond the veneer of formal institutions and clear goals, of parties and social groups, to the relational substratum of people's lives that constitutes these very things. For Padgett and Ansell this is not to deny human agency but to appreciate how it is always embedded in localized milieus and networks, along with its ambiguous and sometimes contradictory character.

What I hope these two examples show is that when we characterize societies in certain ways, say as capitalist or as having a centralized state, we are not indicating that there is some dominant system apart from or above social relations in local contexts, which then comes to shape all other relations in its exact image. Instead, society is the sum of all the manifold social relations and social change occurs when there is realignment of various social domains, during which process certain forms of these relations become the more official or dominant ones, influencing the others. How and why this happens is so complex it is often hard, if not impossible, to accurately conceptualize. Historians are still arguing today about why it was that industrial capitalist relations first became the dominant form in Britain before it came to dominate in other European societies, such as France, with similar levels of economic and technological development. There is no way in this chapter, through the brief summaries of historical studies presented here, that I can capture the complexity of such processes. However, this is not my aim: rather, that is to deny the existence of any overall 'social structure' and instead to present a picture of societies as a sum of manifold social relations that are based in local environments composed of the relations, interdependencies, and interactions between individuals. While I therefore agree with Crossley (2011), who claims that social structure, or 'the global social world', is 'a vast web of relations and interactions, on multiple scales and involving a multitude of types of both relationships and actors' (p. 40), I would tend to accentuate here the multitude of relationships that exist on multiple scales. Thus, when Crossley says that capitalism 'as a social structure, for example, involves a population of workers, tied by an employment relation to a smaller population of bosses who compete with

one another in a market' (p. 128), I would refer back to Stark (1996), who shows that, in practice, there are capitalisms rather than capitalism, and that the model of capitalist relations can take different forms in different locales. It is true that today a system of global markets and organizations tend to support the global dominance of capitalism, but they do not completely dictate its form in all corners of the world or in every organization, nor do they eradicate the resistance to capitalism from within other types of social relations.

This also contrasts with Archer's (1995) morphogenetic concept of structure in critical realism, wherein structure is understood as the array of roles in a society or an organization that results from the past agency of individuals, with which agents in the present can interact to reproduce or to change it. Instead, I find Stark's (1996) notion of 'metamorphic networks' more plausible in that the array of roles and organizational forms is not the result of past agency, but of networks of relations that produce and change organizations and roles as they morph from the past, through the present and into the future. Also, organizations are not made up of only the official roles and relationships that compose them, but of unofficial relations and interactions both within and across them. Social change is not only about individuals interacting to change existing structures, but is about the rearrangement of how multiple social orders are interwoven. In this process of rearrangement, relationships that were previously unofficial or informal can come to take on a more official and dominant role. Furthermore, in her more recent work, Archer (2010, 2012) has claimed we are now in a period of 'morphogenesis unbound' and that this is creating conditions of 'contextual discontinuity', wherein individuals must rely on reflexive novelty rather than established routines to successfully negotiate the new order. Yet this is to create a rigid separation between routine—which Archer takes to be synonymous with habit, unlike Dewey (1983)—and creativity, which is aligned with reflexivity. Once again, though, Stark's (1996) work questions this, for he found that even in the radical discontinuity between state communism and Eastern European capitalism, there was some continuity in some social domains and that people adjusted to uncertainty by improvising on practised routines to create new organizational forms. I will consider this more in the next section.

Before moving on to this, I want to make an important distinction between relations that are impersonal and those that are interpersonal to varying degrees. Many relationships, including the structure of relationships in organizations, have a legal basis of powers and responsibilities, or simply a job description that outlines the function of various positions, standardizing role functions no matter who occupies the role. Yet, as C. H. Cooley (1927) observed, most organizations are 'intermediate' in form, in that they are composed of impersonal and interpersonal, official and unofficial, relationships. The family is a good example of this because it is an institution shaped by ideological ideas about what a family should be, along with state policies and legal frameworks that define family structures and the rights and responsibilities of its members—particularly the responsibilities of parents to their children: yet at the

same time the family is also composed of particular interpersonal relations of interdependence, involving care or neglect, love and dislike, harmony and discord, support and antagonisms, and a range of other interpersonal feelings and emotions. Other interpersonal relations like acquaintances, casual relationships, and friendship networks are more informal, unofficial, non-codified, freeform, and fluid, yet these are not separate from the more official and institutionalized relations. For example, workplaces are composed of relationships between clearly codified role (or relational) positions, yet also are the scene for interpersonal relationships that may be collegiate or hostile, or spill over into friendships and other networks that exist both inside and outside the organization. Such relationships affect the internal workings of organizations, promoting or hindering their official activities and goals. In extreme circumstances, where there is widespread organizational failure, informal networks provide goods and services that official institutions are failing to do.

Alongside this, interdependencies can also be impersonal or interpersonal, depending on whether they involve some form of interaction. For example, when I give a lecture I am interdependent with workers at a power plant somewhere who generate the energy to heat or cool the room, to light it, and to power the equipment I may use to give the lecture (computer, projector, etc.). The interdependence of my activities with theirs solely relates to roles and functions and there is no need for any form of interpersonal or communicative interaction between us. The relationships I have with my students in and outside the lecture room are more intermediate, because, although we have different roles and functions and are thus interdependent in various ways for learning, we also engage in communicative interactions. As such, our personalities and abilities will influence our interpersonal relations: some students may think I'm a good lecturer with a sound knowledge of my subject, while others may think I'm boring and the course uninteresting. I may feel that the former students are intelligent and likeable, keen and enthusiastic, while the latter are disengaged, disrespectful, and not working hard enough. Here, through communicative interactions, our formalized or official interdependence within an organizational network becomes a series of interpersonal relations in which we form different impressions and images of one another and relate to each other in varied ways.

I will explore these ideas in the next section of this chapter, where my argument is that what I have set out above changes our view of what social theorists have termed 'agency'. For example, in the 'structure/agency' debate, agents are seen as lone individuals with their own powers who have to deal with an external structure that enables or constrains that agency. What I am arguing here is that 'structure' is in fact a multitude of overlapping relations—or manifold social relations—in which individuals are always located. In these relations, our powers for agency in various different contexts are always dependent on both impersonal and interpersonal interdependencies, and therefore we should begin to think of humans as interdependents and interactants whenever they practise agency. This is the way we must think when we understand agency in its relational contexts.

2 RELATIONAL AGENCY: INTERDEPENDENTS AND INTERACTANTS

In an everyday sense, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edition) defines agency as ‘action or intervention producing a particular effect’ or as ‘a thing or person that acts to produce a particular result’. The origin of the word ‘agency’ is from the Medieval Latin *agentia* or doing. Similarly, an agent is ‘a person or thing that takes an active role or produces a specified effect’, ‘the doer of an action’. Here we can see that the terms agency and action cannot be separated, as an agent is someone or something that through an action produces an effect on the world or upon other people. However, as I noted earlier, agency is a term often deployed in the social sciences to mean something other than simple action, and is associated with reflexivity because agency involves knowledgeable interventions in the world or interventions that result from conscious deliberation on external situations. Clearly, this must be the case where people act to produce a particular effect or result, but in the definitions above an agent can also be someone who takes an active role. Indeed, we can think of many situations where people act non-reflexively—thoughtlessly—out of habit or from certain preconceptions but still produce an effect on others or the world around them. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2012) argued, most of our intentional actions emerge out of our being-in-the-world, or as I would put it here our being-in-relations, so that the origin of agency is not individual conscious reflexivity, for this is only one aspect of intentional action. Instead, action begins in those non-conscious areas of life, such as habits formed in particular social contexts or worlds, and only becomes subject to reflexive deliberation at particular points in activity or under certain circumstances.

There are two ways in which the conditions for our own individual agency are set by being in relation to others, something of which we may not be particularly aware. The first is the nature of impersonal interdependences with the agency of others—the example I gave earlier is of how my effectiveness as a lecturer depends on the labour and actions of others who I will never meet. My own personal abilities and capacities will have an important role in my effectiveness as a lecturer and the results of my actions in that role, but this is also supported by unseen others. This is typical of how, in the modern world, our agency rests on the unseen network of interrelations with others that enables or restrains it. Second, as Padgett and Ansell (1993) showed in regard of the Medici family, their power to act as the dominant party in Renaissance Florence was created by a network of relations to other families and social classes that emerged around them, a network that was not, initially at least, consciously constructed. It emerged from the interlocking activities of many interrelated individuals over a significant period of time. These social relations provided the contexts in which the Medici could become the dominant power and begin acting to use and consolidate their power. This they did through conscious strategies that were incremental and changeable rather than through the pursuit of overarching goals: their goals and strategies emerged

and changed as a result of the shifting configurations of relations in which their actions were embedded. These are two reasons why we should regard people as interdependents and interactants rather than lone agents, as none of us could have differential powers of agency outside of interrelations and interdependences.

But this means relational theorists need to challenge the utilitarian, goal-oriented model of action that posits a lone individual acting to achieve their own individual goals. In opposition to this, Joas (1996) has posited what he calls 'the creativity of action' against rational choice activity theorists, as well as against those who understand social action as created through norms. The latter two theories both employ a means-ends model of human action where people strive for clearly defined goals, ones that are rationally chosen or normatively oriented. In contrast, Joas' model of creative action rests on the pragmatist ideas of thinkers like John Dewey and G. H. Mead, for whom activity always takes place in situated and embodied contexts of communicative interaction. In these contexts, all perception and action is primarily anchored in pre-reflective beliefs and habits that only become the focus of reflection when the interactants encounter a problem or crisis in their situated interaction. This means that actions are not always oriented to clearly defined goals, as the motive for action may be pre-reflective: it is when a problem or crisis occurs in interaction that interactants have to dialogue in order to reconstruct the situation. According to Joas (1996), what occurs in such circumstances, from Dewey's point of view, is not so much the reconstruction of new goals for action but rather the rediscovery of the 'horizon of possibilities' that each situation contains (p. 133). What appears to us here are not new goals but 'ends-in-view' that need to be debated and decided upon, ones that emerge in the course of interaction and can be refined or abandoned as the situation changes.

In this pragmatist view of interaction, perception and cognition do not precede action but are phases of it, directed and redirected by changing situations and by the dialogical definition and redefinition of problems encountered in interaction, and of the horizon of possibilities, or ends-in-view, that may provide a solution or resolution to them. This also releases the creative capacities of these particular interactants, who aim to solve problems dialogically in their communicative interactions within particular situations. As Mead (1934) has shown, this means that what interactants are doing in problematic situations is not simply searching for new goals that provide the ends of their actions, but reconstructing the meanings of their joint actions and the situations in which they are taking place. As I have argued elsewhere (Burkitt 2014), we can characterize this type of activity not only as creative action but perhaps more generally as *aesthetic activity*, not in the sense of aesthetics as a theory of art but in terms of how humans make and experience meaning, and how the body is a fundamental element in this joint activity (Johnson 2007). Because of this, feelings and emotions also emerge from an interactant's position in the relations that constitute certain situations, and these too guide the way the interactant comes to think and reflect on them. Seeing interaction as fundamentally aesthetic,

as opposed to instrumental or normative, means that many of our actions are not primarily goal oriented but are undertaken for the meanings associated with them and the emotional fulfilment that brings. Thus, the meanings associated with many relationships, particularly family or friendship, are pursued as ends in themselves and should be mutually satisfying. Cognitive reflection or reflexivity emerges as a moment within the fabric of relationships where interactants feel there is a problem or that current relations and interactions are no longer fulfilling.

However, Dewey (1983) has pointed out that such creative interaction is only possible in certain circumstances where interactants have the freedom for new possibilities to emerge from a situation itself, in which they have the power to define those possibilities or new goals. In many situations in the modern world goals are defined and set externally by those outside the interaction. An example of this would be how, in capitalist social relations, wages are set as the goal of work because people could not survive economically without earning money. This is opposed to a model where people could decide their own reasons for working and jointly redefine the meaning of work or change their roles if their work was no longer satisfying for them. Power relations may not only rest on the ability of certain groups to set the rules of interaction, as Padgett and Ansell (1993) suggested, but also upon the ability to set the goals for the interactions of others, as in making wages the goal of working, and thus defining the horizon of possibilities for workers. This does not mean that workers get no fulfilment in work or that it is not possible for them to negotiate work or duties that are more fulfilling, but the horizon of possibilities is largely set for them and managers have greater say in the setting of work targets and goals, something that also varies according to the status and professional standing of the workers themselves.

Interestingly, the studies by Stark and by Padgett and Ansell provide interesting examples of this kind of reconstructive agency at work. In Stark's (1996) analysis of Hungary, after the communist state had collapsed, organizations were left with greater scope to define what exactly constituted resources and assets, and what their potential value was. In transformative economies the measures of value and worth are more open, as there are multiple principles of justification by which these things can be measured. Stark points out that reflexive organizations and agents exploited this ambiguity and polyphony of values in order to redefine the value of various assets in their accounting practices, and to diversify assets in order to hedge against uncertainty. In a totally different context and historical timeframe, Cosimo de' Medici also exploited ambiguity and multivocality to strengthen his own power and interests. He was not a ruler who appeared to pursue clearly defined goals, and those who met him recalled him as an ambiguous and non-committal personality. However, this allowed those who met Cosimo to construct their own attribution of his identity and interests, and it also gave Cosimo the scope to pursue his multiple interests. For him, ambiguity maintained 'discretionary options across unforeseeable futures in the face of hostile attempts by others to narrow those options'

(Padgett and Ansell 1993, p. 1263). In this way, power means locking others into goal-oriented sequences of strategic action that are predictable in advance, while keeping your own options open. In Dewey's terms, it means keeping the horizon of possibilities open for yourself and others aligned to you, while clearly defining the goals and horizon of possibilities for others, especially competitors.

Other relational sociologists have also seen the value of pragmatic understandings of agency to relational approaches. While largely agreeing with Joas and his approach to the creativity of action, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue that he has failed to explain the variation in the degree of creativity shown by actors in different situations. They attempt to explain this using what they term as the 'chordal triad of agency', which means that it can be informed by: (1) the past, in terms of habit or iteration, (2) oriented to the present situation through the practical evaluation or judgement of its contingencies, and (3) be projected towards the future as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities. Situations are themselves conceived of as 'temporal-relational contexts' (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, p. 969) and actors are dialogical respondents nested within various overlapping relational contexts. Creativity varies across the different temporal situations depending on the actors' orientations to the past, the present, and the future, and whether or not one of these chordal elements tends to predominate. Thus, 'changing conceptions of agentic possibility in relation to structural contexts profoundly influence how actors in different periods and places see their worlds as more or less responsive to human imagination, purpose, and effort' (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, p. 973).

The ideas of Emirbayer and Mische are interesting when it comes to looking at how agency can vary in certain degrees. For example, the current tendency in Britain and the USA for the white working class to turn against global capitalism with all that it entails—deindustrialization in the West, the loss of well-paid and skilled jobs, higher levels of immigration—can mean that these groups look to the past for the source of their power: to traditional industries and their domination as an ethnic group. This is also the case given that resources and opportunities are not available to them to reconstruct their lives towards a different and more prosperous future. However, this is set within the context of power relations, something that Emirbayer and Mische do not consider in any great detail in their essay. Following Archer (1995), they also try to analytically separate structure from agency, only in their view structure is the temporal-relational contexts in which people act, while the origin of agency 'must reside one level down (so to speak), at the level of self dynamics' (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, p. 974). Yet this falls into the trap of positing a lone self as the origin of agency who is then related to a structural context, rather undermining their 'relational pragmatics' in which individuals are always located in overlapping temporal-relational contexts. Instead of this, we can draw on other aspects of their work to see individual life histories as intersecting these overlapping temporal-relational contexts, so that agents never stand outside them, becoming externally related to them: rather, the biographical trajectories of individuals

intersect the context so that each interactant is uniquely related to others *within* the context. This means that interactants can never be reduced to the situation or else each one would respond in exactly the same way to it. Instead, they are related to each other from their own unique position within the context. The agentic possibilities for reproduction or reconstruction emerge from interaction within the situation itself, and by possibilities and limitations set from outside the context in terms of the influence and spread of the actions and ideas of other, perhaps more powerful, groups that have the ability to limit the goals and set the rules of interaction. Thus, the network of relations in which specific temporal-relational contexts exist can influence to varying degrees the horizon of possibilities that can be generated within them through interaction, either positively—as with the rise to power of the Medici—or negatively—as with the limits on the power of other groups.

However, even though interactants have varying degrees of agency depending on their relationship to other groups with potentially more power, no group goes completely unrestrained in modern societies, and all interdependents have some agency. They can never be reduced to the situations in which they interact not only because of the chordal triad of agency, or because they belong to overlapping temporal-relational contexts of interaction, but also because this gives each person multivocal and polyphonic perspectives on themselves and others. This is what Padgett and Ansell (1993) pointed out in their study of the ambiguous power of Cosimo de' Medici, but it has wider implications about the dynamic nature of agency that can make the behaviour of interactants unpredictable and, at times, unfathomable. This is because in the polyphony of voices that populate each person's 'internal conversation', or what Bakhtin (1984) called 'micro-dialogues', are the voices of not only those with whom we are currently in interaction, but those we have interacted with in other temporal-relational contexts, and the images and perspectives those others have taken towards us, communicated through their attitudes and stances. If these attitudes are radically different, this can create divided perspectives on our own self that can cause inner conflicts and contradictory behaviour. An example of this, given by Bakhtin (1984), is of the character of Nastasya Filippovna in Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot*, who was the mistress of a wealthy businessman. Aware of the way others have judged her in the past, Nastasya considers herself a 'fallen woman' and often describes herself as such to others, secretly hoping they will contradict her and vindicate her of this charge. However, when other characters in the book do try to provide another more positive perspective on Nastasya, such as Myshkin, who will forgive her for anything, she ends up arguing with them and against herself. As Bakhtin points out, she ends up denying herself the vindication she longs for because two voices and emotional-evaluative tones have made their home in her, dividing her personality and her actions. One of these tones provides the content of speech and action—in this case, self-condemnation—while the other tone—of longing to be vindicated for misdemeanours—determines the structure of speech and action. This is what I have called the 'dialogic unconscious'

(Burkitt 2010a, b) because, along with other aspects of relationships and interdependences of which we are unaware but that affect our actions, this aspect of our micro-dialogue structures our speech and action in ways of which we are not wholly conscious. That is because another voice and tone fills the content of our speech and masks the motives of which we remain unconscious, or are denying. Despite this, something of the hidden motive appears in our actions or speech, as in someone who is desperately trying to hide the fact that they have fallen in love but cannot help but give it away in many of the things they do.

Once again, though, this illustration clouds the link between agency and reflexivity because, for polyphonic selves, we may be only partially aware of the full meaning of our own actions, these rarely being totally transparent and open to knowledgeable reflexivity or reflexive deliberation. Because it is made up of polyphonic micro-dialogues, human consciousness is rarely that clear. However, this does not mean that agency itself resides entirely at the level of self-dynamics, for, as I hope to have illustrated above, this is never separate from relational and interpersonal dynamics that occur within the many overlapping temporal-relational contexts, which the biographical trajectory of our lives intersects at different times and places. Indeed, the opportunity to practise degrees of agency depends not only on our own personal capacities, such as for reflexivity, but from the situation itself and the style of our interdependencies. It is both at the level of social relations and at the level of self-dynamics that agents should be regarded as interactants and interdependents.

We can conclude here that polyphony and multivocality have two effects on agency. First, they enable interactants to use contrasting meanings and values to redefine situations, along with what counts as assets and resources, as well as their own self-identities, in the process expanding the horizon of possibilities and creating new institutions. However, second, they can make relationships vulnerable to breakdown or dysfunction if there is too great a contradiction of meanings about the situation, or if interactants hold radically conflicting meanings. Breakdown is a greater threat to interpersonal relations, such as friendships or family relations, where the institutional frameworks that hold them together are less strong, or where emotional commitment and fulfilment are more important than keeping established ties. But it can also threaten more institutionalized networks like organizations, if unofficial interpersonal relations become dysfunctional and threaten the efficient working of more official role relations and positions. In this way the clash of meanings or perspectives on a situation can also provide those moments of reflexivity necessary from within the fabric of relationships where a problem occurs and there is a necessity to reconstruct social relations.

3 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have argued for the idea of society as the sum of the manifold social relations between individuals, and that the agency of interactants is always located within temporal-relational contexts in some aspect of the manifold

relations. This challenges the idea that there is some ‘macro’ level of social relations that exists above and beyond the local ‘micro’ level of relational contexts. Indeed, societies can only take on a certain character—say as capitalist or patriarchal—by the degree to which some element of these relations dominate and have influence on the others, shaping temporal-relational contexts in terms of the horizon of possibilities for, and the goals of, interaction. And there is always scope for resistance to emerge from within various domains of social relations, especially in unofficial relations or in cases where goals and values are internally rather than externally set. Agency, understood as the power of interactants to act to produce an effect, is always located within these contexts, but is determined also by the biographies and the capacities of interactants. Each one will have their own unique positioning in the temporal-relational contexts, as they have a chordal orientation to past, present, and future within the interaction. Reflexive agency is a moment that occurs within temporal-relation contexts of interaction and interdependence, and as such may have non-conscious origins: this means that perception and cognition do not precede interaction but are phases of it, unfolding within changing contexts through the dialogical definition and redefinition of conflicting or problematic situations, along with the evolving horizon of possibilities that may transform them. When understood in terms of interaction and interdependence, agency occurs within manifold social relations that are contradictory, and between interactants who are deeply dialogical and polyphonic personal and social selves.

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Power and Relational Sociology

Peeter Selg

I INTRODUCTION

“Relational turn” is a new buzzword in the social sciences. Yet there is a lot less consensus on the very meaning of “relational.” The latter is a family-resemblance concept such as most of the important social science concepts including “power” (Haugaard 2010) or “theory” (Selg 2013). In a way this is a happy state of affairs: the concept is alive, albeit contested, maybe even essentially contested (Gallie 1955). One possible remedy for alleviating the confusion is using a metalanguage for organizing the different meanings of the word. I take my lead from one such metalanguage, which was coined a couple of generations ago by Dewey and Bentley (1949), picked up by programmatic metatheorists of “relational sociology” in 1990s (Emirbayer 1997) and 2000s (Dépelteau 2008), and carried to the topic of conceptualizing power in the current decade (Selg 2016a, b). This is the vocabulary of self-action, inter-action and trans-action. In this chapter I use this conceptual triangle to capture the entire variation of conceptions of power that present themselves as “relational.” Before going into theoretical discussions, however, it is useful to acknowledge that we actually do have a spontaneously relational approach to various social phenomena even if we almost never reflect on such phenomena in these terms.

Our spontaneous view of the world is substantialist, not relational: in our language we express the world as being composed of substances, rather than emerging, unfolding and processual relations. The latter perspective would be more characteristic to relational approaches. We presume those substances

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(“things,” “objects,” “subjects”) to have properties (“tall,” “heavy,” “red”) and to be engaged in activities (“running,” “standing,” “walking”). One of the prominent representatives of relational sociology, Norbert Elias, has reflected on that in terms of “process-reduction” that takes place in our normal everyday (substantialist) language: “We say, ‘The wind is blowing,’ as if the wind were actually a thing at rest which, at a given point in time, begins to move and blow. We speak as if wind could exist which did not blow” (1978, p. 112). In other words, we talk about wind as if it wasn’t an emerging process or relation, but a subject that is engaged in an action (“blowing”).

Even though our everyday language is substantialist there are nevertheless some phenomena that we tend to take spontaneously as *relations* rather than *things* or *properties*. Take, for instance, “distance.” Distance between two trucks is definitely a *relation* between them, not a property or action of either of them. Distance has various features that make it easy to make several crucial points about relational approaches. For instance, distance is always reciprocal: A’s distance from B is also B’s distance from A. Thus, you cannot be simply an A that “has” a distance; A needs at least some element of B to “have” any distance. This means, in turn, that the distance between A and B is not reducible to either A or B. Moreover, while the distance is not reducible to A or B, it is always between them and not conceivable as a separate entity that could be made sense of without those very As and Bs. Thus, “distance,” seems to be a thoroughly relational concept in the sense that it is referring to a phenomenon that can only be understood as a relation.

However, there are still certain limitations to sticking to the notion of distance when it comes to rendering relational approaches. Namely, “distance” is not a concept that captures dynamic, unfolding, processual relations between As and Bs that are not only irreducible to and reciprocal between As and Bs, but are also *constitutive* of those As and Bs. And it is precisely these kinds of relations that the relational sociologists are generally talking about. When it comes to social phenomena, they presume that not only are the relations between As and Bs incomprehensible without those As and Bs (as is the case with distance), but those As and Bs in turn are not comprehensible without the relations between them. This is where the example of distance becomes limiting. For instance, we don’t tend to think that moving one truck away from another truck somehow alters the character or “essence” of either of those trucks. If we want to get a spontaneous insight to what is called “deep” relational thinking (see Dépelteau 2013; Selg 2016b), then we need other metaphors than distance for bringing this point home smoothly.

This is where thinking about the concept of “sense of humor” becomes useful. What is so significant about sense of humor is that we tend to treat it as a property of people just as “blowing” is spontaneously presumed to be the action that the wind “does.” We don’t regard utterances like “He has a sense of humor” as nonsensical as we would regard enunciations like “He has a distance.” But the more you think about it the less it actually makes sense to treat sense of humor as a property of people. If we actually did understand sense of

humor as a property, then there would not be any crucial difference between *first* person form and other forms of description of this phenomenon. But there is. What I mean is the following. There's a multitude of "things" like pieces of furniture or parts of body that can be treated in the first person form: there does not seem to be anything wrong if someone utters "I have a chair" or "I have blue eyes." Those statements seem to be at least *prima facie* evidence that somebody has a chair or blue eyes. But think about the sentence "I have a sense of humor." Now leaving aside the fact that grammatically it does make sense, we could ask: Is this sentence evidence—even *prima facie* evidence—of someone having a sense of humor? There are various grounds for saying no. For instance, people who say that they have a sense of humor usually don't have it. The reason is not so much related to the issues of proper humility or improper arrogance, but to the fact that A's sense of humor is a relation rather than a property, attribute or resource of someone. And that's why intuitively we tend to regard the first person description as bizarre, at least when it comes to a sense of humor.

We tend to acknowledge that a *self* cannot "have" a sense of humor without some relation to an *other*. In that sense "distance" and "sense of humor" are similar. They are relational concepts. But they part company in one important respect: unlike with distance, it is up to the *other*, to a certain extent, to attribute a sense of humor to the *self*. But does that mean that, unlike distance, someone's sense of humor is reducible to either the *self* or the *other*? No. And the reason is that no any *other* is equally adequate to perform the attribution of sense of humor to a *self*. Consider this: if James is some random stranger who just pops in and says "John has a sense of humor" about a particular John, then we spontaneously regard this utterance as less credible than we would regard the same sentence coming from a Mary, who is a close friend of John. And the reason is that not only is it up to the *other* to attribute sense of humor to a *self*, but it is also up to the *self* to position the *other* as the one who is able to attribute this sense of humor to him/herself. The colloquial term for this positioning is joking. But again, minimally speaking John's joking becomes John's joking only when Mary gets his joke(s). But Mary can get the joke only if John is, in fact, joking. And in that sense John is positioning Mary to get the joke, which in turn becomes a joke only if Mary in fact does get the joke as a joke and so on. It can get very messy! How many jokes does John have to make and Mary (or Jane or Jim etc.) have to get in order for John to have a sense of humor? This cannot be settled here in our theoretical reflection. It is very much context dependent. But what is certain is that someone's sense of humor is not only a relation between a *self* and an *other*, but also a dynamic process in which various actors are inextricably linked to each other and constituted as elements of the very dynamic relations of which they are part (as jokers, receivers of jokes, audience, laughers etc.). And it is these kinds of dynamic processual complexes that the relational sociologists presume to be the primary target of sociological analysis.

Overall, three different research strategies can be used for studying sense of humor.

1. If we were to analyze *sense of humor* from our spontaneous substantialist point of view as being analogous to an object (like table or chair) or property (like eye color) then we would be interested in questions such as: What features of A form A's sense of humor?
2. If we treated *sense of humor* as being basically analogous to "distance," then we would be interested in questions such as: Which As are regarded as having sense of humor by which Bs and based on which actions of As?
3. The final research strategy for studying *sense of humor* would focus on the network of dynamic relations through which certain actions by the As emerge as jokes through meeting certain reactions of the Bs, and through which As and Bs are constituted as jokers, laughers and so on and are in a constant process of mutual (re)constitution, elements of which can be considered separately, but not as being separate.

What the third research strategy wants to bring to the fore is actually very intuitive: we cannot say that a person who has never made anyone laugh has a sense of humor (which would be possible from the viewpoint of the first strategy, which would treat a person's sense of humor as a property of that person). Similarly, we cannot say that a person who has never made any joke has a sense of humor (which would be possible from the viewpoint of the second research strategy, since it would be up to the *other* to attribute the sense of humor to the *self*). Thus, sense of humor is treated as an unfolding, dynamic and constitutive relation.

Now using this analogy it is possible to outline three ideal types of strategies for analyzing power for organizing the extant scholarship found in sociology, organizational theory, political science, governance and international relations.

1. Corresponding to the first strategy is what we will be calling *self*-actional approaches to power. This strategy of analyzing power, which can be found in any social scientific field, has been around since Thomas Hobbes, who, in Chap. 10 of his *Leviathan* (1651) famously uttered: "THE 'POWER of a man,' to take it universally, is his present means, to obtain some future apparent good."
2. The second strategy corresponds to *inter*-actional approaches. Since Max Weber defined power as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance" (1978, p. 53), this has been a social scientific mainstream understanding of power in the Anglo-Saxon world.
3. The third strategy corresponds to *trans*-actional approaches. Various perspectives that take Michel Foucault's insistence on "the strictly relational character of power relationships" (1978, p. 95) as their starting point set, ever increasingly, the agenda for current students of power.

It is the details of these three approaches that we untangle in the remainder of this chapter.

2 SELF-ACTIONALISM: POWER AS A PROPERTY OR RESOURCE OF THE POWERFUL

Self-actionalism in general presumes that social things (structures, agents etc.) “are viewed as acting under their own powers” (Dewey and Bentley 1949, p. 108). This view can take two forms: individualism and structuralism. There are many perspectives that proceed as if “[n]ot [only] individual persons, but groups, nations, cultures, and other reified substances do all of the acting in social life and account for its dynamism” (Emirbayer 1997, p. 285). Examples of this are various “holistic theories and ‘*structuralisms*’ that posit not individuals but self-subsistent ‘societies,’ ‘structures,’ or ‘social systems’ as the exclusive sources of action” (ibid., emphasis added).

In power analyses it is primarily the powerful self-acting entity A (whether structure or agent) whose properties, resources and dispositions are at the focus of analysis informed by this understanding. The reason we include an extensive coverage of self-actionalism in our discussion is that even that perspective is sometimes characterized as “relational.” For instance, in a symposium on “political networks,” in one of the flagship journals of political science, Lazer argues that “power is intrinsically relational: it flows from the capacity to affect other actors” (2011, p. 66). Some time ago one of the contemporary classics in international relations defined “relational power” as “the ability to change outcomes or affect the behavior of others within a given regime” (Krasner 1985, p. 14). Similarly, Kemper’s book, with the subtitle *A Relational Reading of Durkheim, Goffman and Collins*, puts forth a Weberian view of power with a Hobbesian face: power manifests itself in behavior that “comprises all conduct designed to overcome the opposition of others to realizing one’s own will and gaining one’s interests” (Kemper 2011, p. 22). These kinds of examples point that self-actionalism is also part of the meaning of “relational” approaches to power. Most of the time, however, the word “relational” is not in the vocabulary of authors who propose self-actional perspectives, that is, a quite established set of approaches in power analysis in both the form of individualism and structuralism.

Individualist self-actionalism could be seen informing rational-choice approaches in political science (see Dowding 2009; Moe 2005); various “conflict” perspectives that in their analyses equate power with a quasi-Weberian notion of power akin to Weber’s understanding of legitimate domination or authority (cf. Weber 1978, p. 53), as in the works of Mills (1956), Dahrendorf (1959) and Collins (2004); “exchange perspectives” on governance that see the latter as basically a matter of “coalition building and voluntary exchange among self-interested political actors” (March and Olsen 1995, p. 7; see also pp. 7–26 for an in-depth overview); or “realist” theories in international relations (see Barnett and Duvall 2005, pp. 3–4).

When it comes to structuralist form, various historical institutionalisms that set a “prominent role” for “power and asymmetrical relations of power” in their analyses (Hall and Taylor 1996, p. 940), could be seen as bending towards

this direction. Probably the most clear-cut form of structuralist self-actionalism available among actually defended and influential theories of power would be Althusser's (1971) structural Marxism, in which the structure is seen as almost completely determining the actors, leaving no place for agency for the latter as in case of "ideological interpellation": "ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing" (p. 174).

Sometimes prominent theories of power have elements of both individualist and structuralist forms of self-actionalism. Steven Lukes' "radical view" of power is perhaps the most revealing example of this tension or discrepancy. Intervening in the "faces of power" debate, Lukes introduces the "third face" of power (besides decision-making and non-decision-making) by asking: "is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have—that is, to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires?" (2005, p. 27). Essentially, in this conceptual scheme there is no role for B in creating and retaining power relations. The latter are completely up to A. And in fact A can be both structure and actor in Lukes' perspective. For instance, when Lukes criticizes Bachrach and Baratz's (1962, 1970) actor-centered theory of the bias of the system, he makes a point that "the bias of the system is not sustained simply by a series of individually chosen acts, but also, most importantly, by the socially structured and culturally patterned behaviour of groups, and practices of institutions, which may indeed be manifested by individuals' inaction" (Lukes 2005, p. 26). Now it might seem that he is calling us to pay attention to the powerless Bs, but in fact he does exactly the opposite. If one reads this quote carefully, then it is impossible not to notice that it is the "socially structured and culturally patterned behaviour of groups, and practices of institutions" that are the self-acting As which sustain the bias of the system. Lukes is making a structuralist point here which is very close to Althusser's one about ideology that we considered above as a paradigm case for structuralism. But at other places in both editions of his book Lukes is a defender of individualism.¹ Haugaard has pointed out that there seems to be "a contradiction at the heart of the three-dimensional view of power [of Lukes], whereby the third dimension of power directs our attention to the systemic aspects of power while, at the same time, holding onto the view that power entails responsible agency" (2010, p. 425). Haugaard is right in the sense that there is a contradiction in Lukes' short book. But I would put it this way: there is only a contradiction between individualism and structuralism that are both forms of *self*-actionalism.

It was as early as the 1960s when the viability of this approach was debated between the emerging "pluralists" or "behaviorists" in political science (Dahl, Polsby, Wolfinger) and the sociological "ruling elite" theorists. It was related to the debate of whether we can talk about power that exists outside its exercise (akin to some substance) that a self-actor can "have." The behaviorists/pluralists "concentrate on power exercise itself" (Polsby 1960a, p. 483; see also 1960b).

According to them, the “ruling elite” theorists (for instance, Hunter 1953; Mills 1956) presume the existence of power “outside” its exercise in the form of “potential for control” (Dahl 1958, p. 465) or “power bases” (Polsby 1960a, p. 483). It is common to see the pluralists’ (especially Dahl’s) intervention as establishing a “relational concept of power” (Clegg 1989, p. 50; McClurg and Young 2011, p. 39). However, the “ruling elite” theorists such as Hunter, clearly emphasized “relations” in their use of the word “power”: “Power is a word that will be used to describe the acts of men going about the business of moving other men to act in relation to themselves or in relation to organic or inorganic things” (1953, pp. 2–3). In fact, what the pluralists changed was not the focus on relations, which was already there, but rather the way of making sense of those relations. In our terms they started moving the discussion from *self*-actionalism to *inter*-actionalism.

3 INTER-ACTIONALISM: POWER AS A RELATION BETWEEN ACTORS

An inter-actionalist perspective envisions a world where “thing is balanced against thing in causal interconnection” (Dewey and Bentley 1949, p. 108), so that “entities no longer generate their own action, but the relevant action takes place *among* the entities themselves” (Emirbayer 1997, p. 285). Similar to a self-actionalist perspective, the “things” or “entities” are presumed to “remain fixed and unchanging throughout such interaction, each independent of the existence of the others, much like billiard balls or the particles in Newtonian mechanics” (Emirbayer 1997, pp. 285–286). Such ontology presumes “linear reality” in which not the entities but their attributes do the inter-action and thus “create outcomes, themselves measurable as attributes of the fixed entities” (Abbott 1988, p. 170). Emirbayer calls it a “variable-centered” or “variable-based” approach that “explicitly or implicitly dominates much of contemporary sociology, from survey research to historical-comparative analysis” (1997, p. 286). It is characteristic that even if relations between or among entities are analyzed, they are always analyzed as something *added* to the entities which exist prior to and outside those relations.

Nevertheless, approaches to power inspired by *inter*-actionalism have also been characterized as “relational.” We can have recourse to a recent reception of Robert Dahl’s classical definition of power, according to which “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do” (1957, pp. 202–203). This is an action-based notion of power in which the properties or resources of A not only matter with regard to A having power but also the proper reactions of B. For McClurg and Young, “[i]t is clear from this definition that power is relational. That is, power only exists when considering interactions between and among individuals and groups” (2011, p. 39). They go further to argue that “[e]ven as political scientists have challenged Dahl’s simple definition and formulation of power, the concept has always remained relational” (*ibid.*).

Let's scrutinize Dahl's intervention in view of inter-actionalism. He proposes operationalizing the concept of power into statements about the *base*, *means*, *scope* and *amount* of power. The *base* of an actor's power, or "all the resources—opportunities, acts, objects, etc.—that he can exploit in order to effect the behavior of another" (1957, p. 203), is definitely a self-actionalist not inter-actionalist concept. So is "the means" of power, that is, the various instruments for exploiting the base (ibid.). Methodologically both the *base* and the *means* invoke research questions about the *self-acting* A.

Things get more inter-actional when the "scope of power" is considered. The latter "consists of B's responses. The scope of the President's power [over Congress] might therefore include such Congressional actions as passing or killing a bill, failing to override a veto, holding hearings, etc." (ibid.). Finally, the amount of power, is inter-actional since it is presumed—in theory, at least—to "be represented by a probability statement: e.g. 'the chances are 9 out of 10 that if the president promises a judgeship to five key senators, the senate will not override his veto,' etc." (ibid.). So, the *amount* here is a *probability* that A's use of his power base will lead B to (not) doing certain action. This is basically a probabilistic causation statement, often found in inter-actionalist "variable-based" social analyses.

Consequently, Dahl and his behaviorist/pluralist school (Polsby, Wolfinger and others) introduced inter-actionalism into the "faces of power" debate even if they barely used it in their empirical analyses. But they themselves weren't very explicit about the "relational" character of power in their discussions. This is where Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz enter our discussion.

Being the critics of behaviorism/pluralism and also the targets of harsh criticisms from the representatives of this school, they are usually credited with founding the discussions on various "faces" of power in Anglo-American political science. Their notion of "nondecision-making" (1962) reversed the focus of power analysis from concentrating on who prevails in public decision-making—the focus of the pluralists/behaviorists—to the processes of guaranteeing that nothing important ever gets decided. For our purposes it is equally important to point out that they explicitly characterize power in "relational" terms (1963, 1970, Chaps. 2 and 3).

Their starting point is the Hobbesian self-actionalism, according to which power is "a possession which enables its owner to secure some apparent future Good" (Bachrach and Baratz 1963, p. 632). For them "this usage is unacceptable" because it "ignores the fundamental relational attribute of power: that it cannot be possessed" (ibid., pp. 632, 633). Thus, "power is relational, as opposed to possessive or substantive" (ibid., p. 633). There are three "relational characteristics" of power (ibid.):

A power relationship exists when (a) there is a conflict over values or course of action between A and B; (b) B complies with A's wishes; and (c) he does so because he is fearful that A will deprive him of a value or values which he, B, regards more highly than those which would have been achieved by noncompliance. (Ibid., p. 635)

These “relational characteristics,” are indicators of the inter-actionalist thinking. First, we can skip the discussion of characteristic (a), since it is not specific to any of the approaches we are discussing here: it is equally possible to have either a conflict-oriented or cooperation-oriented framework regardless of it being either self-, inter- or trans-actional. Next, both characteristics b and c actually present a variety of inter-actionalist arguments that boil down to the following: A’s power over B is only possible if B responds properly to A’s threats. Characteristic b specifies this logic by establishing that “a power relationship exists only if B actually bows to A’s wishes” (ibid., p. 633). Characteristic (c) entails that “a power relation can exist only if one of the parties can threaten to invoke sanctions” (ibid., p. 633). But unlike Dahl’s self-actionalist discussion of the “means of power,” Bachrach and Baratz specify that the availability of sanctions gives A power over B only under certain additional conditions. First, “the person threatened must comprehend the alternatives which face him in choosing between compliance and noncompliance,” thus giving power relations certain “rational attribute[s]” (ibid.). Second, the sanction referred to in the threats must be “*actually* regarded as a deprivation by the person who is so threatened” (ibid.). Third, the person who is threatened must regard the value(s) she is deprived in case of non-compliance as higher than other value(s) sacrificed in case of compliance (ibid.). Fourth, “The person threatened is persuaded that the threat against him is not idle” (ibid.).

Besides the “faces of power” debate, *inter*-actionalism is especially crucial in the huge industry of conceptualizing “governance” in network terms. “Governance” designates the forms of rule or power that, contrary to *hierarchical* state-centered or *anarchical* market-based government/governing, are engaged with involving those who are ruled in the process of ruling through *heterarchical* networks (Jessop 2011). The notion of “governance” understood in these terms presumes recognizing that “[a]uthority is not just a toolkit in the hands of A,” but rather “makes A’s rational exercise of her or his power directly dependent on B’s self-reflexive *doing and refraining*” (Bang 2003, p. 16). It is important that there are several other network perspectives on power and rule that even explicitly present themselves as “relational,” but are in fact inter-actional perspectives. The most notable examples are social network analysis (SNA) as it is applied to political networks, and power-dependency theory.

Recently, Erikson has discussed the differences between ‘relationalism’ and ‘formalism’ in SNA. Her distinction matches with ours between trans-actionalism and inter-actionalism. According to Erikson: “The analytical power of a great deal of social network research comes from the ability to abstract away from the messy details of real relationships—but this tendency should be *considered formal rather than relational*” (2013, p. 227, emphasis added). We can point to the “formalist” or “inter-actionalist” character of various perspectives in political/power network analysis that present themselves as “relational.” For example, Knoke’s classic “relational perspective on political structures” (1990, p. 16) sets out “to *explain the distribution of power among actors* in a social system as a *function of the positions that they occupy in one or more*

networks” (ibid., p. 9, emphasis added; see also Knoke 2011 for an overview). Similarly, network approaches like Castells’ (2009) view of power as “relational capacity” and Emerson’s power-dependency theory (1962) and its various developments (Cook and Emerson 1978; Marsden 1983; Crossley 2011, pp. 115–123) explicitly point out that power is relational and dismiss self-actional understanding of power as something *belonging* to actors. At the same time, their understanding of relations is akin to the metaphor of “distance” we discussed in our introduction: relations are presumed to be among pre-constituted entities. Moving from that metaphor to the figure of sense of humor we could introduce trans-actionalism, our last family of relational approaches to power that presume power relations and actors and institutions to be mutually constitutive.

4 TRANS-ACTIONALISM: MUTUAL CONSTITUTION OF POWER AND SUBJECTS

Trans-actionalism implies that “systems of description and naming are employed to deal with aspects and phases of action, without final attribution to ‘elements’ or other presumptively detachable or independent ‘entities,’ ‘essences,’ or ‘realities,’ and without isolation of presumptively detachable ‘relations’ from such detachable ‘elements’” (Dewey and Bentley 1949, p. 108). The perspective assumes that “the very terms or units involved in a transaction derive their meaning, significance, and identity from the (changing) functional roles they play within that transaction” (Emirbayer 1997, p. 287). Therefore, there is no postulation of discrete As or Bs (individuals, structures etc.) or even actions, since “the action^A is the action^A only because it is interconnected to the action^B, and vice versa” (Dépelteau 2008, p. 60). This has several consequences for conceptualizing power and other social relations, most importantly the need to adopt what Dépelteau calls the principles of “primacy of process” and of “dereification” (ibid., p. 62). Thus, while analytically one could talk about As *and* Bs *and* their actions *and* their relations to each other as if they were separated and bounded phenomena, in trans-actionalist research we should, as far as possible, dereify them and conceive of them as “as dynamic in nature, as unfolding, ongoing processes ... in which it makes no sense to envision constituent elements apart from the flows within which they are involved (and vice versa)” (Emirbayer 1997, p. 89).

Therefore, moving to a trans-actional analysis of power entails giving up the usual inter-actional or self-actional interpretations of notions like “decisions” “non-decisions,” “preferences,” “power wielders,” “power receivers,” “subjects,” “identities” and even “freedom” that are usually associated with power analysis. We should treat all the respective phenomena as intelligible only against the backdrop of the “relational setting” as Margaret Somers calls it, referring to “patterned matrix of institutional relationships among cultural, economic, social, and political practices” (1994, p. 72). Somers adds: “the most significant aspect of a relational setting is that there is no governing entity according to which the whole setting can be categorized; it can only be

characterized by deciphering its spatial and network patterns and temporal processes” (ibid.).

This is basically what both Michel Foucault and Norbert Elias have proposed for analyzing power relations. Foucault is especially notorious when it comes to dismissing traditional “governing entities.” He ends with an almost apophatic “definition” of power: “power is *not* an institution, and *not* a structure; *neither* is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Foucault 1978, p. 93, emphasis added). This stretches the concept of power to almost to the extreme of being utterly meaningless. But this is one of the general consequences of taking a stance on power that is “relational all the way down” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, p. 974), and trans-actionalism definitely entails such a stance. Power cannot be a regional category referring to certain “level,” “area” or “domain” of society: “Relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to *other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations)*, but are *immanent* in the latter” (Foucault 1978, p. 94, emphasis added). Before we proceed we should make this point more intuitive by returning to our figure of a “sense of humor” with which we tried to ground the idea of trans-actionalism at the beginning of this chapter.

Sense of humor is not a regional category either. We cannot say that sense of humor is a certain domain of human relations or society; rather, in principle, all human forms of life can be conceived to be relevant for one’s having a sense of humor. To get properly attuned to this insight, the reader should just visualize for a moment the best comedians s/he knows. They definitely have a sense of humor (from the reader’s point of view at least). Now, can the reader honestly say that this is because they are specialists of a certain field called “making jokes” in a manner that one can be a specialist in making chairs or tables? Probably not. The thing is that it is likely their jokes are never about jokes, but “stuff” like “economic processes,” “knowledge relationships,” “sexual relations” and so on, to borrow just a few entries from Foucault’s list. In that sense jokes are *immanent* to them. At the same time, all those different relationships and processes are immanent to the jokes. The point is actually very simple if we express it in non-technical terms: understanding a sex joke presumes that the audience understands something about sex not only about jokes; and similar logic is, of course, involved in understanding an economics joke, knowledge joke etc.). In other words, there is no “sense of humor” as such that can be put to use or not; someone’s sense of humor is a process that emerges from multiplicity of practices that constitute its participants as jokers, laughers, audience, successful and failed jokes and so on.

If one keeps that in mind, Foucault’s points about power start to seem very intuitive. For him, power “which is assumed to exist universally in a concentrated or diffused form, does not exist. Power exists only when it is put into action” (Foucault 1982, p. 788). He points out that:

the analysis should not concern itself with power at the level of conscious intention or decision; that it should not attempt to consider power from its internal

point of view and that it should refrain from posing the labyrinthine and unanswerable question: “Who then has power and what has he in mind? What is the aim of someone who possesses power?”. (Foucault 1980, p. 97)

Methodologically speaking, we need “a study of power in its external visage, at the point where it is in direct and immediate relationship with that which we can provisionally call its object, its target, its field of application, there—that is to say—where it installs itself and produces its real effects” (ibid.). This entails reorienting our major research questions about power:

Let us not, therefore, ask why certain people want to dominate, what they seek, what is their overall strategy. ... rather than ask ourselves how the sovereign appears to us in his lofty isolation, we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts etc. We should try to grasp subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects. (Ibid.)

It is in view of this that Foucault’s own distinction of different logics of power should be taken. Based on his oeuvre as a whole, but especially his later and posthumously published works (such as Foucault 1977, 1978, 2003, 2007) three such logics of power can be deciphered: (1) a sovereignty-based model, accompanied by an understanding of power as akin to commodity that can be distributed, or as working through a mechanism of repression or saying “no”; (2) disciplinary power that works primarily through surveillance and the production of docile bodies; (3) biopower or biopolitics of population that works primarily through mechanisms of security. These three logics of power should not be understood as separate and distinct; rather, they form a triangle whose practices and mechanisms penetrate each other and intervene in each other’s functioning. Therefore, sovereignty, discipline and security are neither “governing entities” within which power relations can be categorized, nor do they designate certain stages of historical development (such as social formations in the Marxist tradition). These three logics cannot be analyzed in isolation. Nevertheless, we can point out that different relational settings call for prioritizing different vocabularies: overall, the vocabulary of biopolitics might be more pertinent to conceptualizing power relations in a late capitalist setting more generally, but one can easily imagine relational settings *within* this general relational setting (such as military conflict, operation of police forces during violent crises) that call more for sovereignty-based vocabulary. The intertwinedness of different vocabularies of power analysis actually makes perfect sense with regard to our metaphor of *sense of humor*. Returning to this figure for the last time, people who “have” great sense of humor (think of comedians who are very widely admired) usually “have” it through trans-actions with very different audiences and by having created very different jokes. It is hard to imagine a popular comedian telling similar jokes over time; and it is impossible to imagine a comedian using the same joke over time. Therefore, one of the inevitable inferences of this is that it is impossible to locate the sources of sense

of humor. They can potentially be located everywhere and derived from everywhere. And this actually is the only logical consequence one can reach about power too from the trans-actional point of view. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Foucault has argued (arguably notoriously): “Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault 1978, p. 93). What is probably less acknowledged outside the circles of “relational sociology” is that a similar consequence is put forth by Norbert Elias, an author who is almost unanimously considered to be a major representative of relational sociology in eminent overviews of the topic (see Emirbayer 1997; Jackson and Nexon 1999; Kivinen and Piironen 2006; Dépelteau 2008; Crossley 2011; Pachucki and Breiger 2010).

For Elias, balances of power “form an integral element of all human relationships” (1978, p. 74). He sees power relations (and all the other human relations) as “bi-polar at least, and usually multi-polar” (*ibid.*). He illustrates this point with several counterintuitive examples:

From the day of his birth, a baby has power over its parents, not just the parents over the baby. At least, the baby has power over them as long as they attach any kind of value to it. If not, it loses its power. The parents may abandon the baby if it cries too much. They may starve it and, deliberately or not, cause it to die, if it has no function for them. (*Ibid.*)

The example is meant to suggest that there cannot be a power relation between A and B that would be unipolar or one-directional (A having power over B without B having power over A). Although a baby’s power might be very small compared to that of parents, nevertheless, “whether the power differentials are large or small, balances of power are always present wherever there is functional interdependence between people” (*ibid.*). And “functional interdependence between people” is one of the crucial characteristics of human society. Of course, “like the concept of power, the concept of function must be understood as a concept of *relationship*” (*ibid.*, pp. 77–78). And, again, like most sociological concepts, the notion of function has traditionally been understood non-rationally “as a quality of a single social unit” (*ibid.*, p. 77), more concretely as “an expression for a task performed by a section within a harmonious ‘whole’” (*ibid.*, p. 77). This usage “leaves out the reciprocity, the bi-polarity or multipolarity of all functions” (*ibid.*, p. 77). Consequently, “It is impossible to understand the function A performs for B without taking into account the function B performs for A. That is what is meant when it is said that the concept of function is a concept of relationship” (*ibid.*, p. 78). From this relational understanding, highlighting the multipolarity or reciprocity of all social relations, it becomes clear why “[p]ower is not an amulet possessed by one person and not by another; it is a structural characteristic of human relationships—of *all* human relationships” (*ibid.*, p. 74). A final point from Elias to add here is that “all relationships between men, all their functional interdependencies, are processes” (*ibid.*, p. 78).

Summarizing this excursus to trans-actional perspectives on power in a more metaphorical way, we can reread Goffman's famous pun that Emirbayer considered to be an appropriate epigraph for his entire manifesto for relational sociology (Emirbayer 1997, p. 296) in terms of power relations. "Not, then, men and their moments," Goffman writes about the focus of social research, and continues: "Rather moments and their men" (1967, p. 3). A trans-actional perspective would presume moments *and* their men, by taking into account that the *and* here does not refer to a temporal order of priority: both "men" and "moments" mutually presuppose each other; "men" cannot be "men" without the "moments" and vice versa. If we do not take this remark about process reduction into account, then Elias' example of a baby having power over its parents would not actually make sense, for it would still presume that parents can exist prior to or independently of the relations to their babies and vice versa. From the trans-actional perspective imagining the As and the Bs as existing somehow prior to the relations (of power) in which they are constituted, this would be as absurd as imagining a non-blowing wind. Thus, when in this chapter I have spoken, for the sake of analytical clarity, about the As (subordinators/power wielders) *and* the Bs (subordinated/power receivers) as if they were separated "creatures" then tacitly I presume the same methodological guideline that Elias put forth in a related context: "They can be *considered separately*, but *not as being separate*" (Elias 1978, p. 85, emphasis added).

This trans-actional insight has tacitly informed various approaches to power and governance in the social sciences, such as Foucault-inspired studies of bio-power/governmentality (Dean 2010; Bröckling et al. 2010); poststructuralist theories of discourse (Laclau and Mouffe 2001; Torfing 2009) that often combine Foucauldian and Saussurean approaches to discourse with insights from post-Marxian notions of hegemony. Clegg's approach, which, among other things, puts an emphasis on "thinking of power as a phenomenon which can be grasped only relationally" (1989, p. 207), moves poststructuralist insights about the "semiotics of power" (ibid., p. 182) to a full-fledged model of "circuits of power," through borrowing from actor-network theory.² A more recent trans-actional approach offered by Roscigno (2011) draws on almost the entire variety of pertinent disciplines (political science, sociology, institutional and organizational theory etc.) and on the author's own extensive research on discrimination to put forth a "dynamic relational theory of power" (pp. 355–364) that "takes seriously and views interaction, structure and culture as mutually constitutive" (p. 356). The movement of "phronetic" social science inspired by Flyvbjerg (2001), owes much to the Foucauldian trans-actional legacy, as does the "dialectical-relational" approach in critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2013, Chap. 9). Jessop's "strategic-relational approach" to state power (Jessop 2008) or Isaac's "(critical) realist view" of political power (Isaac 1987) have roots in Marxian dialectics. "Process-oriented" political sociology aiming for "analytic narratives" (McAdam et al. 2001; Tilly 2007) or highlighting the "entwined" character of social power (Mann 1993) often fluctuate between trans-actional and inter-actional perspectives on power

(see Chap. 16 of this volume on Mann's legacy). Similar ambiguity characterizes the multitude of research programs taking their lead from Bourdieu's "methodological relationalist" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, pp. 15–19) scheme of the interdependence of field, habitus and capital—the essential conceptual trinity for Bourdieuan conceptualization of power (see Chap. 17 of this volume).³ Various perspectives on network governance (Sørensen and Torfing 2007), ethnographic (Wedeen 1999; Hayward 2000), interpretive (Bevir and Rhodes 2006) and poststructuralist methodology of political analysis (Glynos and Howarth 2007) highlight the inextricable link between meaning, identity and power.

5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has distinguished three perspectives on power that in one way or another have been depicted as "relational." As I have argued elsewhere more extensively (Selg 2016b), the choice between these approaches doesn't have to be zero-sum. It is largely dependent on one's research interests. The point can be made by appealing to Foucault:

[U]nless we are looking at it from a great height and from a very great distance, power is not something that is divided between those who have it and hold it exclusively, and those who do not have it and are subject to it. Power must, I think, be analyzed as something that circulates, or rather as something that functions only when it is part of a chain. It is never localized here or there, it is never in the hands of some, and it is never appropriated in the way that wealth or a commodity can be appropriated. Power functions. Power is exercised through networks, and individuals do not simply circulate in those networks; they are in a position to both submit to and exercise this power. They are never the inert or consenting targets of power; they are always its relays. In other words, power passes through individuals. It is not applied to them ... The individual is in fact a power effect, and at the same time, and to the extent that he is a power effect, the individual is a relay: power passes through the individuals it has constituted. (Foucault 2003, pp. 29–30, emphasis added)

Overall, this quote summarizes the trans-actional perspective on power. What usually gets glossed over when reading this quote is the part I italicized "*unless we are looking at it from a great height and from a very great distance.*" I think the difference between self-actionalism, inter-actionalism and trans-actionalism lies in how much distance each is willing to accept when looking at power: one extreme would be the large-scale "realist" panoramas of international relations, painted with a broad brush listing tanks, troops, money or oil as indicators of power, while the other would be various research programs that uncover the "micro physics" of power in our everyday language use. But what constitutes a proper research interest cannot be decided by a theoretical-methodological discussion. These matters are influenced by so many additional factors besides the normative principles developed by methodologists. Probably

a derivation of an old formulation of Murphy's law about technology takes us closer to having a viable practical rule for choosing research strategy: a researcher has to find a proper balance between knowing absolutely nothing about everything and knowing absolutely everything about nothing.

NOTES

1. He has also remained true to this form in later works, when he proclaims: "I continue to suggest that the concept of power should remain attached to the agency that operates within and upon structures" (Hayward and Lukes 2008, p. 11).
2. See Munro (2009) for a more general account on the relationship between actor-network theory and power.
3. Emirbayer (1997, p. 292) includes Bourdieu among the "relationalist" (= transactionalist) perspectives on power; but, for Dépelteau (2008, pp. 53–54), Bourdieu's general perspective leans strongly towards inter-actionalism (co-determinism), and for Crossley (2011, pp. 26–28) it seems to even be somewhere between inter-actionalism and self-actionalism (though he doesn't use this vocabulary).

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Relational Radicalization

Chares Demetriou and Eitan Y. Alimi

Radicalization is a polysemic word. One of its meanings, increasingly adopted inside and outside academia, evokes an individual's path towards militant activism. What is indicated in this usage of the term is a particular life trajectory, away from conventional political engagement and towards belligerence. This understanding insinuates another meaning of the word, as the adoption of radical ideology—the ideology which is subversive of mainstream ideologies. Strictly speaking, however, radicalization indicating changing behavior and radicalization indicating changing ideas are two different notions, not necessarily crossing paths. And then there is radicalization understood as the movement towards political positions that are extreme or drastic in some sense but not necessarily violence-prone. What is indicated in this understanding may merely be the hardening of political positions, such as, for example, when maximalist claims are made in the course of a contention. It is possible to go on listing a few more meanings of “radicalization,” but surveying the term is not the point here. Quite the contrary in fact, the purpose of this chapter is rather narrow: to discuss relational sociology vis-à-vis a particular conceptualization of the term radicalization.

Here, then, radicalization means the process whereby one or more groups within a social movement turn from predominantly non-violent tactics of contention to predominantly violent tactics of contention, with the continuation of violence after its onset included in the process. This notion stands in contradistinction to the notions mentioned above. It is not the process of an individual's trajectory in life, but a collective, group-driven

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process. And at the crux of the process are not changing ideas but rather changing tactics of contention, specifically the adoption and development of violent tactics. This volume's reader, presumably seduced by at least some of the charms of relational sociology, should recognize the advantages of this notion of radicalization. Inasmuch as social processes can be thought in terms of social relations—as relational concatenations forming and transforming in time, to put it simply—conceptualizing radicalization as a social process opens the door to fruitful relational analysis and theory building. And as it accepts that ideas and behaviors are shaped in the context of relations, this notion of radicalization places both ideational changes and apparent individualistic actions in their correct, processual-relational context.

In exploring the connection between this notion of radicalization and relational sociology, this chapter touches upon relational sociology's treatment of the more general topic of political violence—a topic which may cover different forms, manifestations, and types of violence, or the various actors that employ it. But the chapter's main focus remains on radicalization, with the specific aim to develop conceptual and analytic elaboration on radicalization processes as such. In what follows, therefore, we start with a short discussion of conceptualizations and theories of radicalization from the relational and processual perspectives before turning to the particular conceptualization which we favor.

I THINKING ABOUT RADICALIZATION

The study of radicalization from the prism of relational sociology has come to be associated with scholarship on political violence, social movements, and, less often, a combination of the two. Let us dwell into these lineages, noting the various extents to which they paved the way to the processual-relational conceptualization of radicalization which we adopt and develop. It will be seen that the pathway to this particular conceptualization was not the most favored in the political violence scholarship and the social movements scholarship, but it gained favor in the scholarship combining the two lines.

1.1 *Political Violence Studies*

When at issue is the study of political violence, it must be noted at the outset that the bulk of scholarship does not follow the paradigms of relational sociology. Students of political violence disproportionately work in academic fields in which relationalism has not made firm inroads, fields such as security studies, comparative politics, and international relations. Scholars in these fields tend to follow, rather, rational choice theory, political culture theories, or systems theories; or, perhaps more commonly, they tend to eschew explicit theorization for the sake of empiricism. Characteristically, the immense literature that couches questions of political violence under the label “terrorism” mainly presents scholarship detached from relational sociology. This is a diverse body

of literature, of course, stemming not only from various disciplines but also from various understandings of its subject matter—notoriously, scores of different definitions of terrorism are in use. Nevertheless, this literature has as its common denominator a focus on the violent individuals or the so-called “groups at risk,” including the attributes and activism of these individuals or groups, rather than on the webs of relations that constitute them, enable them, empower them, constrain them, and so on. One consequence of this anthropocentric view is the production of reductionist or even mono-causal explanations; this is especially the case in counterterrorism studies, since their aim of developing succinct policy prescriptions is met through analytical parsimony. A second consequence is the oversight of the developments predating the onset of violence, including those early webs of relations that contribute to the forces precipitating violence. Not surprisingly, the role of states and their agents in leading to, perpetuating, and even escalating the radicalization of activists receive scant attention at best. What is more, the tendency to search for answers in the ideology and mindset of the perpetrators of violence reveals a broader problem in the design of inquiry. Specifically, it leaves unanswered two crucial questions: “Why do pacifist groups of activists end up turning to violence?” and “Why do groups of activists with a history of violence remain non-violent at crucial junctures?”

It must be added, however, that some branches of terrorism studies literature do connect to relationalism, albeit at times inadvertently. One such branch compiles and analyzes information on so-called terrorist networks, especially those pertaining to transnational Salafi jihad. Even though the interest is primarily empirical, rather than theoretical or conceptual, the very fact that the empirical subject matter is considered to be connections among individuals means that the data collection and analysis smacks of relationalism. Some large dataset projects, such as the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)’s Global Terrorism Database or the more recent Government Actions in Terror Environments (GATE) database, therefore leave the door open to such analysis of networks and contacts between conflictants. But several more specifically relational studies exist as well, often juxtaposing networks with ideology or culture. For example, Pedahzur and Perliger (2006) pursue an analysis of the structure of networks in the context of suicide bombers and find, among other things, that actors positioned as network hubs are influential in recruiting. Similarly, Sageman (2004), adopting a psycho-social perspective, finds personal and intergroup relations to be paramount in formulating activist cells. While both of these works pay attention to how activist networks shape and are shaped by cultural templates, Juergensmeyer (2003) takes a different relational direction as he reconstructs the habitus-worldview link of so-called terrorists. In a more critical spirit, Stepanova (2008) draws attention to the dynamism of network formation and to the limited capacity of ideological-functional network models to capture the dynamism.

But one can find more rounded relational treatments of political violence outside terrorism studies. Norbert Elias, Randall Collins, Charles Tilly, and

Roger Gould, after all, are some of the well-known relational thinkers taking up the topic. Here, let us briefly consider the last two of these authors—Gould because his ideas are not only relevant but also underrepresented in this volume, and Tilly because his ideas guide much of this chapter.

In *Collision of Wills* (2003) Gould presents a theory of small-scale conflict. Radicalization as understood here, and political violence more generally, connect to the theory, but many other forms of violence and conflict do as well. Gould's starting point is that interpersonal conflict over trivial stakes is not a property of violence-prone individuals, as one might think in order to account not only for the position that trivial stakes are not worth fighting for but also for the fact that most people do not fight over trivial stakes. Such conflict, he maintains, is rather a property of relations. Building on this, his central thesis is that such conflict is more likely in symmetrical relationships rather than in ones featuring some sort of hierarchy, precisely because the ambiguity of social rank in symmetrical relationships is open to different understandings; that indirect claims to rank can be part of such situations only adds to the tension entailed in the divergent understandings. One extension of this thesis, Gould adds, is that moments when relationships change are moments when the potential for conflict increases. In the next section of the chapter it will be seen that both this thesis and its extension have relevance for processes of radicalization.

Moving on to Tilly, attention must be first directed at *The Politics of Collective Violence* (2003). Even though the author had taken up the question of violence in earlier works, most notably in *From Mobilization to Revolution* (1978), it was not until his 2003 book that he moved away from the confines of the strategic interaction approach to develop a more comprehensive and truly dynamic treatment of the topic. Indeed, Tilly (2003) combines a theoretical and metatheoretical view that is sweeping. This is the view that a wide range of forms of collective violence—from brawls to coordinated attacks against or on behalf of the state—emerge from traceable and definable changes in social relations. Tilly conceptualizes these changes as social mechanisms, which is to say, as recurring social patterns with causal/constitutive efficacy—a non-deterministic, process-sensitive approach to mechanisms that, as explained later in the chapter, we employ in our theory of radicalization.¹ Thus, for example, the mechanism boundary activation refers to the increase in salience of us–them distinctions, and to the corresponding adjustment of relations across the us–them boundary and of relations on each side of the boundary. Likely consequences of boundary activation, according to Tilly, can be found amidst highly coordinated emergent collective violence, where the increase in salience of us–them distinctions overrides other pre-existing webs of social relations; by contrast, he adds, pre-existing social relations tend to have higher relevance when collective violence operates at low levels of coordination (Tilly 2003, 17). The Rwanda genocide is a case in point. Featuring highly coordinated violence in the form of civil war, this episode illustrates how boundary activation—here between Hutus and Tutsis—became so elevated in pertinence that it enabled local populations to slaughter their neighbors (Tilly 2003, 136–142).

1.2 *Social Movements and Contentious Politics*

Like Gould, then, Tilly views collective violence as being relational, but he seeks to understand its development in more dynamic terms than does Gould. Tilly adopts a similar perspective in his collaboration with Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow (McAdam et al. 2001), though now one placed in explicit dialogue with the literature on social movements. The authors' epistemological position remains the apprehension and analysis of the operation of social mechanisms, including their interconnections. But they also argue that the social mechanisms that account for the development of social movements account also for the development of other familial phenomena, such as revolutions, labor strikes, ethnic conflict, and more. They therefore maintain that the scope of comparative research should cover all such phenomena, to which they assign the label "contentious politics." At the same time, they allow that the study of contentious politics can redeploy much of the standard theories used in social movement studies—theories about the mobilization of activists and of other resources, about opportunities for action and for organization, and about the framing of issues, grievances, and claims. What they insist on is that these theories be taken away from any static notion previously attached to them and be placed within the dynamic framework of the analysis of social relations through mechanisms.

But while the contentious politics program promotes relationalism, it must be acknowledged that the field of social movement studies has itself been a fertile ground for relationalism. For example, in what might be arguably termed a proto-relationalism work, Ferree and Hess (1985) analyze networks as organizational forms that help explicate the dialectic between divisions and coalitions within the women's movement during the twentieth century. Diani (1995) employs network analysis to examine the relations among organizations and among individual activists within the Italian environmental movement, conceptualizing the movement itself as a complicated and fluid nexus of formal and informal networks (see also Diani 1992), while Mische (2008), studying youth activist networks in post-dictatorship Brazil, investigates the activists' positioning in multiple and changing networks of affiliation and shows how communication styles evolve out of, and intertwine with, these networks. In these and other works in social movement studies, then, we see the analysis of the formation of coalitions and of other networks, of exchanges of information and of other cultural contents, and of patterns of negotiations and of other transactions—that is, we see the stuff of relational analysis.

Relational analysis in social movement studies, as well as in other areas of research, tends to privilege the meso level of analysis. But it can be added that social movement studies engaging in micro-level analysis do not necessarily fall outside relationalism. The study of recruitment to, and participation in, social movement protest activity, for example, has long pointed to the central role of personal ties between movement activists and would-be activists (e.g., Passy 2003). It can be added, furthermore, that the separation between social

movement studies and contentious politics studies is breaking down—to the delight of the champions of the latter. This is exemplified well by Donatella della Porta’s work on clandestine violence (Della Porta 2013). A long-standing student of social movements, the author maintains that the emergence of clandestine violence—violence perpetrated from the underground, hence violence by small groups with limited military capacity and little or no control of territory—can be explained through the reconstruction of certain key causal mechanisms.² She identifies seven causal mechanisms, three producing polarization, three leading more directly to the formation of clandestine organizations, and one leading to the enclosure of the clandestine group. As she demonstrates how these mechanisms account for leftist, rightist, and religious violence, della Porta, too, shows how relational dynamics are recurring features in many cases regardless of variation in terms of historical background, motivation, and ideology.

Thus the scholarship in contentious politics and social movement studies usefully orients theory in relational ways. But just as usefully it offers other, more elementary lessons. From it one learns to pay attention to the agents of contention, which is to say, those individuals, groups, and/or organizations belonging in a network of informal interactions on the basis of shared interests, values, beliefs, and solidarity. One learns also to pay attention to the means of contention, including but not restricted to protest campaigns, and to the targets of contention, including the authorities but also elites and other state allies. And one learns to pay attention, too, to the context of contention—the cultural or political conflict in which the agents, the means, and the targets of contention are embedded.

1.3 *Radicalization Conceptualized as Relational Process*

It is on these relational and broader conceptual grounds that our approach to radicalization builds, including the conceptualization of radicalization with which we start. Developed in our solo and collaborative works (Alimi 2011; Alimi et al. 2012, 2015; Bosi et al. 2014; Demetriou 2012a), this conceptualization considers radicalization to be an emergent phenomenon connected to a social movement engaged in contentious politics. A social movement is here understood, quite conventionally, as involving: (1) informal interaction networks among a plurality of individuals, groups, and/or organizations based on a certain shared purpose and solidarity; (2) frequent, albeit not exclusive, use of non-institutional forms of protest; (3) consequential claim-making directed at authorities and other elites and power holders; and (4) a focus on political and/or cultural conflict, with the aim of either fostering or preventing social change (Snow et al. 2004; Della Porta and Diani 2006; Tarrow 2011). Thus, we hold radicalization to be the process through which one or more social movement organizations shift from predominantly non-violent tactics of contention to predominantly violent ones, as well as the subsequent process of contention maintaining and possibly intensifying the introduced violence. It can be seen that those conceptualizations of terrorism that are grounded on activists’ violent tactics can be readily covered by our conceptualization of radicalization.

By considering radicalization as a process that includes both the phase before the earnest onset of violence and the phase after it, this conceptualization allows for a rounded examination of the phenomenon. It allows, first, the examination of how non-violent forms of contention evolve into violent ones. While, as noted above, the scholarship in the terrorism studies tradition tends to eschew such examination, it is important to heed the observation that social movements rarely start their existence being violent. Understanding the range of their tactics and the ways violent tactics enter the scene to accompany, complement, or supersede non-violent tactics is therefore crucial. For example, in contrast to present-day image and perception, the currently violent Jewish Settler movement had little if any violent component in its repertoire of contention during its incipient and early stages of political activism, interestingly despite the presence of violence-prone worldviews and ample environmental stimuli for aggression (Sprinzak 1991).

Second, conceptualizing radicalization as process allows also for the examination of how newly introduced violence is maintained and potentially upgraded. Such examination actually opens the door to the analysis of how activism combines various violent tactics of contention or moves among them—much like Tilly (2003) proposes. Thus, one can identify several forms of violent activism and rank them based on their destructiveness or some other criteria. One criterion, outstanding in our view, may regard the target of violence, which would yield categories such these: violence towards state targets, towards specific civilian individuals, towards members of a category of individuals, towards individuals as collateral damage, or towards populations indiscriminately. These are categories arguably indicating a qualitative range of radicalization levels, where targeting members of the state is the least radical and indiscriminate targeting the most radical. The translational Salafi Jihad movement and particularly al-Qaeda's activism during the run-up to and including 9/11, offer an illustration of this sort of qualitative shift in radicalization. Al-Qaeda pursued violence falling in all of the aforementioned categories, save for violence targeting specific individuals; such targeted assassinations would practically mean targeting Sunni Muslims, when al-Qaeda faced strong incentives to avoid alienating Sunni publics because of the repeated uprooting experiences imposed on its leaders and the resultant distancing from their home publics. The qualitative range of al-Qaeda tactics unfolded along the radicalization process: initially these tactics employed violence variably against state targets, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, and, a little later in time, against Shi'a Muslims as well as infidels, and then turned to less careful categorical violence in which Sunni Muslims were "collateral damage," to eventually indiscriminate violence victimizing Sunnis as well as others. The attacks on 9/11, therefore, can be seen as the culmination of the radicalization process not only because of their destructiveness but also because they represent the highest qualitative degree of radicalized tactics (Alimi et al. 2015, Chaps. 5 and 6).

Thinking of radicalization in terms of process is advantageous as it does justice to the complexity of the subject matter. For one, it is important that radicalization processes are taken to be path dependent but not determinist.

Following Tilly's epistemology, their relational complexity can be apprehended and simplified through the analysis/reconstruction of constituent processes (mechanisms). But respectfully acknowledging complexity and resultant contingency means that neither the processes of radicalization as such nor the constituent processes can be taken to be deterministic. Rather, they have to be recognized as open-ended, while, to some extent or another, also path dependent. The extension of this position is that radicalization processes can slow down or even reverse. Building on this, one can develop flexible comparative research, where intensified processes of radicalization can be compared with dissipated or reversed ones.

Furthermore, analyzing emergent processes directs attention to how radicalization unfolds, rather than to why it unfolds. Of course, asking *why questions* may not be in and of itself bad. But the research which has traditionally done so—and this includes most research in the field of terrorism studies—has faced difficulties. It has offered accounts of radicalization's so-called root causes—often said to exist at the micro or macro levels rather than the meso level—but has difficulty accounting for instances where the existence of “root causes” does not produce radicalization or, perhaps more often, where existing “root causes” do not produce radicalization at an early point in time but do so at a later point. What is missing from *why accounts*, in other words, is *how* “root causes” and other such factors become effective. The processual understanding of radicalization, by contrast, supports accounts of how micro- and macro-level factors intersect with meso-level relational dynamics, rendering those dynamics consequential.

While we maintain that it is advantageous to treat radicalization as a process relating to a social movement's use of violence, we recognize that this conceptualization is not free of drawbacks. The most notable downside is that it links radicalization to violence contesting the state but not to the state's own ordinary or extraordinary violence. To be sure, this conceptualization does not ignore the role that the state security forces or the political context more generally may have in the development of radicalization on the part of a movement organization; in fact, the next section will show that we consider such role to be an integral dimension of the radicalization process. But by conceptualizing radicalization as change in social movement organizations' tactics, we imply that radicalization is a term that does not apply to the state, and certainly not to the state in its dealings that are unrelated to social movements. Given this, we need to underscore the caveat that the state is always violent and violence-prone—indeed, wanting to monopolize violence—and that its quantitative and qualitative levels of violence can go up or down depending on various factors and circumstances.

2 A RELATIONAL THEORY OF RADICALIZATION

If relations are crucial in processes of radicalization because they mediate between micro and macro factors, that is, between individuals' motivations and group ideologies, how is a theory of radicalization to map them? If interactions entailed in relations activate potential root causes, how is the theory to capture

the corresponding relational dynamics? Recognizing that social reality takes shape at the intersection of manifold social relations, a relational theory of radicalization needs to be comprehensive. As it places social movement organizations at the center of the radicalization process, it must capture and examine the webs of relations that comprise the movement's context as well as the movement itself.

2.1 *A Theoretical Framework: Five Arenas, Five Mechanisms*

As discussed above, the literature on social movements and contentious politics, while not offering a comprehensive model of such relational webs, offers important clues. Bringing those clues together, we conceptualize a framework of analysis and of theory building.

More specifically, we conceptualize five arenas of interaction that, conjointly considered, allow for a rounded examination of processes of radicalization. These five arenas allow for the conceptualization and analysis of five corresponding relational mechanisms.³ These arenas of interaction we understand as the underpinnings of the relational mechanisms. We take them to be “sites and frameworks of interchanges, communication, bargaining, and negotiation among specific sets of actors” (Alimi et al. 2015, 14). They pertain to a given episode of contention and therefore do not necessarily have permanency as arenas or import beyond that episode.

Social movement studies literature has long acknowledged that a movement's political environment is important, and the first arena of interaction we identify stems from this knowledge. The arena between the movement and its political environment, therefore, is comprised of the movement's multiple relations with non-state elite centers of power and with state and interstate institutions, including the socio-symbolic figurations intertwined with these relations, such as figurations of trust or legitimacy. This encompassing arena of interaction provides the underpinnings for the operation of a complicated but crucial relational mechanism, which we coin *upward spirals of political opportunities and threats*. This relational mechanism entails the changes in the political environment that worsen the strategic position of the movement, thus affecting negatively the movement's political leverage and, more generally, the space of collective action and goal attainment. We return to this relational mechanism and elaborate on its complexity below.

The second arena of interaction we identify concerns interactions between movement activists and security forces. We argue that this arena must be conceptualized separately from the arena between the movement and its political environment because particular dynamics may well be featured in each of the two arenas; for example, changes in the movement's strategic positioning may be independent from dynamics developing within the arena between movement activists and security forces, or they may be related but be temporarily distinct, one leading to the other. While this arena of interaction, like any other, can foster various relational mechanisms, we maintain that the relational

mechanism *outbidding* is particularly important as a driver for radicalization. Outbidding refers to action–counteraction dynamics that raise the stakes for the two sides as they struggle for control and influence. However, while outbidding clearly affects the development of contentious tactics, it would be a mistake to think that it is necessarily the most central facet of the radicalization process—let alone a synonym for it. Indeed, it is possible to have an episode of radicalization in which the crucial decision by a social movement organization to adopt violence predates any dynamics between movement activists and security forces. And it is also a mistake to think that this is a simple mechanism; among the elements that may add complexity to it, for example, is the change of the composition of the arena of interaction itself, whereby new social movement actors and/or new security forces actors may enter or exit the stage.

The third arena of interaction we identify is the arena within the movement. This is a space long recognized in the literature as being organizationally plural, as well as being important in the development of contentious politics. A social movement typically consists of various actors and organizations that, based on common interests and beliefs, interact with one another and affect each other's strategy; a monolithic movement is indeed the exception. We maintain that a key relational mechanism in this arena is *competition for power*. While social movement actors/organizations often complement each other, at times they undercut each other over various stakes relating to tactics, strategies, identities, and even goals. When competitive, these interactions amount to competition for power. Moreover, there can exist intra-movement interactions over more overt or more permanent power stakes, such as popular support, economic gains, or leadership positions; obviously, these fall within the operation of the mechanism as well. Competition for power is conducive to radicalization because it tends to feed the various social movement actors' and organizations' need to push harder for the movement goals, to prove their loyalty to the movement commitments, to demonstrate ideological purity, and so on.

The three arenas of interaction discussed so far are always present in episodes of contentious politics because the actors constituting them are always present and pertinent. And when the aforementioned relational mechanisms operate out of them, which is likely but not necessary to happen, the mechanism operations tend to be crucial constitutive factors of the radicalization process. But two additional arenas of interaction may be present as well, though this time their presence is not a foregone conclusion. When present, the two additional arenas of interaction may give rise to two corresponding relational mechanisms which can contribute, in their turn, to the radicalization process, potentially in crucial ways.

The fourth arena of interaction, therefore, is the one between the movement and a countermovement. There is not necessarily a countermovement to every social movement, but often there is, developing before, after, or contemporaneously with the development of the movement. (The labels “movement” and “countermovement” stem from the researcher's point of view, hence the focus is on “movement”.) Typically, the movement and the countermovement have

opposite or at least incongruent goals and draw support from different population segments. Their interactions may be indirect more often than direct, but comprise an important arena all the same. We hold that a central relational mechanism in this arena is *object shift*. Following McAdam and colleagues (2001), object shift refers to changes in the relation between claimants and the object of their claims, such as, for example, when an ethnic movement expands its claim for linguistic protections to cover broader political autonomy as a result of a countermovement's campaign for cultural homogenization. Object shift does not necessarily have to be a push along the path to radicalization, but, as seen from the example just given, this is possible.

The fifth and final arena of interaction we identify regards the interactions between the movement and the public. This is an important arena because social movements often have performative orientations, aiming to have an effect on the public. However, this may not always be the case since some movement organizations may be social pariahs. This is why this arena of interaction may not always exist in episodes of radicalization. A public is, of course, diverse, but in broad strokes one can think of it as made up of three parts: a movement's supporters, its opponents, and third parties. Usually social movements care about supporters and third parties, and it is changes in relations with members of these categories that may affect the radicalization process most particularly. The relational mechanism capturing such key changes is what we call *dissociation*. This refers to the increase in organizational independence, broadly defined, of the movement or parts of the movement from its supporters and third parties. This is a likely driver of radicalization because when the influence of supporters and third parties decreases, a restraining effect on the movement is likely to decrease also. This is not necessarily the case, but it is a likely outcome because public segments follow the law of averages more than do movement activists, which means more moderation is usually found in the former than in the latter.

In sum, we maintain that the first three of these five arenas of interaction always exist in any given episode of contention because these arenas are comprised of interactions among actors who are always present and pertinent. The last two arenas may or may not exist at any given episode, depending on the presence and pertinence of actors. The arenas of interaction—be they three, four, or five—provide the relational underpinnings for the operation of their corresponding relational mechanisms, though such operations are not inevitable.

2.2 *The Comparison of Episodes of Radicalization: Similarities and Differences*

What we have proposed is a relational framework of analysis that maps the important arenas of interaction and captures the main dynamics therein. Such a relational framework provides theoretical direction but also remains open to theoretical elaboration. Drawing from existing theory on social movements

and contentious politics, the development of our framework can be considered to have followed a deductive mode. But ample room for induction is left once the framework yields comparative work. Indeed, the framework allows for comparison with clear inductive paths to theory development. We turn to comparison and the inductive paths in this and the following subsections. In this subsection we discuss the inductive path relating to the fact that any of the five relational mechanisms, while recurring across episodes of contention, can be constituted by different combinations of sub-mechanisms in each episode. To simplify the discussion, we single out the relational mechanism *upward spirals of political opportunities and threats*.

Despite our succinct presentation of the relational mechanism above, determining deductively its connotations is actually not straightforward. The mechanism is complicated on more than one front, and so it is expedient to start with a brief discussion of this complexity. As seen, the relational mechanism refers to changes in a social movement's political environment that worsen its strategic position. As the movement exerts its political leverage from its strategic position, this relational mechanism is connected to changes that close down its space for collective action and/or decrease the chances of attaining its goals. The relational mechanism is complicated, for one, because collective action and goal attainment do not necessarily co-depend. Thus, the closing down of the movement's space for collective action may likely take the movement away from its goals, but alternatively may have no effect on goal attainment or may even bring the movement closer to its goals; and vice versa, a reduction of the chances for goal attainment may or may not relate to the space for collective action, with positive or negative relation both being possible (on these points we follow Koopmans 2004). Furthermore, the strong likelihood that the levels of threat and possibility go up and down as time and circumstances unfold adds more complexity to the relational mechanism.

What simplifies matters in determining the connotations of the relational mechanism, we argue, is to think in terms of aggregate net effects. We therefore consider the net effect of political environment changes being towards the closing down of opportunities for collective action and the reduction of the chances for goal attainment. Indeed, the use of the word "spirals" in our labeling of the relational mechanism is precisely based on the expectation that the operation of the mechanism is not linear at all and certainly not a one-time expression. Of course, there might be episodes of contention in which the overall direction of these changes is indeterminate; when this is the case, however, the analysis of the changes remains useful because it reveals dynamics which, despite contradicting each other, may likely have important ramifications in the process of radicalization at large through connections to other relational mechanisms. But when the changes are primarily towards the direction suggested by the mechanism, this is clearly conducive to a change from predominantly non-violent to predominantly violent tactics of contention; after all, if non-violent tactics of contention work to produce activism and to bring the movement closer to its goals, why radicalize them?

But this relational mechanism is also complicated because its analytical utility is based on an assumption that may not always hold true. The assumption is that the development of upward spirals of political opportunities and threats—the changes worsening the movement’s strategic position—is more or less read accurately by the movement activists, which is to say that movement-attributed changes in the political environment correspond to actual changes. Other scholars, such as McAdam and colleagues (2001) and Goodwin and Jasper (2004), prefer to emphasize the movement activists’ attribution of political opportunity. Our view is that movement activists tend to read correctly at least big changes in their political environment and act upon them, which means that the basic operations of the mechanism yield changes in movement activism and strategy. However, if changes in political opportunities and threats are subtle and hard to read, or if the situation within the movement itself produces divergent readings, then these are dynamics that can be analyzed closely and explained in more complicated ways. It might become expedient, therefore, to analyze how subjective interpretations, cultural templates, and so on, intertwine with the relational dynamics at hand.

Thus, overall changes in the arena of interaction between the movement and its political environment may well be in the direction of upward spirals of political opportunities and threats. This relational mechanism, as it recurs across episodes of contention, presents a general dynamic that is important in comparative research. But while the cross-episode similarity that is signified by this mechanism is one aspect of importance, another aspect relates to the constituent composition of the mechanism. Here the expectation is not of similarity; rather, it is expected that the forces constituting the relational mechanism vary across episodes. Consistent with our relational-processual epistemology, we maintain that these constituent forces be conceptualized as mechanisms as well, or more precisely, as sub-mechanisms in relation to the mechanism explored above.⁴ This creates a pathway to inductive research, since the search for the sub-mechanisms is open-ended. It creates a pathway to fruitful comparison, too, since the analysis of the cross-episode variation in sub-mechanisms may well reveal something important about the radicalization process in general, such as a connection between the radicalization process and the initial/historical conditions that inform it.

To illustrate these points, let us refer to the work we developed with Bosi (Alimi et al. 2015). In that work we compared systematically and in depth three episodes of radicalization: the radicalization of the social movement group Red Brigades connected to the Extra-Parliamentary Left movement in Italy during the 1960s and 1970s; the radicalization of the social movement group Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston (EOKA) connected to the Enosis movement in Cyprus during the 1940s and 1950s; and the radicalization of al-Qaeda connected to the Salafi Jihad movement during the 1980s and 1990s. We found that in each of these episodes of radicalization different sets of sub-mechanisms constituted the relational mechanism upward spirals of political opportunities and threats. The sub-mechanisms *threat attribution*, *boundary activation*, and *opportunity attribution* constituted it in the episode of the Red Brigades; the sub-mechanisms *diffusion*, *brokerage*, and *certification*

constituted it in the episode of EOKA; and the sub-mechanisms *internalization*, *decertification*, and *uprooting* constituted it in the episode of al-Qaeda. These diverse sets of sub-mechanisms show how dynamics from widely different directions can converge to constitute an outcome with a specific form, that is, the relational mechanism at hand. They also show how any given sub-mechanism does not have a predetermined role in the constitution of the relational mechanism: just notice how certification contributed to the constitution of upward spirals of political opportunities and threats in the episode of EOKA, but decertification did so in the episode of al-Qaeda.

Cross-episode comparisons of the sub-mechanisms that constitute a given relational mechanism can reveal useful connections to the context of the episodes. This can be seen, for example, in the episode of EOKA. It is instructive that EOKA, a group formed to wage an armed campaign against the British colonial state on Cyprus, emerged out of a movement asking for the island's transfer of rule from the UK to Greece. The movement as a whole and EOKA in particular took advantage of the postwar diffusion of liberal ideas prescribing, most particularly, self-determination of peoples—hence the sub-mechanisms diffusion. This sub-mechanism concatenated with the sub-mechanisms brokerage and certification. Certification meant, above all, that the political establishment in Greece and the people of Greece signaled their approval of the Enosis movement's claim for union with Greece, while brokerage primarily meant that the Greek government acted as the movement's broker in international fora and especially the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. All three sub-mechanisms, then, readily related to an international context which gave hope to anticolonial struggles.

This example, furthermore, illustrates how the relational mechanism under discussion can indeed involve spirals, rather than linear progression. The opening of postwar political opportunities was read accurately enough by the key organizations of the Enosis movement, and this led to their intensified activism. Brokerage, furthermore, added to the movement's bargaining position since it created a pool of international potential supporters. But these favorable-for-the-movement changes reversed as the contention became a head-on clash with the UK government. The resort to violence via EOKA came about at a moment of closing opportunities and increasing threats for the movement. In particular, the sub-mechanisms brokerage and certification became precarious at this stage and so meant threat for the movement more than opportunity, which meant that the overall changes in the arena of interaction were upwardly. In fact, the upward spirals of political opportunities and threats in the episode of EOKA show a pattern which is commonplace: initial improvement of strategic positioning worsens as contestation progresses. This is a pattern especially conducive to radicalization.

2.3 *The Comparison of Episodes of Radicalization: Varied Pathways*

Each of the five relational mechanisms of our framework is expected to be a driver of radicalization. But as each of them tends to reinforce the others, the relational mechanisms become especially conducive to radicalization when

their operations combine. The concatenation of these relational mechanisms, then, is an added driver of radicalization. Finding how they concatenate, however, is a matter of inductive research. What our own research reveals is that two particular aspects of concatenation call for attention. These are, first, the relative consequentiality of each relational mechanism and, second, the sequence which the interaction of the five relational mechanisms might take. Here we briefly discuss these aspects and their potential for theory building via references to the three episodes of radicalization introduced above.

Not all relational mechanisms had the same consequentiality in the three episodes of radicalization, and in fact the consequentiality of any of the relational mechanisms in any of the episodes varied across the radicalization process. To illustrate, the relational mechanism outbidding was the most consequential relational mechanism during the early phase of the radicalization process of both the al-Qaeda and the Red Brigades, while the relational mechanism upward spirals of political opportunities and threats was so during the early phase of the radicalization process of EOKA. In the later phase of the respective processes, when violence was taken to new levels, the relational mechanism competition for power gained salience with respect to al-Qaeda, the relational mechanism upward spirals of political opportunities and threats gained salience with respect to the Red Brigades, and the relational mechanism outbidding gained salience with respect to EOKA.

The second aspect of concatenation, relating to the sequence of relational mechanism interaction, is not detached from the question of mechanism consequentiality. But it regards most particularly the articulation of the relational mechanisms and the sequence in which such articulation may occur. The episode of EOKA, somewhat familiar by now, can offer an illustration of this. Upward spirals of political opportunities and threats were the main precipitators leading to the adoption of violence by EOKA. Subsequently, and while outbidding between EOKA and the colonial armed forces led to the intensification of violence, upward spirals of political opportunities and threats concatenated with the relational mechanism object shift in a crucial way. That is, object shift meant here the attention which the Enosis movement, including EOKA, gave to a countermovement resolutely opposing the movement. Led by Turkish Cypriots, supported by the Turkish government, and encouraged by the British government, the countermovement related to politics transcending Cyprus; it related, therefore, to developments comprising the movement's political environment, hence the interaction between the relational mechanisms object shift and upward spirals of political opportunities and threats. Thus, as outbidding between EOKA and the colonial armed forces was well under way, the countermovement's activism added to the threats facing EOKA and the Enosis movement at large. The sequence of relational mechanism interaction, in other words, whereby intensified object shift followed the intensification of outbidding and led to renewed upward spirals of political opportunities and threats, contributed to the exacerbation of radicalization.

Of course, adequately explaining the mechanism consequentiality and the mechanism sequence that transpired in our three episodes would require

the full explication of the episodes, something which we cannot do here. But it is noteworthy that our empirical findings support the general claim which earlier in the chapter we attributed to Roger Gould—that moments of relational change open up the possibility for the breakout of violence. This can be seen, for example, in the radicalization process of al-Qaeda. If the early forced exile of al-Qaeda leaders from Saudi Arabia to Sudan, in 1992, was already consequential in a process whereby al-Qaeda's mode of contention began to shift from resistive to offensive—indicated by the attacks on UN/US forces in Mogadishu in 1993 and the attack on US-run Saudi National Guard Office building in Riyadh in 1995—the process intensified after the second forced exile in May 1996, this time from Sudan to Afghanistan. This exile led some of al-Qaeda's leaders, including Bin-Laden, to become distant from their respective societies and allowed competition to develop between those leaders and Afghanistan-based key activists and leaders. Importantly, it also pushed Bin-Laden and his co-expatriates to seek to rebuild and reconsolidate al-Qaeda's financial and political fortunes through an alliance with a murderous, anti-Shi'a, international pariah regime: the Taliban. Shortly after, we saw al-Qaeda occupying a key role in the November 1997 massacre in Luxor, in the Mazar-a-Sharif anti-Shi'a carnage of August 7, 1998, and in the bombings of US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania that took place on the same day.

3 CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have traced the lineages of the relational study of radicalization, showing that they extend to literatures on political violence, social movements, and contentious politics. We have described how our own conceptualization of radicalization stems from these intellectual traditions and explained how the processual-relational outlook of this conceptualization allows for mechanisms-based theory building. We have ultimately argued that radicalization is a path-dependent but open-ended process characterized by interaction among specific relational mechanisms which develop out of specific arenas of interaction connected to a social movement's engagement in politics of contention. As a conclusion, we would like to point to a significant way of extending this conceptualization of radicalization, that is, the space it creates for the study of de-radicalization.

Earlier we pointed out that the open-ended nature of radicalization processes meant that they could slow down or reverse. At this point, having discussed relational mechanisms in some length, we can make a crucial conceptual distinction between a halted or abating mechanism, on the one hand, and a reverse mechanism, on the other. A halted mechanism is one whose operations cease, and an abating mechanism is one whose operations slow down. A reverse mechanism, however, refers to operations that produce the opposite outcome from that which is produced by a given mechanism. It is in fact possible to conceive of reverse mechanisms in connection to many of the mechanisms known in the literature. Thus, for example, what might be termed *boundary*

dissolution is the reverse of the mechanism known as *boundary formation*, the latter referring to the “creation of us–them distinctions between two political actors” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 215) and the former referring to the dissolution of the said distinctions. By the same token, we can distinguish between de-radicalization and non-radicalization. De-radicalization implies the halt or abatement of the operations producing radicalization, while non-radicalization implies a political contention which holds some potential for violence eruption (hence radicalization) but in actuality steers away from it.

Exploring this distinction in our work (Alimi et al. 2015—but see also Della Porta 2013 for a similar line of investigation), we investigated episodes of political contention that remained non-radicalized and found that crucial roles in them were played by relational mechanisms that were the reverse of the relational mechanisms identified in our analytical model of radicalization. For example, in one such episode, that of the Catalan nationalist movement in the 1970s, the relational mechanism *consensus mobilization* operated widely and with evident consequences in the production of a non-violent mode of contention. Consensus mobilization, we hold, is the reverse relational mechanism of competition for power; in the Catalan episode it operated in the arena of interaction within the movement, just as our model of radicalization held for competition of power. Furthermore, in our work we also empirically investigated de-radicalization. Accordingly, we examined moments and openings in the radicalization process of the Red Brigades, EOKA, and al-Qaeda, respectively, where the process slowed down and could have potentially halted. Discussing the halt of the process—de-radicalization—was, of course, speculative, since violence did not cease; but our counterfactual discussion remained grounded in the relational logic of mechanism operations and was therefore instructive of the open-ended nature of those radicalization processes.

Our empirical analyses of non-radicalization and non-radicalization, then, provide support to the logic of our theory of radicalization, since that logic identifies path-dependent but open-ended processes, mechanisms, and sub-mechanisms. Consequently, our theory informs not only radicalization studies but also a host of other related intellectual endeavors, from counterterrorism studies to conflict resolution studies, to transitional justice studies.

NOTES

1. In more precise terms, for Tilly, social mechanisms refer to changes in social relations such that the changed relations reappear in form across time and space and have varied consequences, either as discreet causal forces or, more likely, as forces constitutive of bigger social formations (Tilly 2001, 25–26; McAdam et al. 2001, 24; see also the chapter on Tilly in this volume).
2. Della Porta’s understanding of mechanisms differs somewhat from Tilly’s understanding. She takes mechanisms to refer to chains of interaction that filter structural conditions and produce effects (Della Porta 2013, 23–25).
3. Our notion of mechanism builds on Tilly’s notion, as developed in his solo and collaborative, with Tarrow and McAdam, works. Specifically, in a series of

publications (Demetriou 2009, 2012b; Alimi et al. 2012, 2015) we expound a notion of mechanism that allows for multiple realizability, hence clearing up a common misunderstanding of Tilly's notion.

4. According to our epistemology, the distinction between a mechanism and a sub-mechanism reflects not a distinction with regard to the substantive qualities of the mechanisms but rather choices about the level of analysis. Hence, one study may treat a given relational change as a mechanism, while another study may treat the same relational change as a sub-mechanism.

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The Relational Meaning-Making of Riots: Narrative Logic and Network Performance of the London “Riots”

Christian Morgner

I INTRODUCTION

There was an almost unanimous reaction by politicians, the media and even social scientists in using the label riot for what happened in early August 2011 in several cities in the UK (see Briggs 2012; Benyon 2012; Gorringe and Rosie 2011; Greenslade 2011a, b; Murji and Neal 2011; *The Guardian*/LSE 2011; NatCen 2011; Angel 2012). The most common narrative when telling the story cites the killing of Mark Duggan as a trigger that sparked violent behavior in deprived areas of London. This included clashes with the police and setting cars and buildings on fire. From here, the violent events (including an enormous amount of looting) spread not only in London but also to other cities in the UK, putting Britain into a state of shock.

The most surprising fact is that virtually no one questioned the use of the term riot and its narrative, nor discussed the inherent (political) meaning and application or addressed the analytical and conceptual qualities of the term riot. This chapter asserts that the use of the label by social scientists in particular channeled their explanation and focus in a specific direction, which provides a limited conceptual comprehension of what happened. In this chapter, the use of the term riot and its highly problematic consequences for social research are addressed from a relational sociology perspective (see Crossley 2016). Such conceptual or theoretical discussions of the term are relatively rare. (There are, of course, an abundance of empirical studies.) This chapter does not present a coherent or fully integrated theory, but it will raise a number of theoretical

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arguments that relate to each other. This wider theoretical and analytical vocabulary will enable riot researchers to unpack greater social complexity. The chapter will put Harrison C. White's conception of networks as narrative or communicative entities at the forefront, using this as the underlying force linking different concepts and empirical observations. The chapter will make use of a range of theoretical terms from such theories and concepts as network, narration, motive talk, attribution, conflict and carnivalism. These theoretical considerations are embedded in empirical material, for instance, statistics, media coverage, secondary analysis of interviews and social media. Overt reductions to simple labels and categories are to be avoided in order to gain a more differentiated and balanced picture. The terms and concepts being developed will pay attention to a range of other secondary concepts used by social scientists, such as the notion of triggers and motives. The chapter will make a strong claim that such events cannot be studied as if they occur outside of social reality, exist somehow apart from it or are even asocial or anti-social; instead it will stress the normality of the way in which this form of social reality unfolds and its particular relational structure and logic. In sum, the chapter will present different ties and strings, which form the narrative called "riot."

2 ESTABLISHED MEDIA NARRATIVES OF RIOTS

There is no doubt that politicians and the media have their own agendas, thus favoring a particular worldview and vocabulary. For instance, political reactions aim at control and security issues, at promising that law and order will be upheld. Media reactions might address negative consequences and repeat them several times (thus increasing the negative image through a sort of negative feedback or loop). They will focus on large numbers, on the outstanding and singular—all of which makes "good" news. Both social spheres are in a position in which they have to provide immediate coverage and, consequently, explanations. The term riot became widely used to explain this notion of the singular and outstanding—people rioted, something they normally do not or should not do—and from here the explanations went into the why and how.

What happened was seen as shocking (common frames of explanation or interpretation could not cope with it), and an immediate need to explain the notion of riots became apparent. A range of social scientists and social researchers offered explanations or even collaborated with the media (*The Guardian/LSE* 2011). It seems that this common sense was not further questioned, and it provided the basis for the majority of the studies conducted in the following year. Although the term riot might have been of use in the media and political arenas, the wider area of social research did not engage in a critical discussion of this label and its consequence for social research. This chapter will address, in principle, three issues of the term riot, which should be regarded more carefully: (1) the political use and history of the label riot; (2) the reductive impact on social reality and subsequent explanations; and (3) the homogenizing effect upon its logic and causes.

Although the term riot might seem to be convincing to those who regarded themselves as not participating, thinking this way causes one to ignore the normative and political consequences of its use. In its normative context, the term riot mainly distinguishes between those who behave, uphold the law and act civilized, and those who cannot control their behavior, are outrageous or are criminals. The term riot thus has a signaling function demarcating the social world into two zones, labeling the damage-doing gathering, which is disapproved of, and using terms like *protest* or *demonstration* for similar events that are approved. Moreover, this political zoning of behavior is constructed as if it were an understanding shared by all members of society. However, as Charles Tilly (2003: 18–19) has shown: “In cataloguing thousands of violent events—many of them called riots (or the local-language equivalent) by authorities and observers—from multiple countries of several centuries, I have not once found an instance in which the participants called the event a riot or identified themselves as rioters.” Furthermore, such labels are bound to change in the later chapters of history. The US government and many social scientists labeled the anti-Vietnam and anti-racist movements in the United States in the 1960s in terms of riots and rioters. Nowadays, such characterizations seem awkward; those involved in such movements have rather entered into the heroic chapters of history, and their politicians have fallen into disgrace. Thus, an explanation of what happened in London and elsewhere in the UK during August 2011 might consider a more relational constitution of this term.

The label riot also has a profound effect upon wider social relations—who takes part, and who is “apart.” For instance, the former encompass those who were violent, looted shops and engaged in other criminal activities while the rest did not. However, such a perspective ignores the fact that society cannot be sliced into different pieces. The police, statements by politicians, the media coverage and even the very people who followed the events on their TVs were, from the perspective of relational sociology, constitutive features through which meaning was established. The constitution of meaning must be seen as part of a complex network of different narratives based in societal reality and not apart from it. However, the label riot suggested that the meaning of the events derived purely from the activities of those perceived as rioting. (Tilly showed that these people consider themselves otherwise, although the construction of meaning is hardly in the hands of the rioters alone.) This also had serious consequences for the type of explanation that followed, which aimed to base the riot in the motives of those who participated as rioters. Questions arose as to why people participated in the riots and what caused their behavior to change. These causal or linear types of explanations can be grouped into three general types: sociodemographic explanations, normative or value-based explanations and political explanations (see Birch and Allen 2012: 33).

The sociodemographic explanation tends to collate various statistics on the prevailing economic conditions, namely, levels of deprivation and rising inequality, in particular in light of the spending cuts of the government’s deficit-reduction program. The second type speaks of a moral and normative decline

but also of failed social integration and low education. The third type links the riots and recent elite scandals, essentially providing ammunition to those who felt that they did not get their share of these profits. A variant of this type linked the riots with a general mistrust of the police, caused by new forms of policing. However, all of these approaches have two difficulties: (1) they cannot explain why these motives led to a series of very specific actions on this particular day and time¹; and (2) the empirical evidence (mostly of a quantitative nature) does not explain why other regions with similar features did not experience the same actions (for an overview of this critique, see McPhail 1994).

The notion of riot subsequently suggests that the people who were part of the riots were all rioters, engaging more or less in the same activities. An extreme version of this suggests that all were looting, burning down houses and fighting with the police, relying more or less on the same motivational resources. This picture suggests that there is virtually no difference between individual action and collective action. Furthermore, this notion makes reference to theories of mass psychology and crowd theory, where the individuality and diversity of social activities is suppressed by the event—in other words, people are acting without thinking. McPhail and Wohlstein's (1983) research (mostly through video analysis) confirms that there are numerous different activities taking place during these events, with very often only a minor group behaving violently. Nevertheless, this aspect of the notion "riot" led to very general and abstract questions: Why did the riots happen? Or, why did people riot? These questions try to explain the diverse behavior of several thousand people through cause-and-effect explanations. Furthermore, the internal logic of such social occurrences, the details of how such events unfold, the cascades of social behavior and the reinforcing feedback are virtually ignored.

The aforementioned discussion of the term riot revealed that it works as an epistemological obstacle (Bachelard 1994). Beside its normative and political connotations, it channels the scientific discourse into a particular direction and logic, blocking a more complex and differentiated approach. Consequently, the second part of this chapter carves out a different analytical vocabulary that uses ideas as developed in relational sociology in combination with a reinterpretation of existing empirical material.

3 RELATIONAL NETWORKS AND MEANING-MAKING

The following will outline a different theoretical vocabulary that is more capable of understanding the relational formation of social meaning, which cannot simply be attributed to the intentions and motives of certain people. The chapter will suggest that the label riot is but one part of an overall narrative, which is created in a complex network of different narratives, stories or communicative exchanges.² Such an idea of a communicative network has been proposed by Harrison C. White. Although the events were labeled as anarchic, disorder or unrest means that a procession of meaning was possible, although these labels declared that the events seemed to have no order. Thus, if the events did not

lead to a chaotic assemblage of meaning, how could the different activities have been linked up and therefore integrated into an overall narrative and procession of meaning? White suggests that such linkages emerged from “interacting control struggles” (1992: 150). This means that the elements (activities, events, reports and utterances) of a network evolve through a form of mutual co-production.³ The basic idea is that the creation of meaning prompts efforts to embed the meaning or relate it to other events; subsequently, the creation of meaning has to reckon with such counter-meanings (White speaks here of forms of control and counter-control of meaning).⁴ In other words, the network describes complex coordination efforts with regard to the elements of a network through other elements of the same network. “Identities come to perceive the likelihood of impacts to other identities in some string of ties and stories. The social result is called a network” (White 1992: 65). Thus, the network is not based along a line similar to the pearls on a chain or classic notions of the network, but “[e]ach control effort presupposes and works in terms of other identities” (White 1992: 6). In this sense, the heterogeneous elements of a network—media reports, the officials’ statements, conflicts between police and those involved, and reactions of the general public—create a stable narrative (communicative network) when the meaning or identity of each element (reports, acts, statements and reactions) anticipates and responds (indirectly or directly) to other elements of the network. Such an approach will not only have to deal with the physical violence and looting, but also with the accounts of politicians, and the reactions of the general public and, in particular, the media (accounts stressing such an internal dynamic are quite rare, see Firestone 1972).

4 “ONCE UPON A TIME”: THE NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BEGINNING

It seems by now to be a firmly established narrative that the shooting and killing of Mark Duggan was the initiating moment of the so-called London riots (see Briggs 2012: 30). The idea of the “trigger” is, however, problematic in two ways: (1) it does not compare the event to other similar events that did not have the same effect; and (2) it somehow ignores the temporal gap between the shooting on August 4 and violent events that occurred not before August 6. A person’s death is no doubt a tragic and very emotional moment for many people. Individual deaths are unfortunately a reoccurring event for the British (England and Wales) and Metropolitan Police. Since the 1990s, almost 1500 people have died after coming into “contact” with the police (England and Wales) (see Inquest 2012). Twenty-one people died in shootings within the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Police, which is about one person per year for the last twenty years. The highest number was in 2007, when three people were shot. Although a considerable number of people have died in contact with the police (England and Wales), virtually none of these deaths have triggered large-scale events.⁵

Several accounts have stated that the shooting of Mark Duggan was the immediate spark—that the riots were an immediate reaction to this event (it served as a trigger or catalyst) (see Waddington 2012). The language of the immediate, of the trigger or catalyst, suggests a near instant, causal reaction in the form of violent behavior. However, these actions did not occur within an immediate time frame, but two days later. Very little research has addressed what happened within those two days. It seems that the communication of what had happened caused a great deal of confusion. The event was reported and dealt with by multiple sources. There were statements issued by the police, media reports, and a discussion of the event on social media and other local networks. Social media (Facebook) picked up on the event after a few minutes (Briggs 2012) and was used to disseminate additional reports and to distribute images, which then fostered private interactions about the incident. Media reports joined this diffusion of information, adding further pictures and opinions, in addition to the statements issued by the police. The social networks had great difficulty drawing conclusions about the event's meaning because of the inconsistent reports, differing opinions and confusion within the police in dealing with the incident appropriately. Specifically, the police did not immediately inform Mark Duggan's parents of his shooting (see Reicher and Stott 2011, Chap. 4). Donati (2012: 194) describes such interactions of intermediaries as part of the relational meaning-making process. According to White, Godart and Thiemann (2013), the meaning-making would not lead to the creation of a commonly accepted framework in this case, but would instead increase the uncertainty regarding the event's meaning, and subsequent social relations. White, Godart and Thiemann also argued that such increased uncertainty can create turning points. The field of possibilities expanded, creating opportunities to modify established strategies.

Thus, subsequent development of the event happened on a Saturday (when people were not at work or were involved in other social activities), and a reduction of uncertainty became available through joining a network of like-minded people (see Hogg and Mullin 1999). The mutual co-presence of other people reinforced itself, and this group of several hundred people marched to a police station in Tottenham, London. However, the communication between the group and the police did not lead (for whatever reason) to a mutually supported agreement that would have reduced uncertainty; instead, the different facts, interpretations and behavior formed a communicative contradiction, which became an antagonism. If communication has condensed such contradictions, it is very likely that they will be attributed as being deliberate, for instance, having something to hide or not regarding one communication partner as worthy of being informed (see Luhmann 1995: 389). Such a picture is then easily reinforced in a group, and antagonism becomes the topic itself. At this point, the uncertainty of the situation is reduced through a form of social regression (see Slater 1963). Multiple sources and directions or other social contingencies are reduced to a communication between only two partners, in this case, the police against the group of "protesters."

Georg Simmel (1964: 14) draws attention to this relational co-constitution, where both sides have something in common: that of working against each other, in a form of shared antagonism. Both sides are now linked in a network of mutual co-production. At this point, a type of parasitic social structure emerges (Luhmann 1995: 389). The catalyst of that structure is negative contingency: “I will not do what you want if you do not do what I want” (Luhmann 1995: 389). This structure nourishes itself through a communication of rejecting the communication of others, in which one can observe what will harm the other side because one assumes that the other side observes what will harm it. It is from this perspective that actions are drawn together; however, they may be heterogeneous because in such a situation, “everyone can actualize all possibilities that disadvantage others” (Luhmann 1995: 390), and a conflict between two parties is ongoing. The logic of “us versus them” is employed by both sides and thereby reduces the uncertainty of social relations. For instance, the group repeatedly shouted: “We want answers.” “We want justice.” “We have been given no answers” (see Good 2011).

It is difficult to explain such spirals of growing antagonism through structural theories of conflict or violence because they cannot grasp the great variety of actions and why they occur in particular situations. Relational sociology in combination with attribution theory fills this gap, as it investigates how people give meaning to human behavior.⁶ Meaning is constructed through direct or indirect observation (through the report of others) of a behavior, which is interpreted as deliberate, goal-orientated, or as a result of reflex, accident or habit. Finally, an imputation of the causes of the behavior is made, which usually takes two forms: the behavior’s causes are attributed to the environment or to the situation/person (see Hotelling 1980: 138). For the notion of aggression and violence, the imputation of intention is crucial, leading to the question of how the situation at the police station facilitated an attribution of malevolent intent.

The attribution very much depends on the meaningful rules that are present in the given social setting. These rules present a threshold through which malevolent intent can be imputed. The given situation is that of the police and the general public. For the general public, two rules were important in the situation: (1) the expected claims, such as justice and the right to be informed; and (2) that the police behaved within their legitimate means (see Westley 1966). The police are concerned about their asymmetrical relationship with the general public: (1) they are the authority that can use force; and (2) they demand cooperation to maintain law and order (see Westley 1953). If a violation of such rules becomes apparent, the behavior is very likely to be seen as intentionally malevolent. This leads to the question of why the police and not environmental factors are put into the foreground. First, if the police’s behavior is questioned, its mediating role as a third party is undermined. If the police violate the rules, there is, in principle, no other police the public can turn to for help. Second, the general public perceives the police as treating people of a particular ethnic group unlawfully. In the London riot situation, whether this

was intended by the police or not, a number of issues facilitated such an attribution: it took a very long time before the police reacted. There was not much communication between the two groups, thus the public experienced long bouts of silence on the part of the police. Further, the demands were not met in the sense of talking to the police officer who had the authority to speak openly and lawfully about the case. Thus, the police appeared to be hiding something. The silence was regarded as intentional and was met with even stronger claims (the group began to shout). Information about the event was also spread via social media (there was a considerable increase in Twitter messages; see Tonkin et al. 2012; Bennett 2011; Burn-Murdoch et al. 2011). Thus, more and more people appeared at the scene. Furthermore, rule violations such as being uncooperative or making use of non-legitimate force became likely motives imputed by the police. Only when this relational set-up emerges does a vocabulary of motives which is more overtly aggressive or violent in its direction arise (see MacIver 1940):

Overt aggression occurs with substantial frequency only when people are threatened in a conflict situation and observe a model successfully aggressing against the source of threat, the other party in the conflict. (Pitcher et al. 1978: 25)

In consequence, the situation leads to a point where any behavior is framed in a way through which a vocabulary of motives can appear, through which the behavior is seen as violent, sparking further violence against those attributed as rule violators, that is, the dispersing of the crowd through “normal” police tactics or the burning of police cars (see Manning 1980). In particular, activities regarded as an illegitimate and intentional use of physical violence function as a threshold symbol: “But then it kicked off, people got angry because of the girl—police hit her or something ... this pushed them over the top” (NatCen 2011: 15).

Here, the logic of counter-violence unfolds and leads to an upward-spiraling effect of using more violence (riot police, police on horseback, and the crowd throwing rocks, bottles and bricks). One could speak of threshold cascades (see Granovetter 1978). However, it would be wrong to frame all further activities within the narrative of physical violence. Physical violence only represents a minor portion of the events—it is a symbolic threshold, which is only broken in the most threatening circumstances (see Fig. 29.1). The majority of the violence was not directed against other people, but against commercial premises and vehicles.

Mark Duggan’s death, or violent clashes with the police in general, overlooks the fact that the relational set-up and its embedding into a larger communication network led to an increasing uncertainty about what had happened and how the conflicting messages could be interpreted. Social relationships also became more uncertain, due to interpretations and conflicting statements within various social networks. This increased uncertainty had a cascade effect, which led to new strategies aimed at managing it; for instance, collective information

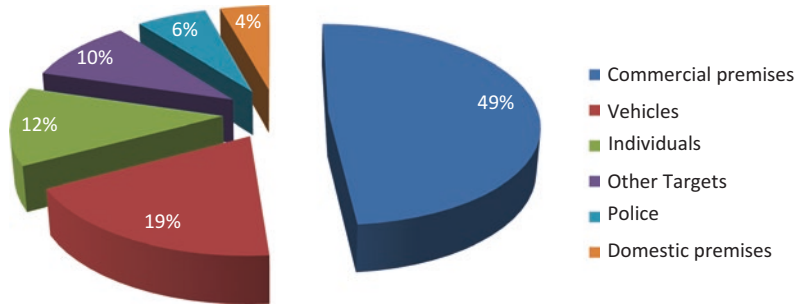


Fig. 29.1 Recorded crimes related to the events by target/victim
Source: Home Office, October 2011, $n = 5326$

sharing among like-minded people. However, these measures only increased the uncertainty elsewhere (police or media), which escalated the uncertainty into antagonism and finally (violent) conflict. This relational explanation demonstrates why such high levels of uncertainty are relatively improbable. It also shows that the failure to cope with rising uncertainty can create new uncertainty thresholds, which increase the likelihood of a major turning point.

5 NOTION OF THE OUTSTANDING: THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEDIA MEANING

Quite a large number of people were informed about the development via social media or through the use of text messages. Additionally, the media started to pick up on the topic. This diffusion of information embedded the developments into a much larger social world (see Baker 2012). Furthermore, the use of social media and the coverage by the mass media had a reinforcing quality. If something is widely reported, it has to be important, so more people will follow the events and attend them in person, thus making the event itself even larger, bringing again more attention to it. The logic of an increasing singularity of a possible major conflict develops. This outstanding quality is again enhanced by a particular logic of the media itself, for instance, the focus on pictures (Internet, newspapers and television), the highlighting of something seen as negative or deviant as a source for news and the attraction of something big, namely large-scale conflicts (for more details on these news factors, see Staab 1990). Although the role of the media has been noticed by various authors as a crucial factor in spreading events and diffusing information about them (see Singer 1970; Myers 2000; Russell 2007), this research has overlooked the self-referential quality in the construction of meaning or narrative with regard to these events (Morgner 2010). The reason for this can be seen in a conservative understanding of the media, which is mostly informed by the sender–receiver model of the early days of mass communication studies.

The media appear to be reporting *about* the events; they are an input/output system in which information about something on the outside is noticed and selected and then distributed to others. However, this ignores the fact that media outlets are not neutral sources that simply mirror the world, but that the images by the media, which are informed by particular criteria of newsworthiness, frame the event (see Snow et al. 2007). They give it meaning, which is then picked up by its audience, leading to subsequent reactions that work along this frame (using a language of the outstanding or surprising or singular), thereby reinforcing the frame and enhancing the narrative of the media, which leads to another narrative of reactions *ad infinitum*. Media meaning-making is therefore best described through a relational approach of interlinking cascades of news messages. The early media reports on August 6 focused on three images in particular (most of the images were redistributed through social media): the burning of two police cars and a double-decker bus and a fire that destroyed the Carpetright building. These pictures were repeated across the different channels and media, shown from various angles and embedded into a general coverage as sort of a peak point or particular highlight. Thus, an image of the whole of Tottenham/London being in an uproar emerged, comparing the events to the bombing during the Second World War: “London and the Blitz” (see Reicher and Stott 2011). A frame of the extraordinary was established, uniting the different actions under the label of the riot and as something that deviated from the ordinary.⁷ Other channels interrupted their scheduled programming, with the interruption reinforcing the notion of the extraordinary: “television’s most powerful gesture consists precisely in interrupting the continuous flow of its programs” (Dayan and Katz 1998: 162).

As a consequence, the extraordinary circumstances caused even more people to flock to the area, which in consequence confirmed the narrative (because an extraordinarily large number of people were present) (for more on large numbers and media, see Staab 1990). This notion of the extraordinary was also picked up by a range of commentators, who explained that those attracted by the events were mostly criminals (or ordinary citizens who were lured to the events through sheer emotional amazement). Such claims received further support from the statistical data of those taken to court. In the case of London (the latest data chart from the Ministry of Justice is from September 13, 2012), the majority of the persons had previous offenses (see Table 29.1).

The numbers in Table 29.1 seem to verify that the majority of those participating in the events had a criminal record, leading to the conclusion that the circumstances mostly attracted these people. Although one cannot really argue with the data, when comparing this data with the general crime statistics in London in the twelve previous months, the overall explanation is quite flawed (see Table 29.2).

The outstanding fact in this table is that nothing stands out. The overall assessment of criminal histories is virtually the same year round. Thus, if the event was especially attractive to so-called criminals, their percentage must have been considerably higher than the average. For example, the category of “more

Table 29.1 Criminal histories of suspects involved in public disorder between August 6 and 9, 2011

<i>Previous offenses</i>	<i>Percentages and numbers of offenders</i>
None	22.3
1	12.3
2	8.7
3–5	16.6
6–10	14.5
11–14	5.8
15–49	16.4
50 or more	3.4
Total number of offenders (100%)	2021

Data Source: Ministry of Justice, Statistical Bulletin, September 13, 2012

Table 29.2 Criminal histories of all offenders who received a reprimand, warning, caution or sentence for an indictable offense in the twelve months leading to the end of March 2011 in London

<i>Previous offenses</i>	<i>Percentages and numbers of offenders</i>
None	27.8
1	10.4
2	7
3–5	13
6–10	11.8
11–14	5.7
15–49	17.3
50 or more	6.9
Total number of offenders (100%)	76,136

Data Source: Ministry of Justice, Statistical Bulletin, September 13, 2012

than 15 previous offenses” must have been significantly higher. Additionally, the data does not support the luring thesis of ordinary citizens being attracted by such circumstances. The outstanding fact is that, with regard to their criminal histories, the majority of people participating in the event did not differ qualitatively, but only quantitatively. This leads to two questions: Why was the situation constructed as “normal,” and why did the event vary in terms of its quantitative extent, that is, the numbers of people participating?

The second part of the question is usually answered through socioeconomic categories, such as youth, race and educational level, through which relevant motives are imputed and very often stereotyped (McPhail 1971: 1069):

There is no compelling reason to accept the inference that persons are more impetuous because of their youth, more daring because of their gender, more disenchanted because of their race, or less rational because of their educational level. An equally plausible interpretation of these data is that such persons are

simply more available for participation by virtue of the large amount of unscheduled or uncommitted time which results from being young, black, male and without educational credentials in the urban ghettos of contemporary U.S. society.

This view is supported by a range of other studies (see Moinat et al. 1972; Miller et al. 1977; Ladner et al. 1981; NatCen 2011: 34). They show that variables such as time and access to the location are a far better explanation of behavior than socioeconomic explanations. The first activities in London emerged on a Saturday evening, which further extended availability; also, London's public transport offered cheap and quick access to most locations.⁸ Another mechanism was also of great importance: people joined or "helped" what they considered their peers or in-group members due to a situation of reversed social order. This leads to the first part of the aforementioned question: Why did the situation appear normal, even though the media gave it the notion of being outstanding?

6 THE NORMALITY OF THE SOCIAL RUPTURES: THE RELATIONAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE REVERSED ORDER

That people act upon an assumed understanding of one another as being ordinary or "normal" receives special attention in the work of Harvey Sacks (1992: 218):

There's a business of being an "ordinary person," and that business includes attending the world, yourself, others, objects so as to see how it is that it is a usual scene. And when offering what transpired, you present it in its usual "nothing much" fashion, with whatever variants of banal characterizations you might happen to use.

The analysis thus has to elaborate on the issue of what kinds of normalities (including kinds of deviance) are produced through the narrative of the network and within the accounts in the particular setting of the so-called London "riots"?⁹

The events in London were reported as a sort of social rupture, which is marked by a temporary interruption of the continuous flow of social activities—something occurs that stands out of the ordinary. Pierre Bourdieu speaks of moments in which the meaning of the ordinary is turned upside down (Bourdieu 1990: 159). This idea is also explored by Mikhail Bakhtin (1993).¹⁰ Carnivalism refers to a narrative of suspension and/or reversal of the rules and regulations of ordinary life. Bakhtin demonstrates that this state leads not to chaos but to a temporal order on which social reality is made contingent (see White et al. 2013). Common ideas and truths are endlessly tested and contested—they appear in relativity to all things and claim to voice alternative choices.¹¹ The world being in an upside-down state means that other norms and values will replace the status quo for a short time. Struggling with the

police, being in conflict with others—a range of activities regarded as criminal—are, for the abovementioned people, not extraordinary circumstances, but represent their “normality” to a certain extent (see Osvaldsson 2004; for the normality of the locations, see Till 2012): “Normally the police control us. But the law was obeying us, know what I mean?” (*The Guardian*/LSE 2011: 23).

The reversed order and its normality was crucial with regard to three developments that stress a relational set-up: (1) the asymmetrical relationship with the police (the experience of strict policing and the possibility of reversing that order served as a catalyst in making the violence a collective phenomenon); (2) an interlinking of different meanings describing the events through a language of the lawless, unrestricted, unrest, anarchy and so forth (see Greenslade 2011a, b) that redefined the notion of property; and (3) the reversed order constituted a new “audience” for the event, who engaged the circumstances through a highly moral language of good/bad behavior.

A considerable amount of research has demonstrated that partisanship or frame alignment depends on the superior status of one side and the social closeness of the other (Arms and Russell 1997; Roche 2001; Snow et al. 1986). This implies that a third party will not be neutral if the person involved in the conflict is regarded as an in-group member, as a like-minded person (detests the police), as part of the same social relations (see Roche 2001),¹² and if such a third party is in conflict with a group that shares an asymmetrical relationship. In such a setting, a collectivization of violence is then possible due to a strong partisanship, where solidarity emerges to support one group against the other because the members are socially close and at the same time distant from the other. The adversary status of the other is thereby influenced due to its superior status (see Manning 1980; Hotaling 1980; Roche 2001). Studies published in the aftermath of the events have demonstrated that the policing practice contributed to such a notion of being socially close (the police violate the rights of these people),¹³ enlarging the distance with the police, who use their superior status to implement such a violation (see *The Guardian*/LSE 2011: 19). The partisanship also becomes possible through the use of the BlackBerry Messenger service (*The Guardian*/LSE 2011: 30). This violation was implemented via dense coverage by the media about the event and through personal networks. In consequence, these structures were crucial in diffusing and spreading the activities. That people were part of these wider networks—and were socially integrated and informed—meant they could be mobilized more quickly than large numbers of isolated or excluded people (Bohstedt 1994: 269). Further, those being informed could “copy” the activities of other areas (Bohstedt 1994: 281)¹⁴:

[F]ew young people got involved in the riots on their own. Most went along with friends and both influenced and were influenced by their peers in terms of how far they went in their involvement. (NatCen 2011: 6)

7 NARRATIVES OF REDEFINITION AND THE COMMUNICATION OF MORAL JUDGMENTS

The majority of the offenders brought to trial were not prosecuted for violence against any given person, but instead for looting or looting-related activities (for an overview on the term looting, see Ginty 2004). As Bakhtin (1993), Bourdieu (1990), Rosenfeld (1997), and White, Godart and Thiemann (2013) have noted, the reversal of the social, in a sort of carnival spirit, opens up new possibilities:

The breaking with ordinary experience of time as simple re-enactment of a past or a future inscribed in the past, all things become possible (at least apparently), when future prospects appear really contingent, future events really indeterminate ... [their] consequences unpredicted and unpredictable. (Bourdieu 1990: 182)

This is an important narrative, which is reflected in a broad range of semantics depicting the situation of the looting, for instance: “It was like Christmas,” or “This was more of a party,” or being a “feast” or a “spectacle” or a “festival” (see Topping and Bawdon 2011; *The Guardian*/LSE 2011: 20 and 28; NatCen 2011: 21).

In such a setting, the narrative leads to a redefinition of property rights (see Dynes and Quarantelli 1968, 1970; Varul 2011; *The Guardian*/LSE 2011: 28):

“People were picking up things like it was in their homes and it was theirs already,” “Get stuff for free,” “Get anything you want, anything you ever desired,” “It would have been like a normal shopping day ... but with no staff in the shop.”¹⁵

The issue of ownership is questioned, very often in the form of a conflict over who can own what.¹⁶

This is strongly reflected in the selectiveness of the stores being looted (see Fig. 29.2). Of the stores being targeted, more than 60 per cent were retail stores. Within this category, the most common were electrical and clothing stores (see Fig. 29.3). This data reflects that general stores representing mostly

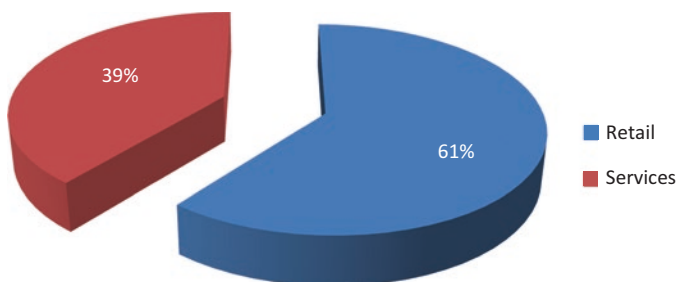


Fig. 29.2 Types of commercial premises targeted in the events
Source: Home Office, October 2011, $n = 2278$

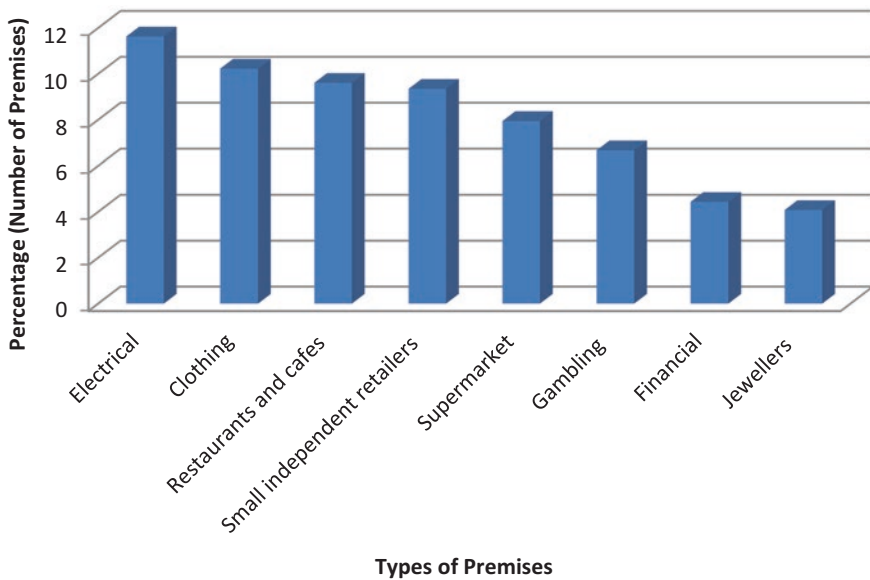


Fig. 29.3 Types of commercial premises targeted in the events (detailed version)
 Source: Home, Office, October 2011, $n = 1457$ (the list excludes general categories such as “other premises” and percentages smaller than 4%)

goods of symbolic value or status were targeted; so-called lifestyle goods such as big flat-screen TVs or mobile phones made up the overwhelming majority of the products looted. For example, banks, utility stations, industrial plants, private residences and schools were largely ignored. The apartments and homes that were damaged were in or near burned business establishments.

With the establishment of such a reversed and highly selective order, another party emerges in the conflict that in principle makes use of moral judgments of good and bad behavior. For instance, David Cameron (2011) called the riots “mindless selfishness.” Joe Anderson (cited in Bartlett 2011), a member of Liverpool’s council, called the participants “mindless thugs,” and the *Daily Mirror* (2011) classified the occurrences as “mindless rioting,” or, using more drastic language, described the “scum’ who need to be swept from the street” or “the looters who should be shot” (Henley 2011). Through such moral judgments, a new description or communicative tie in the network is offered, creating a sort of subhuman person driven by greed and anger. Thus, another group is formed to take part in the conflict because such judgments rearrange the linking of the elements and therefore the procession of meaning in the network. Taking part in the network legitimized the talk about drastic means, sending in the army, or using rubber bullets or water cannons. There is no doubt that, because of this language, some people were afraid to continue the looting, but the abrupt ending suggests that the narrative of the reversed order

consumed itself. As Bourdieu (1990: 193) outlined, it is the ordering, the beginning grip of the normality of the event, that consumes the spontaneous energy. The behavior becomes predictable, the contingency of *the against* changes into a repetition of the same, and suddenly the potential of pumping even more negative contingency into social reality decays. The order is restored, at least temporarily.

8 SUMMARY

This chapter criticized the unquestioned use of the term *riot*, with its normative and political implications, from the perspective of relational sociology.

First, this perspective demonstrated that the implicit narrative as embedded in the term riot channeled the research in a particular and limiting direction, such as having a reductive impact on explaining the social reality (focusing only on activities like looting and violence) of the events, and on its subsequent explanations (addressing the hidden motives of a mostly socioeconomic nature). Furthermore, the term riot preferred linear and strictly causal explanations by focusing on the hidden and suppressed causes of riots and these causes being released through a particular trigger.

Second, relational sociology could challenge common descriptions of the “trigger” or “initiating moment” by providing a close reading of the cascading stages of increasing uncertainty through which an antagonism, a conflict and finally collective violence evolved. The analysis of the management of uncertainty could demonstrate that patterns of attribution are crucial factors through which a violation of rules can become possible, which again has serious consequences for subsequent reactions.

Third, such developments were not a local phenomenon, but were already embedded in a wider social network through social media, personal relations and the mass media. Through the inclusion of all these narratives into a wider network of social relations, new links could be forged and activities could unfold through connecting themselves to this network. This reconfigured the meaning of the network and thus enabled other links to be integrated. Such important linkages were facilitated by the media, which provided a description of a world turned upside down.

Fourth, in this context a carnival atmosphere emerged—what was considered as deviant became normal. In this normality, a range of other activities could be acted out: motives that enabled such behavior became possible in the everyday. Social media, the mass media and personal networks could mobilize other people to take part, enlarging the idea of the event and making it even more attractive for the media. In such a setting, the redefinition of property becomes possible as a sort of normality, in which shopping without paying at the counter is acceptable. However, the looting did not occur on a random basis. The upside-down order is not simply an alternative, but provides an alternative to obtain what is considered to be of symbolic value in the everyday, here very much related to questions of identity and status. The narrative of the

reversed order induces a narrative of moral communication, mainly in the form of describing the reversed order as morally bad and thus legitimizing a language that is even more drastic.

This chapter criticized the unproblematic view of the term riot and provided different conceptual considerations through which new viewpoints regarding the study and understanding of the events can be conducted. These viewpoints stand apart from the current account of the deviant, the criminal or the mindless, but emphasize the relational constitution of such events.

NOTES

1. Very often, motivational explanations use the idea of the trigger, through which these deep desires and motives are unblocked. This idea of the trigger will be discussed in the second part of the chapter.
2. This chapter makes use of the term narrative or relational network but acknowledges that a number of related concepts exist, for instance, the terms “conversational order” (see Harvey Sacks 1992) or self-referential communication (see Niklas Luhmann 1995).
3. “Network” does not refer to an observation of linkages between people, meaning that it does not refer to an observation as an outside category, for instance, as a sort of coverage about the riots.
4. “Control is both anticipation of and response to eruptions in environing process” (White 1992: 9).
5. It is also not possible to argue that the shooting of Mark Duggan was the straw that broke the camel’s back because the overall number of people dying after contact with the police has sharply declined during the last ten years. In 2010 and 2011, these numbers were the lowest they had been for the previous twenty years (see Inquest 2012).
6. Attribution theory can be seen as a particular case of processing meaning in the form of a question/answer network (motive talk).
7. This notion of the extraordinary, therefore, also related to the audience at home who followed these events on television. The message of the extraordinary was directed at them and confirmed by capturing their attention. Although the television audience did not physically participate in the events, viewing was part of a meaning-making network, and they therefore took part in the process.
8. Most of the studies with a socioeconomic orientation were unable to explain why areas sharing similar features such as youth, ethnicity and educational level were untouched by the activities, in particular East London (Poplar), or why areas of relative wealth (South and West London) were part of it.
9. This interactive or conversational approach is supported by McPhail and Wohlstein’s 1983 research, which demonstrates that most people do not attend such gatherings alone, but as part of a group of friends and associates.
10. Another very common theory describes this as social liminality (see Waddington 2012: 11).
11. Bakhtin and others (see Surhone et al. 2010) mainly addressed forms of carnivalism involving humor and jolly relativity and applied this to social movements, which use tactical frivolity as a form of public disorder.

12. Forms of self-categorization are crucial here, as they highlight an important difference between those who become involved and those who remain bystanders (see Levine et al. 2002).
13. The study “Reading the Riots” (*The Guardian*/LSE 2011: 18) reports that 85% of those involved identified policing as an important factor (see also Klein 2012).
14. The looting and violence spread mostly into the north-west section of London, which is well-connected historically, as well as in terms of the media, transportation and personal networks. This thereby excludes Wales and Scotland or regions further north that no doubt have areas of similar socioeconomic conditions but did not become involved (see Baudains et al. 2012).
15. *The Guardian*/LSE study (2011: 5) arrived at similar results: “Many rioters conceded their involvement in looting was simply down to opportunism, saying that a perceived suspension of normal rules presented them with an opportunity to acquire goods and luxury items they could not ordinarily afford. They often described the riots as a chance to obtain ‘free stuff.’”
16. It is very likely that the looting was spurred on and later became a widespread phenomenon through the local presence of gangs, which exploited the situation more from need for profit or status (see Harding 2012a, b).

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Christian Morgner's research addresses the creation, transformation, and transmission of meaning. Going beyond more traditional conceptions of meaning as a cognitive quality or object, he considers meaning as the continuous request to create specific shapes, which acquire meaning only in light of other meaningful possibilities. Exploring meaning-making from the perspectives of culture, communication, and globality, his research has taken three main directions. The first of these strands explores diffusion and localization of mediated meaning in global events (terrorist attacks, natural catastrophes, and media events). A second strand explores meaning-making in situations of high uncertainty—for instance, communication breakdowns and high-risk situations. Finally, a third strand looks at the invention and transformation of meaning in creative and artistic practices. Morgner has held research positions and visiting fellowships at the University of Cambridge, Yale University, Hitotsubashi University (Toyko), University of Leuven, and the École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (Paris). His current projects relate to globalization of the arts, risk communication and cultural diversity, and disaster prevention in the Global South.

Music Sociology in Relational Perspective

Nick Crossley

In this chapter, drawing upon my previous work both on relational sociology (Crossley forthcoming, 2011, 2014, 2015c) and music (Crossley 2008, 2009, 2015a, b; Crossley and Bottero 2014, 2015; Crossley and Emms 2016; Crossley et al. 2015; Bottero and Crossley 2011; Hield and Crossley 2014), I sketch out a relational framework for music sociology. I begin with a brief overview of my approach to relational sociology.

I RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY

Relational sociology challenges both sides of an enduring schism which dogs sociology. It challenges atomism, which reduces societies to mere aggregates of individual actors, and it challenges simplistic variants of holism, which hypostatise society, making it an actor in its own right, endowed with the capacity to secure the conditions necessary to its own survival and flourishing, and/or animated by a determinate historical mission and telos. Each of these approaches rejects the foundation of the other. Atomists deny the reality of ‘society’, whether ontologically or for methodological purposes, arguing that it is nothing more than an aggregate of individual actors (often this means human actors but in some cases it includes corporate actors, such as business organisations). Simplistic forms of holism, though they do not deny the existence of human organisms, explain the functioning of social systems in a way which affords no room for individual agency and tend to exclude the human actor in their inventories of the parts of such systems.

Relational sociology affords a place to both individual actors (human and corporate) and societies but refuses to treat either as foundational. Opposing atomism, it argues that societies are more than the sum of their (individual human)

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parts, that interaction between individuals manifests emergent properties and generates more enduring relations and networks and also culture (Crossley 2015c). Indeed, it suggests that individual human actors (and also corporate actors) are themselves emergent properties of interaction. The (human) actor, as commonly conceived in both philosophy and the social sciences, does not come into the world fully-formed. Actors are defined by capacities (e.g. for reflective thought, moral deliberation and self-control) that are acquired through interaction with others and necessarily draw upon cultural resources (e.g. language, body techniques, moral codes), themselves originally generated in interaction, when exercising those capacities. Furthermore, their self-consciousness, an integral aspect of their agency, presupposes consciousness of the other (Schutz 1966) and is formed within relations of interaction (Mead 1967; Crossley 1996). Finally, the formation of this self–other structure nurtures a desire for recognition; self is dependent upon other to reinforce their sense of reality, purpose and self-worth (Mead 1967, Crossley 1996).

Action is interaction for the relationist and the actor is an inter-actor; always already enmeshed in a network of relations. Even her relation with herself is mediated by internalised representations of others (particular and generalised) whose responses she anticipates in everything that she does (Mead 1967). Thought, as Mead (1967) suggests, is a conversation with oneself, modelled and drawing upon prior conversations with others.

The actor remains important in relational sociology, however. Whilst interactions are not reducible to their individual participants and have the potential, on occasion, to both surprise and transform those participants, and whilst societies comprise vast networks of interaction whose dynamics defy the attempts of those involved to understand and predict them, it is actors, their (emergent) impulses, perceptions, feelings, thoughts and desires, which drive interactions and thereby energise the social world. Actors are constrained in multiple ways but they interact within and around these constraints. Societies are not reducible to individuals but neither do they exist above or behind them. They exist between actors, as emergent properties of interaction. Moreover, because they emerge from interaction, which unfolds through time, societies are always in process. If we exclude the actor from our inventory of the parts of the social world, as some versions of holism do, we ignore the spark that drives the interaction, which, in turn, (re)produces and transforms society.

I could elaborate further. Now, however, I want to reflect upon the application of this framework to music sociology.

2 MUSIC AND SOCIETY? MUSIC IN SOCIETY? MUSIC AS SOCIETY?

It is tempting to say that music sociology addresses the relationship between music and society: the way in which music shapes and is shaped by society. This formulation is problematic if taken too literally, however, because it implies that ‘music’ and ‘society’ are self-contained and mutually exclusive entities—external to and acting upon one another like snooker balls colliding on a table.

From a relational perspective, 'society' is a network of interactions and relations, which, for some purposes, we can analytically separate into different domains (e.g. economic, political, domestic etc.), and music is one of these domains. There is no relationship between music and society because music is part of society. Rather than a relationship of music to society, understood as separate entities, music sociology, for the relationalist, is focused upon the relationship between one domain of human interaction (music) and various others, which, along with music, collectively comprise society.

Even this formulation is potentially misleading, however, if it suggests that domains of interaction are concretely separable, existing in discrete pockets of space and time. They are not and do not. Doing music generally involves doing many other things too, simultaneously and by the same stroke. A concrete sequence of human interaction may simultaneously contribute to the doing of: music, the economy, political life, gender, sexuality, ethnic identities and much else besides. We may distinguish between the musical and economic aspects of particular interactions for analytic purposes, for example, abstracting certain elements in each case; but in doing so we are abstracting from concrete interactions in which music, economics and potentially many other elements are inextricably and irreducibly entangled.

Consider a typical gig. Assuming that the audience paid to see the band and that the band are being paid, the interaction is simultaneously musical and economic. Whatever else they might be doing, at the very moment they perform the band are supplying the audience with a service for which the latter have paid. This will be readily apparent if they play a short or poor set, prompting the audience to demand their money back. The audience might believe that they didn't get what they paid for. But, of course, that is not all that is happening. Band and audience are also collaboratively 'doing' music. Moreover, if the band play politically provocative songs, stimulating exchanges with the audience which address political issues, then the gig, without ceasing to be a gig, becomes, in addition, a 'political public sphere'. The parties to it are doing politics as well as music and the economy. And they may be doing many other things besides, in virtue of exactly the same interactions. They may be doing and reproducing romantic, family and/or friendship ties, for example, and they may be doing one or more of the communities they belong to and identify with (religious, national, class-based, ethnic, generational etc.). We would have little difficulty abstracting the musical aspect from such webs of interaction, and there is nothing wrong with such abstraction in itself, but we should always be mindful that it is we who have separated music out in this way.

It is legitimate to talk of the relation between music and other domains of social interaction (e.g. the economy, polity etc.) in this context and to trace effects passing from one to the other. Perhaps the band know what kinds of tunes audiences will pay to hear and tailor their sets and even their song writing to accommodate this demand; economics affects music. Perhaps the ideas expressed in a song change the minds and political behaviours of some audience members; music affects politics. Perhaps a gig reconnects audience members

with their ethnic heritage, revivifying their ethnic identification and thereby the ethnic community to which they belong. These relations are not forms of external causation akin to colliding snooker balls, however. Different ‘domains of interaction’ affect one another because they are facets of the same concrete interactions which participants to those interactions juggle and negotiate. In what follows I elaborate upon these ideas, beginning with the idea that music is social interaction.

3 MUSIC AS INTERACTION: MUSICKING

In his fascinating book, *Musicking*, Christopher Small (1998) argues that ‘music’ should be treated as a verb rather than a noun: to music. His neologism, ‘musicking’, is intended to capture this. Musicking is the activity of doing music and music is precisely something that we do. Howard Becker (1982) says something similar with respect to ‘art work’, a term often applied to material objects, such as paintings or novels, but which he redeploys to capture the activity, the ‘work’, involved both in making those objects and in creating and sustaining the experience and definition of them as ‘art’. This work is ongoing for Becker. Objects may be physically finished at some point but their existence as art is dependent upon them being perceived and the framing of this perception; upon the way in which they are defined and upon the interpretations brought to bear upon them. And the business of perception, framing, defining and interpreting is interminable. For as long as the object is ‘art’ it is subject to the perpetual negotiation that is art work.

This is true of all art but it takes on further relevance in relation to music, whose object is less tangible than either painting or literature. Musicking often involves objects of some sort, whether written scores, instruments or physical recordings, but the object is not the music. The object is used in the making of the music but it isn’t the music in and of itself. We may sometimes speak as if the object were the music. We might refer to our record collection as ‘my music’, for example, or to sheet music as ‘the music’. However, these are turns of phrase. Nobody seriously contends that a plastic disc or written score is music in and of itself. Music is inextricably connected to sound. Indeed, it is often defined, following composer Edgard Varèse, as *organised sound* (cited in Levitin 2006, 14), with the added specification, to some degree tacitly implied by ‘organised’, that the sound is *humanly produced*.

This definition might be challenged from a number of angles. Speech is humanly produced organised sound, for example, but most people wouldn’t regard it as music. Conversely, there are examples of what many people do call music which do not meet the terms of the definition. The score to John Cage’s much discussed *4’33*, for example, instructs the musicians to lay down their instruments and sit in silence for four minutes and thirty-three seconds (split into three successive ‘movements’). Similarly, when workers at a record plant refused to press *Asylum*, the (anti-religious) first track on their *Feeding of the 5000* EP, UK punk group Crass replaced it (for the first pressing¹) with two

minutes of silence, which they titled *The Sound of Free Speech*. In both of these cases the musician/composer makes no sound. In the case of *4'33*, listeners are supposed to be listening to ambient background sounds in their environment, so one might argue that the piece involves sound but what they hear is random and therefore not organised. In the case of *The Sound of Free Speech* it is precisely silence (an absence caused by religious censorship) that they are supposed to be listening to.

These counter-examples are important and I return to them. However, the vast majority of what we refer to as music is humanly produced organised sound and I want to work briefly with this definition, before addressing the exceptions, because it provides a useful way in. According too much weight to exceptions can detract our attention from what is going on in music most of the time.

If music is humanly produced organised sound then, by definition, it entails that somebody makes a sound or rather vibrations that can be converted into sound. I will call this the *artist role*. The performance of the artist role is necessary to the existence of music but it is not sufficient because music also depends upon the conversion of the abovementioned effect into sound and upon listening as an active, organising activity; that is, upon what I will call the *audience role*. Artist and audience roles are not necessarily separated in practice but both are present and necessary even in situations, such as the participatory musicking discussed by Turino (2008), where they are fused. This point must be unpacked.

The existence of sound is dependent upon perceptual systems which translate vibrations of air into conscious (sonic) experience. Sound is an intentional object. It exists for perceiving subjects and only for them. There is no sound and therefore no music in the absence of a perceiving subject: an audience. Vibrations of air can exist without a perceiving subject but they are not yet sounds and certainly not music.

Furthermore, human perception entails an active interrogation and organisation of sensory material (Dewey 2005; Husserl 1973; Levitin 2006; Merleau-Ponty 1962). What is heard depends not only upon what is there but also upon the way in which we listen, which in turn is shaped by our 'perceptual interests' (i.e. what we are doing and listening for (Husserl 1973)) and by perceptual habits formed through previous experience (Dewey 2005; Husserl 1973; Levitin 2006; Merleau-Ponty 1962).

More specifically, we seek out patterns or structures. What we hear is constrained by what is there. However, it is also, in some part, a function of our own capacity to structure raw perceptual data. We organise what we hear and the organised nature of the sonic material, which makes it music, is dependent upon this process of organisation for its final realisation. Various authors have argued that 'tone' is not a property of sound as such, for example, but of the way in which human listeners process and organise sound (Scruton 1997; Levitin 2006). Likewise, in a famous discussion of temporality, Husserl (1964) argues that the existence of melody (we might add rhythm) depends upon the

structuring activity of the perceiving subject. A melody comprises a string of discrete, individual notes which listeners group into a structure. Each note is heard in relation to what preceded it, triggers an expectation of what is to follow and is more generally fitted into a pattern which the listener assembles as they listen. In a fascinating argument Leonard Meyer (1956) argues that this is one of the reasons why and how music affects us—because we struggle to make sense of it, experiencing frustration when it defies our expectations and pleasure and release when it conforms to them.

Not only is the audience necessary for turning vibrations into sound, therefore. It also plays a role in organising sonic material and thereby realising its musical potential. Sound doesn't have organisation in itself but only for us, as we perceive it. Like sound more generally but even more so, therefore, music is an intentional object. It exists only in the experience of the audience.

This is not to deny the importance of the artist. The audience are constrained by the sonic material they engage with and that sonic material is shaped by the artist. The patterns that audiences perceive have been created, largely self-consciously, by the artist and, of course, the artist is usually her own first audience member: listening to, building and editing drafts of her songs on the basis of how they sound to her. This does not alter the fact, however, that music exists only in the experience of the audience and that the audience play an active role in its realisation. Music is formed relationally, between artist and audience. Furthermore, the artist role is often split further into *performer* and *composer* roles, and relations between artist and audience are usually mediated by a variety of what Becker (1982) calls 'support personnel': for example, managers, promoters, engineers, producers and so on. Musicking, as Becker (1974) says of art more generally, is *collective action*. It involves the interaction of multiple actors or at least multiple roles.

Later in the chapter I will consider the objection that music can be a solitary pursuit, as when an individual plays the piano alone for their own pleasure. Presently, however, note the affinity between this conception of music and my earlier definition of relational sociology. Music is described by reference to the same key concepts used to capture social life. Music is a relay of social interactions within a network. The interaction between artist and audience is central but the network is often far more extensive than that.

We should add that the sonic exchange outlined above is only one of several levels on which artists and audiences interact. I have already suggested possible economic and political dimensions, but in the gig situation at least we should also acknowledge the feedback from audience to artists and the efforts of artists, additional to their playing, to rally the support of the audience (see also Berger 1999; Fonarow 1997). Though a gig may be heavily scripted in advance, on the side of the artist, what happens in practice is shaped by this interaction. Enthusiastic audiences energise the artist, perhaps improving her performance, which then further enthuses the audience. Conversely, artists may struggle to perform well to an unresponsive audience. There are three points to grasp here. First, artist and audience interact in multiple ways; their interactions and

relations are ‘multiplex’. Second, feedback from the audience affects the action of the artist. Indeed, Becker (1982) notes that artists edit compositions and performances not only in response to feedback but in response to anticipated feedback. They put themselves in ‘the role of the other’, as Mead (1967) might say, in an effort to find ways of affecting their audience in the way they desire. Finally, mutual motivation is an aspect of these multiplex relations. Artists are motivated by (amongst other things) the financial returns and recognition which audiences bestow. Audiences are motivated by the aesthetic pleasure (amongst other things) which musicking generates for them. Artist and audience are interdependent, and as Elias (1978) observes, interdependence generates a balance of power: each desires the goods provided by the other and is therefore vulnerable to the other’s demands.

It is important to add here, finally, that the actors involved in musical networks include so-called ‘corporate actors’; that is, organisations, such as record labels, the Musicians Union and government (local and national), involving multiple human actors which make and implement decisions in ways irreducible to those actors. Often such actors have much greater resources at their disposal than individual human actors, and their actions, to some extent because of this, are highly consequential—though they too belong to networks which impact upon and influence them.

4 CONVENTION AND STYLE

Audiences typically find it easier to make sense of music when it conforms to a style with which they are familiar and often struggle, at least initially, to make sense of music from cultures very different to their own (Meyer 1956). This is because artists typically orient to musical conventions when composing and performing, and audiences orient to those same conventions in their perceptual interrogation of the sonic material and their search for patterns. If the artist has drawn upon unfamiliar conventions then the audience will struggle to make sense of the piece.

Many musicologists have written about musical conventions (e.g. Meyer 1956; McClary 2001). Becker’s (1982) discussion is particularly relevant for our purposes, however. Conventions are not only shared habits, for Becker. Indeed, they are not always habitual (though they often are). Building upon David Lewis (1969), he views conventions as coordination mechanisms. There are often numerous possible ways of organising our activities, he observes, each equally as effective but only effective if all involved opt for the same one. Parties must work out a way of proceeding. When a solution gains acceptance, which in many cases involves it becoming tacit and habitual, we call it a convention. Parties to a convention do not necessarily act in the same way. However, each can anticipate how the other will act and this allows them to combine their efforts with relative ease and efficiency. Note the relationality here. Conventions are, by definition, shared and serve the purposes of interaction.

Convention operates at various levels of musicking, for Becker, from aesthetic nuances through to relatively mundane matters, such as the way in which gigs are booked and advertised. Particularly relevant here, however, are such conventions of sonic organisation as: the 12-tone scale (A to G plus sharps and flats), with the specific tonal intervals that entails; key/scale conventions (e.g. playing in the key of F#); song forms, such as 12 or 32-bar blues, the sonata form and so on; conventions of musical notation and so on. These forms are arbitrary to a large extent, as illustrated by cross-cultural and historical variations. But our ‘agreement’ upon them in contemporary Western societies considerably eases collaboration between artists and allows them to pattern their creations in ways which audiences will be able to follow, engage with and (hopefully) enjoy.

This is not to say that the activity of the musician is entirely predictable to the listener. Following a widespread view within musicology, first articulated by Leonard Meyer (1956) and briefly introduced above, Becker notes that the artist, if they are to stimulate and give pleasure to the audience, plays with convention, teasing the audience in a way that creates tensions which are subsequently released as expectations are finally met or a new gestalt takes shape. Becker, following Meyer, views this tension/release dynamic as an important source of pleasure in (listening to) music.

5 AT THE BOUNDARIES

But what about 4'33, *The Sound of Free Speech* and other avant-garde pieces which challenge the definition of music as humanly produced organised sound? Do they necessitate a different definition?

We might respond in a normative mode, suggesting that music simply *is* humanly produced organised sound and that 4'33 therefore isn't music. This response would be problematic from a sociological point of view, however, because sociologists are typically interested in the ways in which social actors define their own realities and some people do define 4'33 and similarly unusual pieces as music. Furthermore, this normative response does not address those humanly produced organised sounds that we don't regard as music, such as speech.

As a first step in tackling the issue, note that 4'33, *The Sound of Free Speech* and any other examples we could cite have an identified artist (e.g. John Cage and Crass) and an audience who interact either via a recording (*The Feeding of the 5000*) or a performance. The idea of musicking as interaction is not challenged by these outliers. Furthermore, as the title of *The Sound of Free Speech* suggests, even ‘silent’ pieces are sonically focused. Audiences are expected to listen. Nobody has ever suggested, except in a metaphorical sense, that a painting or sculpture is music.

If we accept this bottom line, then it is appropriate, for sociological purposes, to accept and focus upon the definitions of music offered up by participants in a particular interaction or ‘music world’ (see below). In the

overwhelming majority of cases, what they define as music will be, amongst other things, humanly produced organised sound and we should be prepared to analyse it as such, but when the exceptions arise we should work with them, exploring what music is within the particular music world we are investigating.

This is not only a matter of labelling. Defining sounds as music means framing an interaction in such a way that somebody takes up the role of listener and orients to what they hear as music. What distinguishes a performance of *4'33* from other ambient background noise is the fact that it occurs in a performance space, with audiences sitting in silence, facing an orchestra and listening in a concentrated fashion across three successive movements, punctuated by a brief pause where artists and audience relax. It has a beginning and an end, demarcated by the conductor, and audiences orient to the performance as they would to a more standard performance; they actively listen.

Likewise, *The Sound of Free Speech*; it occupies space on a 12-inch vinyl record; has a title, which is listed alongside other song titles on the record sleeve; it has a beginning and an end and so on. Whether audiences actually listen to it is an open question. As a fan, in my youth I liked the statement which it made but, apart from the first time I 'heard' it (unaware of its backstory and the statement it was making and puzzled by the silence), I generally skipped it. However, it remained a meaningful and somewhat obtrusive silence. Skipping the track involved locating the point on the record where it stopped and dropping the needle there.

Furthermore, both pieces have a backstory which lends them meaning, well known within the community to which artist and audience both belong and, in the case of *4'33*, involving specific musicological theories—musicologist Richard Taruskin describes it as an example of automatism.² Arthur Danto's (1964) discussion of 'art worlds' is an important point of reference in this connection. Discussing the use of everyday objects (particularly Andy Warhol's Brillo Boxes³) in art, Danto argues that what distinguishes them from their everyday manifestations is the theory of art which informs both the artist's action and the audience's interpretation. An everyday object takes on an artistic significance when experienced through the lens of a theory of art. Thus we might say that the experience of *4'33* is framed, for both Cage and at least some of his audience (those 'in the know'), by the theory of automatism. *The Sound of Free Speech* belongs to a less prestigious and less 'intellectual' music world but its title, the sleeve notes to *the Feeding of the 5000*, discussions in the music press and the web of conversations between UK punks at the time it was first released all furnished the audience with the resources necessary to distinguish it from any other two-minute stretch of silence and to render it meaningful, as a protest against censorship.

This account also helps us to deal with humanly produced organised sounds, like speech, which aren't music. They aren't music because they are neither framed nor oriented to as such by an audience. Apart, that is, from the occasions where they are: for example, rap and toasting.

This account of framing and audience orientation helps to reinforce the sense of music both as interaction and as humanly produced; that is, as relational. Music is humanly produced not only (and not always) in the sense that an artist creates vibrations which an audience transforms into meaningful sound but also in the respect that it comes into being, distinguished from other sounds in our environment, through acts of demarcation, framing and the orientation of the audience to it.

6 INTERNAL CONVERSATIONS

Before moving the discussion along to its next stage we must consider one more objection: What about apparently solitary musical experiences, such as the individual sitting alone at the piano? Is that relational?

I believe that it is. Such activities are reflexive interactions akin to the ‘internal conversations’ discussed by Mead (1967) and relational in just the ways he suggests. The individual interacts with herself, switching between roles (e.g. artist and audience), playing, listening critically and reflecting back upon what has been played. They judge themselves, please or displease their self, sometimes surprise their self. They direct, reward, encourage/discourage themselves and so on. And in doing so they draw upon a prior experience of interaction with other people in their social circles and particularly their more musically inclined alters. They ‘take the role of the other’, to use Mead’s expression, and their ability to do so, as Mead notes, is derived from earlier interaction with others. Moreover, even solitary activities are generally embedded in and facilitated by networks involving other people.

Alan Rusbridger’s (2014) fascinating account of his attempt, over 18 months, to master Chopin’s (notoriously difficult) Ballade No.1 on the piano illustrates some of these points. Sometimes he is pleased with his practice. Often he isn’t. In all cases, however, he takes the perspective of another towards himself, reflecting back upon his playing to analyse and judge it: I upon Me, as Mead (1967) would say. Sometimes he adopts the perspective of Mead’s ‘generalised other’. He is an accomplished pianist who moves in ‘cultured’ circles. He knows how the Ballade (and Chopin and classical piano more generally) should sound, and he brings that knowledge to bear upon his own performance. Other times, he hears and reflects upon his playing from the perspective of specific others, generally teachers, professional pianists and other accomplished musicians whom he has practised with and approached for advice and opinions. He wonders what ‘Lucy’ would make of his morning’s performance or of a problem he has encountered; whether ‘Michael’ would approve. And sometimes he brings the viewpoints of Lucy and Michael (amongst others) into dialogue within his internal conversations, thrashing out their differences for them in an effort to arrive at his own view. Furthermore, as his project evolves he decides that he will play the piece before a small audience, with the consequence that his practice is now infused with the anticipation of that performance and possible audience responses. Anticipating an audience and, in effect, imagining himself to be playing to one, he claims, transforms and improves his practice.

Rusbridger shifts between roles (e.g. artist, audience, critic) responding (*qua* I) at each point to his preceding actions (*qua* me). Furthermore, though he is the only human being physically present in the situations of interest to us, he brings the influence of others, both particular and generalised, to bear upon what he is doing. He has internalised representations of ‘the other’ and they figure strongly in his private reflexive exchanges, sometimes serving as mechanisms of social control but also often as resources which he draws upon when working through difficulties. Indeed, it is not clear how he would proceed in many situations if not through imagined dialogues with his significant others. As Mead suggests, his mental life is dialogically constituted: an emergent property of the networks of interaction that comprise his active belonging to a society.

Interestingly, moreover, he is aware of blind spots in his reflexivity and seeks out various teachers to provide other points of view. This is partly a matter of his inability to fully stand back from his activities to judge them but also an acknowledgement of the intersubjectivity of musicking. Although the experts he consults do not always agree on the finer details of how the Ballade should be performed, he acknowledges that playing it properly means playing it to their satisfaction, while his own satisfaction in his work is dependent upon securing their recognition.

Finally, note that Rusbridger’s ‘solitary’ activity is made possible by multiple relations of interdependence with others. He is playing a piece written by Chopin, on pianos manufactured by Fazioli and Steinway; pianos which are regularly tuned by a professional tuner. He draws upon skills imparted to him by numerous teachers, past and present. He seeks out advice and so on. Need this be so? Could he not write his own music, on instruments that he himself has made, abandoning all conventions of Western music? Even if he could, his project would still be a dialogue with the Western music world and thus related to it. More to the point, it would be very unusual, not to mention costly in terms of time and effort. The effort of going it (completely) alone is simply too much and in practice we all, like Rusbridger, rely upon others to some extent.

Everybody’s experience varies and Rusbridger, as the editor of leading British newspaper, *The Guardian*, is hardly the man in the street. However, it is my contention that the relationality of his experience is common to all private practitioners. Even our most private moments of experimentation are enabled by and situated within networks of interdependence. Music is relational.

7 MUSIC WORLDS AND/AS NETWORKS

Rusbridger’s activities and network were concentrated in what I would call the classical or (Western) art music world, a world distinguished from other music worlds such as the jazz, folk, pop and punk worlds. ‘Music world’ is a concept I have developed in dialogue with Becker’s (1982) work on art worlds (e.g. Crossley 2015a; Crossley et al. 2015). It is one of several seeking to capture geographically and/or stylistically distinct pockets of musicking but, in my

view, it is the best. Amongst the others, ‘subculture’ has been widely criticised and largely fallen into disuse (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004). ‘Scene’ is popular but, as Hesmondhalgh (2005) has argued, has been developed in contradictory ways by different authors, rendering it ambiguous. ‘Field’, by contrast, is too firmly nested in Bourdieu’s theory, which I find overly prescriptive and problematic (Crossley 2011, 2014; Bottero and Crossley 2011; Crossley and Bottero 2014). ‘World’ affords a pragmatic lens and a variety of tools for capturing and analysing the ‘collective action’ that is music. More importantly, it requires us to think relationally, focusing upon interaction.

Worlds, which can often be subdivided into sub-worlds (often either geographically or by reference to stylistic distinctions such as ‘trad’ and ‘modern’ jazz), reflecting their internal diversity, can be distinguished and analysed on various levels. Their constitutive interactions are shaped by distinctive *conventions*. Their participation involves and requires a mobilisation of *resources*. Particular *places* (performance and rehearsal spaces, record shops and/or other hangouts) often loom large. And the demarcation of a world generally involves a *collective identity* (albeit often contested). Much of my work to date has centred upon the *networks* which hold worlds together, however, and in this chapter I want to briefly elaborate upon this key component.

In my empirical work I have looked at the emergence of a punk world in London between 1975 and 1976 and the subsequent diffusion of punk to Manchester, Liverpool and Sheffield, where further punk worlds (or nodes of the national punk world) formed before transforming into post-punk worlds (Crossley 2015a, b). I have examined the emergence of the Two Tone music world and, with Fay Hield, have investigated the Sheffield folk singing world (Hield and Crossley 2014). In all of these cases I have sought to identify as many of the world’s key participants as possible and any relevant and meaningful ties between them. And in each case I have found that participants form a single network ‘component’; that is, although most participants have only a handful of ties, their overall pattern of connection is such that all are at least indirectly connected by a ‘path’. In Fig. 30.1, which visualises the Sheffield punk/post-punk world, for example, one can pick any two participants and trace a path of connection between them. Furthermore, in each case I have found the networks to be relatively dense (i.e. a high proportion of all participants are tied) and with short average path lengths,⁴ indicating cohesion and compactness.

The existence of these networks, and their cohesion/compactness, is not incidental. It is integral to the formation and flourishing of a world. There are various reasons for this, including:

1. *Communication and Coordination*. Collective action entails participants acting in concert. For a gig to be successful, for example, artists, audience members and support personnel must all converge upon the same place at the same time. This requires coordination and thus communication between them, which in turn necessitates fast, effective and efficient connection.

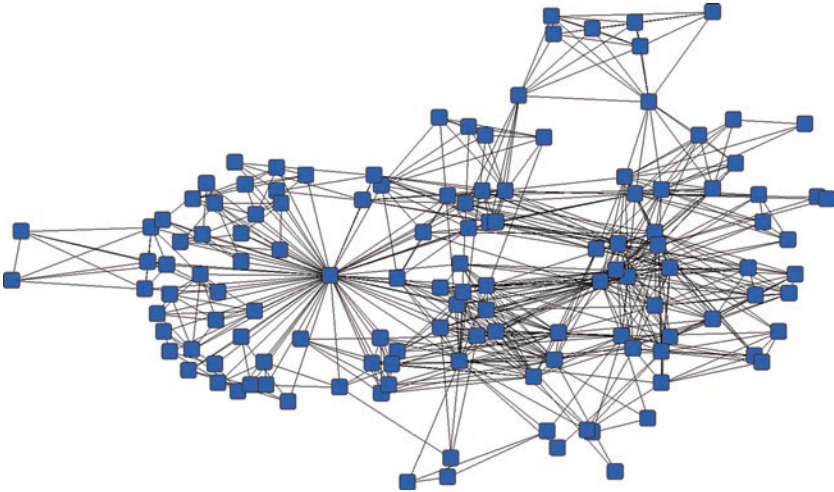


Fig. 30.1 The Sheffield punk/post-punk world

2. *Resource Mobilisation*. Collective action involves the exchange and pooling of resources. For example, those with specific skills (e.g. drummers) must find others with complementary skills and ambitions (e.g. singers and guitarists), and young bands with no money and little business acumen might need to find a manager who can supply these things. This activity simultaneously draws upon and generates networks.
3. *Social Capital*. Relations of interdependency, particularly when a network is dense, tend to foster norms of cooperation, mutual support and trust, which both constrain and create opportunities for those involved (Coleman 1990). Certain patterns of connection facilitate forms of action not otherwise possible.
4. *Competition*. Cooperation does not preclude competition, which is also fostered in networks and important to world formation. Bands and artists become aware of one another's achievements through network ties and this can encourage them both to practise hard and perhaps also to be bolder (e.g. stylistically) in an effort to outdo one another. The result is better, more innovative and distinctive music. This does not only apply to artists. Support personnel compete, and, in a paper on hot jazz enthusiasts, David Riesman (1950) identifies a similar process amongst audiences. Audience members compete over who knows most about and/or is most devoted to 'their music', injecting dynamism and further resources (including money) into their world as they do, to the benefit of that world.
5. *Collective Creativity and Diffusion*. Various theories of creativity, including Emile Durkheim's (1974) important concept of *collective effervescence*, explain this by reference to networks of interaction (see also Joas 1996). And networks are, further, important for diffusing the innovations created by such effervescence, lending them a sense of coherence

and normality, and reinforcing them through sanctions. One's network is one's 'reference group' (Merton 1957), and membership of a network, with the benefits that brings, can become conditional upon compliance with its emerging conventions. This is not only a matter of overt behaviour but also of such shared background assumptions as those discussed with reference to Danto (1964) above.

6. *Recruitment.* The network constitutive of a specific music world is embedded within the wider personal networks of its participants, who draw new recruits from those personal networks.

Of course, networks are not prime movers. We cannot take them for granted. They form, transform and fall apart, and we must track these processes. A large part of my work has focused upon just this.

Worlds themselves are connected and overlap, moreover, in a 'musical universe' (Crossley and Emms 2016). A world is not a discrete network but rather a (fuzzy-edged) cluster within a larger network. My colleague, Rachel Emms, and I have begun to explore this via music festivals (*ibid.*). Festivals are linked to one another by, amongst other things, a flow of artists between them. They form of a network. Applying a cluster analysis to this network we found, alongside several eclectic clusters representing mainstream music, that festivals claiming to represent different music worlds tend to form distinct clusters (the main worlds captured in our sample were jazz, folk and heavy metal). There is linkage across worlds and particularly from more specialised worlds to the mainstream, but there is clear clustering along stylistic links, corresponding to different music worlds.

8 MUSIC AND/IN SOCIAL SPACE

Music worlds are fascinating sociological phenomena which can and should be analysed from a number of (relational) angles. Some of this analysis will focus upon what we might think of as the 'internal' organisation of particular worlds. However, as noted above, much of music sociology is concerned with the relation of music to other social domains, such as the economy, polity, household and so on. An exploration of these issues could fill several books and I only have a few paragraphs remaining. I want to conclude this chapter, however, by very briefly considering the relationship of musicking and music worlds to what Peter Blau (1974, 1977) calls 'social space'.

Blau's starting point is status homophily; that is, the empirically observed tendency for human actors to disproportionately form social relations with others of a similar social status (e.g. ethnicity, income bracket, generation, education, religion, sexuality and, for some purposes, gender) to themselves. Blau does not specify which statuses have this effect. Indeed, he suggests that this will vary between societies and across time, and he regards it as an empirical question. However, he suggests that each status which manifests an independent homophily effect should be regarded as a distinct dimension of a

multidimensional space, which every human actor occupies a position within, in accordance with their various (relevant) statuses. Actors are, by definition, more likely to enjoy relations with those closer to them within this space.

The first implication of this concept for music sociology is drawn out in Noah Mark's (1998) work on the social distribution of musical tastes. Social differences in musical taste have been widely discussed in sociology, mostly with reference to Bourdieu's (1984) classical work. Much of the debate and explanation is focused upon class, however, when other statuses (especially age and ethnicity) often evidence a stronger effect. Moreover, explanations, such as Bourdieu's claim that the working class lack the aesthetic disposition necessary to appreciate high-brow music because they live too close to the bread line ('necessity'), whilst important and relevant, do not explain the very specific associations between musical styles and status groups observed, and fail to acknowledge the sometimes elaborate working-class aesthetic described in such works as those of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, particularly their work on highly style-conscious youth subcultures (Hebdige 1988; Willis 1978, 1980; Crossley and Bottero 2014). Mark suggests an interesting alternative.

Mark's explanation centres upon social influence. He claims that we acquire our tastes in interaction with others, who expose us to new music, teach us how to listen to it, persuade us of its value and convey the kudos that attaches to its audience. However, because most of the people with whom we interact are, as Blau suggested, similar to us in social status, particular types of music tend to become associated with particular statuses. One of the reasons that taste typically varies with age, for example, is that people typically mix (in ways which shape taste) with others of a similar age to themselves, confining the processes of mutual influence in which they are engaged to a particular age group. This is not the whole story of the association between taste and social status but it is an important part of it.

There is another side to the story, however. Alongside status homophily, network analysts have observed the importance of shared tastes, beliefs and values in drawing actors into relations: so-called value homophily. Music itself may draw people together, for example; quite literally at gigs and record shops but also in the respect that we are more likely to identify, enjoy interacting with and like others who like the same music as we do. And where musical tastes are shared across status divides this may help to break down the segregation between those groups, reshaping social space.

I will offer an example of this shortly, but first we should note that the impact of social space upon music is not limited to taste. As noted above, music is collective action. Individual musicians do not work in a vacuum. They interact with other musicians. This may require them to cross status divides but, in some cases at least, they will find other musicians to work with from within their own status groups, effectively positioning whole music worlds within social space.

British reggae provides an interesting example. The musical impact of the racism experienced by Jamaican immigrants arriving in the UK in the 1950s is well documented (Gilroy 1987). Excluded from the leisure spaces of white society and enjoying relatively little positive and meaningful contact with whites, such immigrants were forced to generate their own leisure spaces and practices, which they did, drawing upon what they knew from back home. An impressive world of reggae, sound systems and blues parties, linked back to Jamaica via an initially informal trade in records, formed within immigrant networks. And the overwhelming majority of participants in this world were Jamaican ex-pats; very few whites ever became involved or even knew about it. Reggae had a very clear position in social space.

Reggae was not entirely contained within immigrant networks, however. It leaked out in a variety of ways and began to acquire adherents within the white community, most notably amongst first-generation skinheads. And contact bred further contact and recognition. Reggae became popular with white audiences, creating a bridge between the black and white communities. The almost exclusively black underground blues parties did not disappear but in other contexts reggae created an occasion for black and white to mix and find something in common. We should not overstate the power of music to bridge such divides, and it is important to acknowledge that later generations of skinheads, in some cases, were drawn into explicitly racist forms of politics and music. Music can clearly contribute in this respect, however, shaping the social space in which it is positioned.

9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have outlined some of the key aspects of a relational approach to music sociology. In particular I have suggested that music is a form of social interaction, embedded in a relatively stable network of more durable ties. In addition, I have outlined a concept of music worlds, which seeks to capture particular pockets of musical activity, and I have noted both that such worlds are connected to one another and that they are clusters in a larger network. I have also stressed that musical interactions often involve many other aspects too, including economic, political and status group aspects. Music is a part of society and indissociably interwoven with the many other aspects of interaction that comprise society's vast network.

NOTES

1. The first pressing was on Small Wonder records but this incident persuaded Crass to form their own label (Crass Records). Working with a different pressing plant they subsequently repressed *Feeding of the 5000* on their own label, with 'Asylum' reinstated, and they also pressed it (with the title 'Reality Asylum') as a stand-alone single.

2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/4%E2%80%B233%E2%80%B3> (accessed 15 July 2016).
3. Brillo pads were pads for cleaning kitchen surfaces, sold in boxes akin to washing powder boxes. Warhol created his own more or less identical boxes and, for his installation, stacked them much as they might be stacked in a supermarket, prompting the question of what distinguished his installation from stacked boxes in a supermarket and, more specifically, what made them art?
4. This is a matter for the researcher's judgement because, although we can measure density and path lengths precisely, what we might expect to find will vary by case and we therefore have no distribution to compare scores against.

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Relational Sociology: Contributions to Understanding Residential Relocation Decisions in Later Life

Sarah Hillcoat-Nallétamby

I INTRODUCTION

The increasingly globalised emphasis on casting individuals as consumers, empowered with choice and decision-making capacities enabling them to exercise agency in diverse markets, has been reflected in policy discourse and service provision targeted at older people; hence, they are portrayed as independent agents, free to choose and select products, services and lifestyles as informed consumers, notably when it comes to their health and social care preferences. This emphasis finds its roots in neoliberal thinking, which gives primacy to individual, voluntaristic, rational choices embedded within decision-making predicated on intentional, consequential action (March 1982, 29). Whilst this is a welcome move from the long-standing, dichotomous social representation of older people as either “dependent-disempowered”/“independent-empowered” social agents, it nonetheless overlooks the possibility of a more nuanced construction of their social action as the product of temporal, transactional processes evolving with others through complex figurations of interdependent relationships (Elias 1978; Hillcoat-Nallétamby and Phillips 2011).

This chapter aims to demonstrate the relevance of relational sociology as an ontological perspective, with the potential to provide renewed understanding of the social phenomenon of later life residential relocation decision-making (RRDM) as a transactional process. For the purposes of this exercise, RRDM is defined as the processes involved in deciding and choosing whether to move to a different living environment, for example,

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an assisted-living or extra-care facility. These environments generally facilitate self-contained living in a non-medicalised but supportive communal setting (Hillcoat-Nallétamby 2014, 420). RRDM processes can culminate in a move to a different residential location or a decision to “stay put”; this chapter focuses on the former.

Viewed through the lens of relational sociology, the concepts of *temporality*, *transactional process* and *interdependencies* (Dépelteau 2008, 2015) will provide a framework for making sense of older people’s experiences of residential relocation, depicted through their own narratives. It is hoped that this work will enhance theory in the field of gerontology, where scholars have tended to focus on theorising later life social phenomena through the lens of macro-level structural determinism and its constraining influence on individual agency, or the micro-level focus of humanistic approaches (Phillips et al. 2010, 204). The field of gerontology has, therefore, yet to adopt, in any depth, the ontological insights provided by relational sociology.

The RRDM process in later life merits particular attention because it embodies specific parameters compared with other life transitions. First, residential mobility tends to reduce significantly the older we become, hence creating a specific “habitus”, reflected through the familiarity of daily living routines, physical spaces and social environments, which, together, may generate feelings of “attachment” to one particular place. Second, with age, the likelihood of significant and permanent changes to the fabric of social relations through, for example, widowhood or the death of family and friends, increases. And, third, later life is frequently associated with an increasing incongruence (albeit actual or imagined) between the physical aspects of our spatial living environments and changing individual cognitive and/or physical requirements and abilities; for example, increasingly restricted physical mobility for someone living in a house with front steps and poor access to transport may generate unwanted social isolation. Together, these elements of mobility, familiarity, relationality and spatial (in)congruence give a particular shape to the social phenomenon of RRDM in later life.

The chapter begins with a critique of some established gerontological approaches to theorising about the phenomenon of later life relocation transitions as the umbrella for more focused work around RRDM. This is followed by an outline of the interpretive framework proposed by the author for understanding later life RRDM processes as transactional, and hence relational, phenomena. The framework is then put to the test using narrative accounts from a qualitative study set in the Welsh context (Burholt et al. 2010), which captures older people’s stories about their journeys through the experience of relocating from their own homes to a supported, extra-care living environment. These case studies illustrate the processual and temporal nature of the RRDM phenomenon and its origins in transactional relations based on interdependencies, but they also raise questions about the relevance of self-action as congruent with transactions.

2 CRITIQUE OF GERONTOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO RELOCATION TRANSITIONS IN LATER LIFE

From the field of gerontology, theories of later life relocation transitions have led to the elaboration of explanatory frameworks about older people's mobility and migration. Some of this work has contributed to the development of environmental gerontology, a sub-field focusing on "the interaction between the older person and their environments" (Phillips et al. 2010, 83). In essence, these theories approach residential decision-making and its outcomes in terms of individuals' adaptations and reactions to their physical, psychological and social contexts. A forerunner of these has been the "environmental press" theory or "ecological model" of ageing (Lawton and Nahemow 1973), which, although not directly formulated in relation to the relocation process, has nonetheless highlighted the interrelations between older individuals and their physical environment. A transactional element to this model refers to an individual's process of adaptation across time to changes in their cognitive, physical and psychological capabilities (or "competencies") on the one hand, and their reactions to different elements of the external environment on the other ("environmental press"). Transactions therefore occur between an individual's "competence" (e.g. propensity to fall), their responses to elements of their physical environment (e.g. stairs), how well they adapt their behaviour (e.g. avoiding falls) to this situation of "environmental press", and their subjective responses to these situations, shaped in part by societal norms and personal values. From this perspective, change occurs as individuals adapt (with more or less (dis)comfort) in response to the demands of their environment, depending upon their levels of competence.

This "interactionist" theory, with a focus on the interface between an older individual and their physical environment, omits any relational interpretation of transactions and is premised fundamentally on a causal framework with the individual at its core. Although recent applications of the ecological model of ageing have introduced more temporal and dynamic dimensions, including consideration of life span developments and adaptation processes across time (e.g. Baltes and Baltes 1990), from a relational perspective, they are still underpinned by an interpretation of transactions as occurring between independent "things", rather than as sets of dynamic and evolving relations between "things".

More focused on the process of later life migration, another influential behavioural theory, developed by Wiseman and Roseman (1979), posits that older people's decisions about whether to move will be determined by: their level of satisfaction with their current living environment; a series of "push-pull" or "decision-to-move" trigger factors¹; and consideration of other intangible (e.g. attachment to local community) and tangible (e.g. housing market) factors. Wiseman identified different types of moves (e.g. seasonal) and distinguished voluntary from involuntary moves. Others have subsequently recognised residential decision-making as a reflexive and iterative process (Haas and Serow 1993). Again, however, at the centre of these theoretical interpretations is a focus on the individual.

A third theoretical strand comes from the work around a developmental model of migration for older adults which proposes a typology of post-retirement moves (Litwak and Longino 1987). Relocations are explained as a means by which individuals adapt across the life course to changes in circumstance and evolving needs or priorities (e.g. amenities moves for lifestyle preferences; moves which facilitate access to support networks if there is onset of functional decline or disability).

More contemporary research has built on these foundational theories to provide frameworks for understanding the phenomenon of later life relocation transitions, for example, in terms of an individual's ability to adapt to changing circumstances (e.g. "behavioural plasticity") and how this may affect relocation decisions. Other studies have focused on the nature of, or proximity to, social networks as care "resources"; and how relocation trajectories vary depending on individual characteristics such as relationship status (e.g. single or couple). Older people's narratives have been used to emphasise the role of physical context in shaping feelings or perceptions of belonging, continuity and change in relation to relocation and living environments.² Some of this work resonates with the idea that later life RRDM may have temporal and transformative properties. The concept of "residential reasoning" has, for example, been elaborated (Granbom et al. 2014) to suggest that individuals' thoughts about residential mobility (staying put or moving on) are interlinked and evolve with time, in line with anticipated changes to later life autonomies and vulnerabilities (Koss and Ekerdt 2016).

This body of theoretical work, it is fair to say, has expanded beyond deterministic, predictive and linear analysis of the relocation phenomenon to a theory which recognises the phenomenon as a more complex, temporal process, reflective of the interactive effect of individual socio-psychological attributes and physical contexts. This notwithstanding, the focus remains predominantly on the individual—with, at the most, a relational dimension which provides an explanation of their decisions and processes in relation *to* others—but with no seismic shift in ontological foundation to one of relationality. Rather, from a sociological perspective, this body of work, if anything, has come to reflect "co-determinist" thinking—"theories (that) explain the evolution of the social universe as the effect of *inter-actions* between social structures and agency" (Dépelteau 2008, 52), with the additional element of "physical" or "environmental" structure as a core dimension in the theoretical literature from gerontology.

In sum, against this theoretical backdrop from environmental gerontology, the later life relocation experience has been studied predominantly as a phenomenon driven by individual self-action. Although interactions with others are recognised, a more critical appraisal would suggest that they align within Emirbayer's (1997, 282) analysis of substantialism where the units of analysis are "substances of various kinds (things, beings, essences)", imbued with the capacity for independent self-action or interaction. From this perspective, self-actions—in this case, RRDM processes or transitions—would be conditioned by individual characteristics or dispositions (e.g. ability to adapt to

change; health problems), and other exogenous factors relating to social networks or the physical nature of the living environment. Although some theoretical strands do embrace more of a reflexive perspective, the ultimate goal is one of determinism and predictability—hence an implicit temporal (T) linearity and sequence to these processes or transitions (see Fig. 31.1).

Arguably, predictability could be an inherent property of the RRDM process in as much as individuals *will* seek the security of shelter, and in the example of relocation to an extra-care setting in later life, will also be seeking some form of support. From a relational perspective, however, this quest is not individualised and linear. Rather, a relational ontology would suggest that it is a “back and forth” process between reflexive actors embedded in transactional figurations, in transient or evolving circumstances, but with social action nonetheless guided towards one outcome, that of seeking shelter with support.

In Fig. 31.2, RRDM emanates from transactions between and across different circumstances (C) in a reflexive process, introducing the possibility for cumulative, non-sequential and sequential decision-making journeys. In this

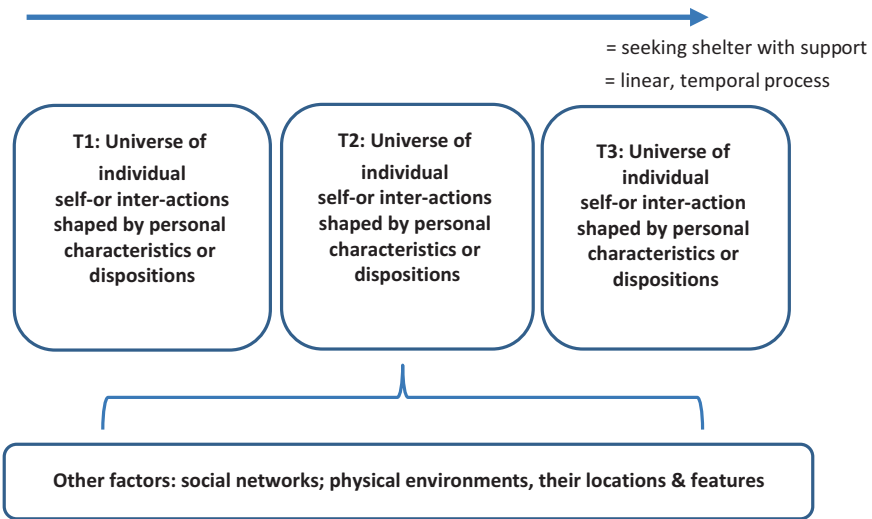


Fig. 31.1 Dominant conceptualisation of residential relocation transitions

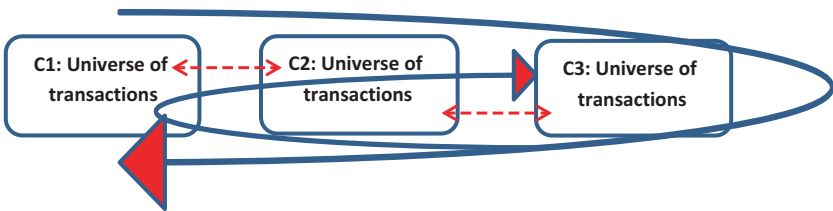


Fig. 31.2 Relational conceptualisation of the RRDM process

model then, transactions are not confined to one time period but may be interconnected and evolve in time across circumstances; as such, they can have transformative properties, some having more significance at particular points in time than others.

3 LATER LIFE RRDM: A RELATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Considering Fig. 31.2, the interpretive framework proposed in this chapter draws on several elements of relational sociology. First, people do not live as isolates, but as members of networks or figurations characterised by interdependent relationships. Second, these interdependencies evolve as part of dynamic and potentially transformative transactional processes across time. Third, this transformative property means that relations of power and agency will shift or be modulated during the course of any process. The arena or social universe within which RRDM evolves is therefore formed of transactional, interdependent relations between different social actors.

Interdependent relationships—figurations: As Elias (1978) proposed, individuals identify and engage with others through different networks or “figurations” of interdependent relationships, functional interdependencies being one of them. Here I adopt Kasper’s definition of the notion of “figuration” as “dynamic patterns or bonds of functional interdependence” (2013, 81), because it allows for variations in terms of the quality, quantity, temporality, power (im)balances and “habitus” of these social relations (2013, 77).³

What then, if any, are the relational properties of later life RRDM? This question finds resonance with scholars who have been inspired by the disability movement’s contribution to our understanding that human relationships are based on mutual dependence, exchange and partnership, in other words, “relational interdependencies” (Barnes 2006; Reindal 1999; Shakespeare 2000). Hence, an older person’s engagement in decision-making about relocation to a given care setting would be at the heart of exchanges evolving across a constellation of actors belonging to different networks or, in relational terms, figurations (Fernandez-Carro 2016; Groger 1994; Pescosolido 1992; Shawler et al. 2001). The complexity of these exchanges will vary depending upon whether actors engage temporarily, intermittently or constantly in the decision-making process over time; for example, a social worker whose presence is intermittent but pivotal in opening up access to formalised services; or kin members who take on the role of permanent mediators between the older person and constellations of service providers. Whilst this body of work has not been associated directly with a relational ontology, it does recognise the confluence of complex human relationships in shaping an older person’s ability or willingness to engage in the RRDM process. Hence, contrary to a rationalist and individualist approach, from a relational perspective there is a basis for suggesting that RRDM exists and emerges through an individual’s embeddedness in their figurations of reference.

Transactional processes—temporality: Dépelteau (2008, 2015) argues that individual action cannot be separated from the transactional context to which people belong, but aligns to the principle of a relational perspective which rejects the idea of ego-centred action. Hence, RRDM would not exist as an individual endeavour but as part of interdependent, relational transactions (between actors).

Kasper, however, argues that despite relational sociology recognising the primacy of social relations as a unit of analysis, it has yet to offer a convincing conceptualisation of them as dynamic processes, or as she says, “processual relations” (2013, 70). This suggests the need for a temporal element in understanding the RRDM. The argument advanced here is that such temporality is at the core of the RRDM process, in later life specifically, as individuals are progressively confronted with the inadequacies (covertly or overtly recognised, or suggested by others) of their current living arrangements. This recognition or awareness will be part of a complex process, which, over time, shapes RRDM and reflects: the short- or longer-term impact of one-off or cumulative events or factors (e.g. changing health conditions, reduced income, loss of a partner); transactional exchanges with others, whose views, expectations and bearing on the older person’s sense of independence may have profound effects (e.g. fear of a parent falling) on their RRDM; the normative context, which may continue to reflect historical memories of the disempowering effect that institutional settings have on self-determination (Foucault 1977; Goffman 1961; Rothman 1971), and which can modulate a willingness to contemplate moving to a more supported living environment. In contrast, where normative expectations accommodate and value autonomy (Hillcoat-Nallétamby 2014), that is, a recognition of the relative need we have for others, then a more agentic understanding of the RRDM process can be replaced with one based on recognition of relational interdependencies. The temporality of this process will vary depending upon individual circumstance and will reflect the interplay of these factors: sudden or progressive transformations to life circumstances (occurring through linear or reflexive, cumulative or non-cumulative time frames); transactional exchanges (through figurations of reference); and changing self-awareness of the meaning and implications of individual “independence”. Together, these factors will have a transformative effect on later life RRDM (either as a decision to move or to stay put).

Agency and power: From a relational perspective, agency is not conceived as action based on individual will alone, but as “inseparable from the unfolding dynamics of situations” (Emirbayer 1997, 293–294); agency, therefore, exists only in relation to an “other” (person or situation), and no longer retains its individualistic properties, becoming “fluid”, moulded through time and relational exchanges. A relational ontology also challenges the notion of power as ascribed to, and exercised by, certain individuals or groups (Elias 1978), implying instead that its existence is dependent upon the presence of an “other”; an individual oppressed is in subjugation to another, their oppressor.

In other words, power cannot be “outside of” or independent of relational figurations (Emirbayer 1997, 292). Similar to agency, the exercising of power will evolve (with potential shifts in balance) depending upon transactional context and process.

What then of power and agency in the context of the RRDM phenomenon? I have argued that an older person’s engagement in RRDM will reflect the nature of the relational transactions in which they engage during this process. It will also reflect the wider social context, which often dictates that older people should strive to protect their independence—hence building broader normative frames of reference which place value on “independent” and “active” ageing as prerequisites for successful, healthy living in later life.⁴ Independence in later life therefore becomes a valued social goal, acting as a motivational factor in RRDM. Progressive changes in personal circumstance have the potential to bring about shifts in social status if an older person is seen as mutating from an “independent” residential actor (i.e. living where and how *they* choose) to one who finds themselves having to renegotiate their living arrangements, through or with others. It is arguably this process of “(re)negotiated RRDM” which, in some circumstances, elicits fears of lost agency and power or brings them into imbalance. Whether these “(re)negotiations” between members of the figurations of reference result in empowered or disempowered RRDM requires exploration.

To summarise: combining these elements of relational sociology, the interpretive framework proposed presents RRDM as a social phenomenon evolving as part of a temporal process, combining elements of interdependent, relational transactions which have transformative properties. Older individuals engage in the RRDM process across time (temporality), their decision-making shaped through the dynamic relational transactions in which they engage with others. By implication, “independent” action cannot be separated from the transactional context in which people live, the individual’s ability to maintain and exercise agency in the RRDM evolving within their figurations of reference, hence losing its individualistic properties. RRDM is therefore reflective of interdependent relations which can be said to have transformative properties—the potential to bring about practical change—moving or staying put—to alter perceptions of “independence”, and to facilitate or hinder empowered decision-making as relations of power and agency evolve or mutate across figurations.

4 CASE STUDIES: ILLUSTRATIVE NARRATIVES

Can the relational elements outlined here find resonance in older people’s narratives about their RRDM experiences, and do they provide a potentially valid ontological perspective for understanding this phenomenon? The following case studies are used to explore these questions by examining “thick” extracts from four narratives of older people living in Wales who have recollected their journeys through the process of deciding whether to leave their own homes and move to an extra-care facility. By the time they had been interviewed, the process of RRDM had been accomplished and they had moved.

4.1 Case Study: Mrs J.

Mrs J. in her late eighties, has a son and daughter, but lost her husband several years ago. She was previously a volunteer at a local hospice. Having been ill for a while following a mild stroke, her rehabilitation has been facilitated through medical staff. This figuration of reference—kin, medical staff and volunteer colleagues—represent the web of transactional relationships within which her own RRDM has evolved across time, shaped by the cumulative effect of changing life circumstances, and the need to contemplate, reflect and consider such a move, and recognise her own limitations.

Interviewer: *How did you decide to come and live here?*

Mrs J.: *I used to do voluntary work for St. Kentingern's that's the local hospice and I suffered terribly with my back but since I've been here my back has been better ... I don't have to struggle so much to do things like I used to [...].*

Interviewer: *When you decided to come here was it the facilities that pulled you here?*

Mrs J.: *It was one of the other volunteers said to me one day [...] she said "You know where you should be living, that new place up the Prom." I said "What about it?" That was a year before it opened; she said "Now I've seen the facilities, I've read about it and it's for people like you" [...] I had a sister living next door and she was rather bossy and she would say "You are not going out again today" and I thought, "Is this all I've got to look forward to?" and that went on for about 37 years. I wanted to be away. I love her to bits, don't get me wrong I do, but she is very controlling, that's her nature ... very bossy. So I feel so much happier since I moved. She rang just before you came, I said "I can't stop now" she said "Where are you going?" I said "I'm not going anywhere" she still thinks if I say I am going out two days running, "Shouldn't be doing that!" So that's freedom in one way; and also she said when I was struggling to get a lunch or some vegetables, I couldn't do it at all. Kept taking things out of the oven and burnt all my fingers, she used to say to me "You should put your name down for that, it would be ideal for you" and I put my name down and here I am. So that was it."*

Interviewer: *How long have you been here?*

Mrs J.: *Just over eight months. I didn't settle in too quickly, that's just me that, nothing to do with here. I had a whole year to think about was I doing the right thing. Should I move? I loved my flat where I was but it could be so lonely in the winter ... you close your door, you wouldn't see anybody then when you needed to see them. [...].*

Interviewer: *Are you satisfied with the choice that you made coming here?*

Mrs J.: *Yes I am. I know it's right for me because it took me a good number of years to accept that I couldn't do the things I used to, I can't*

walk where I used to and all that kind of thing. I could never face up to, if I had another bit of a stroke, it took me so long to rehabilitate myself, with their help of course, the physio to be as good as I am now and my doctor said it's not the medication that's done it, he said "It's you who have done it." Got rid of my calliper, got rid of my sling with my arm and my special shoes they used to make for me. So kind of back to more or less normal and this place keeps you like that. Now, I don't have to rely on, I've got one sister and she's absolutely wonderful, she comes into me nearly every day, she come in yesterday and hoovered because that does my back in and she irons and changes the bed, the strenuous things. The thing is she has talked for the past couple of years about maybe when property prices change she might sell up and go back down to Kensworth where her daughter lives. So without her it would have been very difficult in my flat so here I am building up so that if or when she does go I will have somebody to fall back on."

Mrs J's RRDM was embedded in a cumulative and reflexive temporal process—personal ill health over time; an awareness of the extra-care facility before it had opened; anticipating the need to live independently of sibling support; recognition of a feeling of loneliness; reflections on the relocation decision; and the time taken to do this. It had also been shaped by relational transactions within her figuration of reference—a volunteer colleague's knowledge of the extra-care setting, her sister's overbearing interventions, and support from medical staff. All these relationships have had a transformative effect in empowering Mrs J to take deliberate action in deciding to move. This also manifests in her recognition that she has made the right move, is no longer lonely but surrounded by others and has an enhanced sense of autonomy, albeit by acknowledging the increasing limitations in her physical mobility. The balance of power in the sibling relationship has fluctuated over time, with Mrs J's feelings shifting from oppression and a need to assert her own will, to expressing a sense of empowerment through the satisfaction she has gained in moving. The relations with medical staff have also had a transformative effect through the process of rehabilitation which, together with the physical relocation to extra-care living, have contributed to the outcome of enhanced personal autonomy. In sum, through these relational interdependencies, Mrs J. has mastered decisional and executional autonomy (Hillcoat-Nallétamby 2014).

A driving force underpinning the transactional relationships has been the normative intent of striving for independence; this has been a motivating influence behind the actions and reactions of members of Mrs J's figuration of references. Sibling and volunteer friend have both anticipated problems of dependence, as does Mrs J herself, yet her progressive recognition of decreasing physical capacities has given way to a recognition of the need for others—and an acceptance of relative autonomy.

4.2 Case Study: Mrs R.-A.

Mrs R.-A., aged eighty-five, is widowed and has one son. Recognising the impact that driving cessation and widowhood have had on her life, she decided to look for somewhere else to live, with the help of her son.

I was living in a house in Glan Conwy and I was driving and I stopped driving. I'd passed 80 and I felt the time had come when I shouldn't be driving any longer. But I wasn't on a bus route and I was out of the village ... and I became isolated. And I stayed on for a bit after my husband died [...] And then I decided I'd need to move. I've got a son living in Abergele and he said "Well we'll have a look round. Where would you like to live?" I thought I'd like to live on Rhos-on-Sea; I rather liked the sea front there. We didn't find anything that had the same facilities that they had here. And what he was particularly keen on was that ... there was around the clock care. So I get, they call it assisted living. And so we came and had a look and we both liked it and we said "Are there any apartments for sale?" And as it happened there was. And this was one of them that we viewed. And this was the one that I preferred of the three we saw.

When asked if she is satisfied with her decision to move and the choice of accommodation she has made, Mrs R.-A. replied:

Oh yes, yes, definitely. I'm in the right place.

From a relational perspective, Mrs R.-A.'s story is one of transactional RRDM. Her decision to move to extra-care living forms part of a temporal process, configured by the cumulative effect of life events—widowhood, cessation of driving and an increasing awareness of geographic isolation. Along this journey, the relational exchanges with her son—her primary figuration of reference—play a key role in facilitating her decision and choice of extra-care facility, and are tempered by her son's concern that there be care support in place, as well as her own personal preference for a seaside location. The decision to move and choice of care setting therefore develop through this interdependency—personal choice combined with kin concern.

In this instance, the RRDM process therefore combines elements of individual and dyadic choice, as well as negotiation and reflexive decision-making. The transactional exchanges empower Mrs R.-A. in making a choice of location ("*where would you like to live?*") which transforms to becomes one of mutual endeavour ("*so we came and had a look and we both liked it*"). These decisional interdependencies notwithstanding, Mrs R.-A.'s choice of apartment is distinctly her own ("*this was the one that I preferred*"). Her son's preference that she should seek a living environment which offers support is reflective of a concern for her increasing vulnerability, but this does not appear to translate into any shift in power relations or disempowered decision-making for Mrs R.-A. Rather, the relational exchanges are modulated around mutuality and empowerment.

4.3 Case Study: Mrs W

Mrs W., aged eighty-six, has been widowed for 14 years, is in regular contact with her daughter, but has been living by herself and suffering from some health problems. The cumulative effect of these factors, along with distance from local amenities and a burglary which have increased her sense of vulnerability, have led her to take a decision to move to extra-care living.

- Interviewer: *So what were the reasons for you coming here then?*
 Mrs W.: *Well I was on my own and I was elderly and had a bad leg and I was lucky to be picked to come. I was one of the first in.*
- Interviewer: *Was it your choice to come here particularly or ...?*
 Mrs W.: *Oh yes I put my name down before they started building out here. My daughter lives in Betws and she said, "They're starting to build now" so I was lucky enough to be picked.*
- Interviewer: *So was it a discussion you had with your daughter then?*
 Mrs W.: *Yes. I lived in Bryn Glas [...] I lived on the top and there are no shops or anything up there. So I'm marvellous here, I have a meal put for me lunchtime and I've made friends and it's lovely. I've no complaints whatsoever.*
- Interviewer: *So how long have you been here then?*
 Mrs W.: *Four years.*
- Interviewer: *And you're happy with the choice that you made?*
 Mrs W.: *Oh yeah, couldn't have been better. I'm friends with everybody ... And as I say we go down every evening and have a laugh, make our own entertainment.*
- Interviewer: *Okay so what were your expectations then before you came here?*
 Mrs W.: *Well there wasn't very much to look forward to really, because I'd lost my husband 14 years ago and I'd been on my own a long time, and I'd been robbed, I had a burglar in my bedroom. So it was a bit nerve-wracking [...]. So when I came here it was like coming to a different world wasn't it, and I've made friends.*

In this case, the RRDM process has evolved with time, reflecting Mrs W's changing life circumstances and the transformative effect that her decision to relocate has had in alleviating her problems. Although the transactional relations with her daughter have been instrumental in her decision-making journey, it has been through Mrs W's own volition that she has taken the initiative to register on a waiting list. The outcomes of her later life RRDM have empowered her to feel more engaged in a broader web of social relations.

4.4 Case Study: Mrs S

Mrs S, in her eighties, is widowed with a son and daughter-in-law. Initially resistant to the idea of moving, her RRDM process evolved towards one of acceptance and voluntary decision-making.

- Mrs S.: *I didn't think that I would settle in because I'm a very sort of, what can you say, a lone bird, you know even growing up I sort of liked my own company at times. But there are times when you appreciate having another person to laugh with and enjoy the evening entertainments.*
- Interviewer: *So do you find it easy to talk to different people then here?*
- Mrs S.: *Oh definitely. Yes because they are so ... what can I say? Responsive, you know if you get into a conversation with them [...].*
- Interviewer: *Okay. So how did you make the decision to come here then?*
- Mrs S.: *Through my son and his wife. Because I used to live down the road here. My house is still there and we're hoping somebody is going to buy it [...].*
- Interviewer: *So what prompted the move into here then?*
- Mrs S.: *My son and his wife, they were very concerned about me. They said that I wasn't sort of looking after myself. I wasn't eating carefully enough.*
- Interviewer: *So were you involved in the decision then to come here or was it just a decision really made by your son?*
- Mrs S.: *Well I did come into it yes because Ian wrote and he said "Come to the Open Day" and I said "No I didn't want to come here." And they said "Well why?" And I said "Well I know lots of people by sight who I've seen here on the Open Day." And I said "Well if I'm going to go there, I felt that I wasn't as bad as what the other people were." But anyway time went on about six weeks and Ian said to me "Mum I'm worried about you." He said "Because you don't ... you seem to be losing the art of speech and that." So I said "Well I can't see what the joy is. If I'm going to have a flat of my own, because I'll be isolated again won't I?" So he said "Not really." He said "Because there's lots of things happening there that will keep you on your toes." So I came. He wrote again and this flat went vacant ... And so they said "Come and have a look at the flat." So I came and had a look at the flat and I thought "Well it's not as much to do as the three bedroom house down there." So I said "Okay." And that was the beginning of it.*
- Interviewer: *Okay and would you say then generally you're happy with the choice that you made to come here?*
- Mrs S.: *Definitely yes.*
- Interviewer: *And is there anything that particularly comes to mind as to why you think it's a good move you've made here?*
- Mrs S.: *Companionship and somebody who is alert to the needs of aged people. That young lady that brought you up, she's marvellous. From the accommodation to your bills for your electric and everything it's all seen to. And she's marvellous that girl.*

The transactional relationships which have characterised Mrs S's RRDM have had a transformative effect both in terms of shaping the transitional process and its outcomes, and, along the way, the relationships of power between the members of her figuration of reference. The decisional context has initially been quite forcefully engineered by her son, and initially proves disempowering for Mrs S., who needs to seek reasons not to move, as she tries to negotiate her own RRDM pathway. Here then is an RRDM journey which is temporarily subjugated to wider kin pressures, reflecting normative assumptions that changes in later life are necessarily symptomatic of increased vulnerability and loss of independence. With time, however, these relational transactions evolve as a "negotiated" and reflexive process, which ultimately empowers Mrs S. to engage in a broader figuration of social relationships, leading her to recognise other advantages of living in a supported housing environment.

5 CRITICAL REFLECTIONS: LATER LIFE RRDM FROM A RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The case studies presented here have served to illustrate the potential relevance of a relational ontology in understanding the temporal, processual and transactional elements of RRDM in later life. The figurations of reference within which individuals are embedded have shaped this process, and in turn, have transformed relationships of power between members of these figurations. Broader normative influences about later life well-being, the quest for independence and the vilification of dependence have come into play through these figurations' forces of (dis)empowerment. The RRDM process, then, is not a linear, rationalised and individualised one when viewed through a relational lens.

Each case study also illustrates the interplay of individual's efforts to maintain, reaffirm or acquiesce to changes in physical and cognitive well-being over time, and to battle with (or against) the broader normative expectations of later life as a time of increased vulnerability and loss of independence. In the narratives provided here, the "battling" process between actors in each figuration of reference has been conciliatory, and expectations of independence have given way to recognition and acceptance of autonomy, and to an acknowledgment of the importance of interdependent relationships.

The introduction of a processual dimension to RRDM, however, challenges one element of relational sociology—that action cannot exist as self-action. In his seminal work, Emirbayer has traced this notion of self-action to the influence of the substantialist perspective where units of analysis are seen as "substances of various kinds (things, beings, essences)" (Emirbayer 1997, 282), imbued with the capacity for independent action. This, he argues, is because "individual persons ... are inseparable from the transactional contexts within which they are embedded" (Emirbayer 1997, 287). Similarly, as Dépelteau (2008, 60) argues in his elaboration of the principle of transaction: "'Self-action' is related to the notion of agency in voluntaristic and co-deterministic explanations ..." and, as such, is viewed as acting under its own powers.

Given these positions, how, then, to interpret Mrs J’s RRDM journey, which has evolved through the relational transactions with her sister, but also through a voluntaristic, self-initiated decision to actually move? (“*I had a whole year to think about was I doing the right thing? Should I move? [...] Interviewer: Are you satisfied with the choice that you made coming here? Mrs J.: Yes I am. I know it’s right for me*”). Similarly for Mrs R.-A., her RRDM has been one of mutual endeavour with her son, yet her narrative portrays a choice of apartment which is uniquely her own (“*And this was the one that I preferred of the three we saw*”). And Mrs W. had already registered to be considered for an extra-care apartment before her RRDM had become part of a transactional process shaped through her figurations of reference (“*Oh yes I put my name down before they started building out here*”). Is part of her journey not also fashioned through voluntaristic self-action?

Does this interpretation fall away from relational thinking if we see the RRDM process comprising elements of action existing independently of each figuration of reference? This interpretation would be untenable from a relational perspective if we follow the premise that “specific social actions can be understood only as parts of a chain of transactions” (Dépelteau 2008, 60–61), that is, if agency (social action) is indistinguishable from structure (transactions).

A tentative answer to these rhetorical questions is that each case study presented here suggests that parts of the RRDM process (of social action) can be conceptualised as self-action *provided* they are seen as emerging and evolving from the broader spectrum of relational transactions within which they are embedded (Fig. 31.3). Conceived in this way, personal choice or decision-making emerge from the chain of transactional exchanges occurring within an individual’s figuration of reference, and the individual recognises a sense of

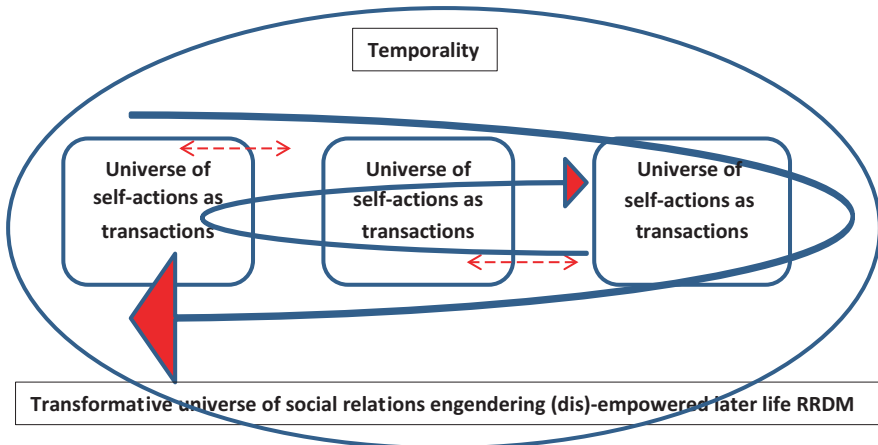


Fig. 31.3 Relational conceptualisation of the later life RRDM process

enhanced (empowered) or reduced (disempowered) agency or both, as part of their RRDM journey.

Self-action—self-determinism—can therefore be understood to be integral to transactions, provided both are understood as part of a broader temporal and, hence, processual phenomenon. In other words, temporality provides the interpretive lens through which self-action and transaction can be seen to coexist. This is not to say that agency can be seen as an individual property (Dépelteau 2008, 63), but, rather, can be understood to emerge, and equally to recede, if conceptualised as part of a temporal process where transactions have a transformative effect. As Maines has argued, in line with Einsteinian principles, time itself can only be conceptualised as relational—“the observer and the observed are always caught up in a communicative relationship and that reality is perspective-dependent. Time and communication always interpenetrate” (1987, 305). Considering the RRDM as part of a temporal process—seeing time as substance, as a structuring mechanism itself rather than a linear process—therefore addresses the problem of linearity and non-reflexivity, which, I have argued, characterises the key theoretical perspectives of this phenomenon in environmental gerontology. It also goes some way towards addressing the fundamental criticism advanced by Kasper (2013): that relational sociology still needs to provide a convincing conceptualisation of these relations as *dynamic processes*. My suggestion is that this gap stems from the need to conceptualise social relations as integral to, and transformed through, *temporal processes*.

The other challenge that these case study examples raise for a relational approach to later life RRDM is how and where to accommodate the non-relational factors (e.g. changes to health, physical attributes of the living environment), which many of the theories from the field of environmental gerontology would consider as “explanatories” of this process. These factors, it may be argued, exist “beyond” the individual in as much as they do not clearly emanate from transactional relations evolving across figurations. How then to account for them through the lens of a relational ontology? Kasper (2013) again gives some perspective on this in her model of dynamic relations, when she identifies the *built environment* as one element of the biophysical context in which, she posits, all social life necessarily occurs. The built environment (for example, someone’s home) could therefore perhaps be conceptualised as she proposes, as part of the “interrelated contexts of biophysical conditions, figurations and habitus” which together contribute to generating different and ever-changing “lifestyles” (2013, 81). Similarly, Donati proposes that architecture as a social phenomenon can be interpreted in relational terms if it is “defined as the site of the human intentionality which is expressed in it through a configured use of relational space” (2011, 43). In his terms—and relevant to RRDM—a “well-designed” house will facilitate good social relations; conversely, “a house can become simply a dormitory, instead of a place of meeting, dialogue and increased communication [...]”. He continues, “More generally,

a house [...] (is) perceived as being less human if the instrumental imperatives (those of technical functionality) [...] are such as to render the place unsuitable (or less suitable) to that tract of human relations for which we enter such a structure [to live ...]" (2011, 44). Whilst this sociological definition of architecture does help give "place" to the built environment of the home in a relational sense, it is also strongly reminiscent of the deterministic perspective of the "environmental press" theory, which would use this architectural incongruence as an explanatory factor for the RRDM process.

Introducing these biophysical elements to a dynamic, processual relational model of RRDM nonetheless still sidesteps the question of how to accommodate "things" such as an individual's physical health or their financial resources, which do not lend themselves easily to a relational interpretation because they are *sui generis* to that person. Dépelteau's explanation here would perhaps be that "individual characteristics are key dimensions of actions and reactions, but actions and reactions are also interdependent ones" (2015, 56). This suggests then that these "things" are integral to, and not distinguishable from, their relational context. However, this still begs the question: What do they do *in* these relations? By analogy, yeast is in the dough, and dough is not dough without it, but we know full well that yeast's contribution is to make dough rise through a chemical process of fermentation. My tentative response would be to see these "things" from a relational perspective as "elements of ammunition" which serve to enable normative-driven "battles" to be waged about what constitutes signs of changing "independence" (for example, increased difficulties in an older person's ability to walk and limited financial resources to adapt a home to this reality), which can lay the foundations for the onset of the RRDM process.

In conclusion, there is clearly scope for "re-viewing" later life RRDM through a relational ontological lens, and from a broader perspective, continuing to explore how this can inform environmental gerontology. To achieve this, however, one of the key challenges will be to elaborate, in a meaningful way, a place for those "things" which span beyond the individual because they belong to the realm of the inanimate physical environment or to the biological make-up of an individual. Core to an environmental gerontological interpretation would be the idea that these "things" are pivotal in shaping the phenomenon of later life relocation.

NOTES

1. Anticipated or unanticipated "push" factors include things such as loss of a partner or distance from family members, whilst "pull" factors will include proximity to services or other locational considerations such as climate.
2. For a more detailed review, see Perry et al. (2014).
3. Which Kasper defines as "our socially conditioned ways of being in the world" (2013, 77).
4. See, for example, WHO (2002). For the UK, see DWP (2015).

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Relations, Organising, Leadership and Education

Scott Eacott

Orthodox approaches to understanding organisations and organising are built on an underlying generative principle of structure. However, since the work of Follett (1927, 1949), the Hawthorne Studies of Mayo and colleagues (e.g. Mayo 1933) and the subsequent human relations movement, the significance of relations to organising activity is a well-rehearsed argument. Even Weber (1978 [1922]) who is attributed with articulating “the bureaucracy”—a hegemonic structuralist account of organising—recognised the role of “charisma” and its influence on practice and structural arrangements.

This chapter surveys contemporary debates and research on approaches that have been grouped together under the convenient label of “relational” in educational administration literatures. At the outset it is important to be clear what this chapter is, and more importantly is not. This chapter cannot, nor will it attempt to, provide a comprehensive survey of all research that mentions relations, relationships, or claims relationality in any sense. The potential set of research is literally infinite. However, in order to provide some synthesis of past research efforts and trajectory, in what follows I identify some of the central tensions that are confronted by an analysis of, and advocacy for, relational approaches to understanding organising activity.

I will argue that contemporary calls for relational approaches face somewhat of an enduring struggle. Few, if any, would disagree that relations are central to social activity, but to hold such a position has implications for scholarship and practice. To privilege relations one has to confront the hegemonic structuralism—with its inherent determinism—of “the organisation”. At the same time, can one advocate for a relational approach to organising activity without doing the same in one’s scholarship? Advancing a relational

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approach is more than a theoretical resource and instead a methodological framing—a way of being a scholar. To ground this discussion, after some initial analytical and historical framing of the academic tradition, I present four examples of research with claims to being relational (e.g. adjectival, conflationism, co-determinism, and relational) and comment on the current state of affairs in each.

I ON THE TRADITION OF RELATIONAL APPROACHES IN ORGANISING

The importance and significance of social relations for organising activity have a rich history of research and in many ways developed as a counter-narrative to the dominance of Taylor's (1911) work on the principles of scientific management. Taylorism is more concerned with structural arrangements (e.g. supervision, performance management) and efficiencies than interpersonal relations. Contemporary thought and analysis on educational organisations, particularly those stressing 'leadership', are an extension of long-standing debate on the nature of organising activity. However, attempts to balance structural determinism and agency to capture the essence of organising—an ontological and epistemological question—have proven incredibly difficult.

Most organisational analyses assume, or grant ontological status to, organisations, constituting them as a *social fact*—think Durkheim (1982 [1895])—and then proceed from there as a starting point. It is not surprising that organisational studies assume the realness of organisations. To think otherwise would be to question the value and legitimacy of the self. Embodying key markers of modernity (e.g. essential referents such as “the individual”, “the institution”), classic organisational approaches reduce relations to determinant functions between entities. The challenge that is present here is that, in the construction of entities, these works are mobilising substantialist ontologies. Therefore, while well-rehearsed arguments stress that organising (including leadership, management, and administration) is relational (e.g. Uhl-Bien and Ospina 2012), that relational perspectives are at the forefront of emerging and established leadership scholarship (e.g. Dinh et al. 2014) and more relevant to practice (e.g., Bradbury and Lichtenstein 2000), any attempt to advance a relational theory of organising requires a generative theory of relations.

Key early texts in educational administration seeking to illuminate relations include Yauch's (1949) *Improving Human Relations in School Administration* and Griffiths' (1959) *Human Relations in School Administration*. Leithwood and Duke's (1999) chapter in the second edition of the *Handbook of Research on Educational Administration* devotes an entire section to articulating a relational approach to educational administration and leadership. Although they remain within a Parsonian-inspired systems approach, Leithwood and Duke raise a key theoretical question when noting that “the distinction between management and leadership contributes little or nothing to an understanding of leadership conceived as a set of relationships” (p. 67). This relationalism

(e.g. a focus on relationships rather than relations) is arguably the orthodoxy of relational approaches to understanding organising activity in education.

Parsonian-based system thinking has been central to educational administration (e.g. Getzels and Guba 1957). However, as Donati (2011) argues, Parsons attempted to provide a general theory unifying action and structure without a theory of relations. Theoretical and/or methodological arguments in educational administration, even those claiming to be relational, if grounded in systems thinking, cannot actually conceive of relations as their central focus. At best, they are measurement constructs but, more likely, what remains is a collection of somewhat loosely coupled conceptual resources seeking to define social facts from different perspectives—even if with similar labels. In addition, this research, for the most part, continues without any serious explorations of the relations it holds with other relational approaches and/or fit within the broader domain of enquiry, leading to a series of parallel monologues.

Why does this matter? As an initial point, the genesis of any sense of a “relational turn” in the social sciences was the pursuit of a counter-narrative to dominant substantialist ontologies (Prandini 2015). Any conceptualisation that conceives of relations performing functional determinants between entities (e.g. substances) reduces relations to mere functionaries. This is a limitation of scholarship drawing on classic sociological canons such as Durkheim. Similarly, Donati (2011) argues that (structural) Marxist scholarship, with attention to ties and historical materialism, and Weberian work seeking to understand rather than explain relations, prevents the generation of analytical apparatus capable of exploring relations and/or going beyond the analysis of a select set of relations. Rather than taking all work claiming to be relational at face value, what is required is an analytical engagement with the work to nuance the similarities, but, more importantly, the distinctions between approaches: in short, a relational account of relational scholarship.

While there is an emerging, or re-emerging, sociological stream of educational administration and leadership studies, rarely are canonical sources such as Durkheim, Marx, and Weber mobilised (the exception being Samier and her enduring work with Weber). The most commonly cited sociologist in contemporary works is Bourdieu (e.g. Thomson 2017). This is not surprising given his substantive monographs on education, namely *The Inheritors: French Students and their Relation to Culture* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979 [1964]), *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977 [1970]), *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu 1988 [1984]), and *The State Nobility* (Bourdieu 1996 [1989]). Bourdieu is explicitly linked to relational sociology (e.g. Papilloud and Schultze in this handbook), and despite the common ransacking of his theoretical resources, he explicitly developed a relational gaze. The mobilisation of Bourdieu in educational administration is, however, sparse, and primarily limited to major centres of the Commonwealth such as Australia and the United Kingdom, and rarely, if ever, the United States of America (for an exception see English 2012).

Of increasing popularity, in particular in the USA-based scholarship of educational administration, is social network analysis. Building on a long history of relational scholarship that mobilises mathematical structures, social network analysis is increasingly common in the exploration of educational change (e.g. Liou et al. 2015) and ongoing attempts at mapping the field of educational administration knowledge production (e.g. Wang and Bowers 2016). With its privileging of mathematics, in doing so an appeal to positivism and those who conceive of science through an exhibitionism of data and procedure, such analysis is primarily concerned with relationships between entities (or nodes) and therefore somewhat devoid of underlying relational principles.

To build on this (albeit too brief) historical framing, a search of core educational administration and leadership journals and book publishers was undertaken. The data generated from this search provides some evidence for a trend or at least an increase in affiliation to relations or relational approaches in the literatures. On that basis, I argue that there is an ongoing, if not increasing, recognition that the ideas of relations matter for organising activity in educational administration. However, the minimal attention to theoretical and/or methodological resources to think through what are, or can be, relations is problematic. The contribution of this chapter is not simply in the provision of a historical description of relational approaches to organisational theory in educational administration but instead relates alternate approaches to one another, in doing so providing a relational analysis of relational approaches—as noted earlier, relational scholarship is a way of being rather than simply a theoretical resource.

2 A SYSTEMATIC SEARCH

While there remains multiple manifestations of relational studies in educational administration, for this analysis the review of literature encompassed research that included self-descriptive terms *relational*, *relations*, *relationships*, or close derivatives. Informed by previous studies (e.g. Cherkowski et al. 2012), this search was undertaken in seven key international journals: *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *International Journal of Educational Management*, *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *Journal of Educational Administration*, *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, and *School Leadership and Management*.

Furthermore, book and book chapters published by prominent publishing houses relevant to the field were searched. Key identified publishers included: Routledge, Springer, SAGE, and Emerald. Other publishers such as Cambridge University Press, Sense, Peter Lang, and Jossey-Bass were also checked. Unlike journals, the search strategy was less systematic and relied upon titles, descriptions, and, where possible, checks of reference lists and indices. As noted earlier, the goal was not to identify everything written about relations in educational administration. Such a task is arguably neither possible nor desirable.

After an iterative process of searching abstracts then reading full texts, a final sample of 243 was identified. While the quantity is arguably interesting, the content or nature of the literatures is of far greater significance to advancing knowledge claims. To that end, the analysis of content and the underlying generative principles of arguments is the contribution of this chapter.

3 FOUR CASES OF THE STRUCTURE OF LOGIC IN THE ADVOCACY OF RELATIONAL APPROACHES

Well-rehearsed arguments in organisational theory have stressed the significance of relations and relationships. The earlier section sought to demonstrate some distinctions in the ways in which relational approaches have been mobilised in the educational administration literatures over time. In this section I take up the challenge of further nuancing these distinctions through a systematic analysis of the identified published literatures. There is, based on the identified literatures, a positive trajectory of scholarship making reference to relations. Beginning with a modest single publication in the 1940s, the rate of publications linking to relations has grown rapidly since 2000.

As my assumption of sustained—if not growing—attention is correct, it is then defensible to claim a critical mass of literatures with some form of affiliation to relational approaches. Consistent with interest in the broader social sciences and management literatures, we can expect some diversity in approaches.

To make sense of this sample of literature, building on the work of Dépelteau (2008), Donati (2011), and Prandini (2015), a four-category frame is mobilised to classify the usage of the label “relational”:

- The addition of the adjective “relational” to describe the desirable form of organising activity (e.g. relational leadership);
- the application of relationships to describe the co-determinism of social activities;
- the use of relations to conflate two previously separate concepts/constructs/entities; and
- those focused primarily on relations.

These four categories represent three distinct versions of relational scholarship (see Fig. 32.1). The first, adjectival, is consistent with frequent approaches to educational administration scholarship, which instead of defining “leadership” simply add an adjective reflecting the normative orientation of the researcher. The second and third approaches, “relationalism”, concern co-determinism (as is often seen in systems approaches) or conflationism (e.g. conflating analytical dualisms such as structure and agency, individual and collective, universal and particular). While relational in a sense, this work fails to adequately overcome their substantialist ontologies (those to which relational approaches are said to have developed as a counter to) in building

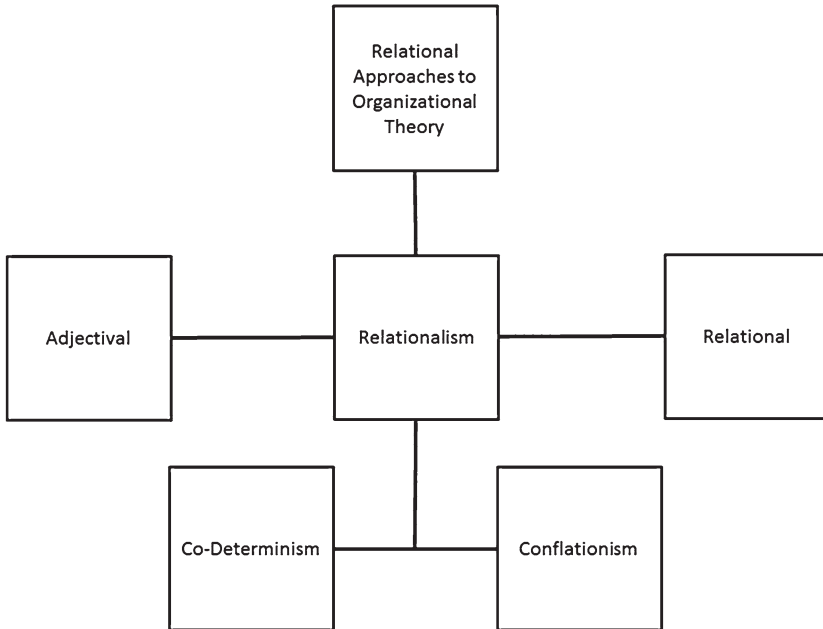


Fig. 32.1 Relational approaches to organisational theory

knowledge claims. The final category, relational, is reflective theoretically, methodologically, and empirically of relationality. This is the closest to an ideal or pure relational scholarship, but it is rare.

While presented here in an order of integration of relations into the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological framing of scholarship, each offers insights into our understanding of organising activity in education. This is not to say that all approaches are equal value, nor that I am neutral in my assessment of their worth, but in the interests of providing a useful synoptic perspective on relational approaches to organisational theory in education below, I focus on the contribution, critique, and trajectory of each category of study. It is important to remind the reader that such categories are far from definitive and there remains considerable grey between them. At the same time, they do reflect major approaches and the challenge of maintaining fidelity between espoused approach and scholarship.

4 ADJECTIVAL RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The use of “relational” as an adjective in educational administration literatures frequently reflects the underlying normative orientation of the observer. This particular approach uses the adjective to advance a particular position and create a distinction from other adjectival approaches (e.g. Bell et al. 2016).

Educational administration has a long history of advocacy for adjectival approaches and promoting fads and fashions. Popular texts and meta-commentaries frequently recite the chronologically dominate perspectives as though they reflect historical moments (e.g. Bush 2011). Relational leadership as an adjectival approach enables the author/s to articulate the importance of relationships (e.g. Helstad and Møller 2013), developing relational trust (e.g. Browning 2014) or sensibilities (e.g. Giles et al. 2015), building positive relationships (e.g. Cardno 2012), and managing external relations (e.g. Lumby and Foskett 2001), among others. These lines of enquiry contribute to the trajectory of arguments stressing the importance of social relations for organising activity, such as Follett and Mayo.

There is widespread, if not universal, acceptance of the relational aspects of social activity. Despite this appeal, the contribution of these adjectival relational approaches is limited as the articulation remains grounded in the normative orientation of the observer. The adjective is used as a cover to argue for a specific approach to leadership, one believed to be superior to all other forms. However, the argument is fundamentally flawed as the criteria used to judge “good” (“effective”, “desirable”, etc.) leadership—that which conforms to the observer’s position—is that which is consistent with the description of the adjective “relational”. The approach confirms itself by generating data that is consistent with its worldview.

Apart from the explicit adjectival leadership, there is some, although limited, examples of articles claiming to mobilise a “relational” form of analysis (e.g. Branson et al. 2016). The difficulties of mobilising a relational analytical approach in a field well recognised for defaulting to adjectival models become clear quickly, as can be seen below in an example from Branson and colleagues (2016: 128):

The focus on leadership as first and foremost relational provides a frame for critically examining the nature and complexities inherent in the lived reality of middle leadership. Relational leadership is conceptualized as encompassing four inter-related dimensions. These are derived from data and respectively centre on structure and power; trust and credibility; learning; and discursive relations. (p. 128)

Branson and colleagues (2016) conflate an analytical approach with a normative position. “Middle leadership”, that used to demarcate individuals holding specific positions with an organisational structure, becomes synonymous with “relational leadership”. For the authors, this is based on Burns’ (1978) claim that the authority of any leader comes not from structural arrangements but is instead generated through relationships. An underlying substantialism built on objective structures means that Branson and colleagues are really arguing for, at best, a relational bureaucracy, but arguably just for their version of what “good” leadership is (particularly given their own roles during the research). Although there are appeals for relations between roles within the structure, the negating of power in such relations and/or reducing it to a

simple thesis that having “positive” relations is a good thing, barely raises such claims beyond common sense. What is missing from this approach—both conceptual and analytical—is a theory of relations.

The major critique of adjectival approaches to leadership (or anything) is that they tell us little about the focus of analysis. The mobilisation of relational is vacuous. It tells us little about leadership (or whatever other focus is taken) and at the same time simply uses relational as synonymous for a particular version of it (e.g. trust, sensibilities, positive work environment). It just becomes a language wheeled out to express a sense of importance and an attempt to “bring people back in” (Louis 2015) compared to more structural-based accounts. In doing so, adjectival approaches do illuminate a particular version of educational administration. As for contributing to advancing knowledge of relations, the contribution is small at best.

5 CO-DETERMINISM

In what has been described as “an era of relationships” (Daly 2015), the most common form of relational approach in educational administration literatures (84%, $n = 205$) can best be described as co-determinism. This is where the outcome of a particular activity is explained through the relationship of two (or more) entities. As Abbott (1965) notes, building on the work of Getzels and Guba (but without reference to Parsons), “the current tendency in the study of organizational behavior is to identify the structural characteristics of the organization and the personal characteristics of the individual, and to analyze the relationships of structure, personality, and behavior” (p. 1). Given the orthodoxy of (Parsonian) systems thinking, co-determinism conforms to hegemonic approaches to scholarship in the field. Therefore, it is common to find research that links principals’ social interactions with teachers and student engagement (e.g. Price 2015); vision, teacher motivation, and relationships (e.g. Barnett and McCormick 2003); or that links leadership, student citizenship, and outcomes (e.g. Savvides and Pashiardis 2016). In addition, it is possible to see multiple papers from the same researcher/s that substitutes variables. For example De Nobile and McCormick discuss organisational communication and job satisfaction (De Nobile and McCormick 2008), organisational communication and occupational stress (De Nobile, McCormick and Hoekman 2013), and biographic differences with job satisfaction (De Nobile and McCormick 2008) and occupational stress (De Nobile and McCormick 2010). This conceptualisation of relations is also found in research on school effectiveness and school improvement, where it is not uncommon to find sophisticated statistical approaches used to establish and argue for interventions over malleable (or manageable/manipulation of) variables. In an era of evidence-informed policy-making and an orthodox approach to science that privileges exhibitionism of data and procedure, statistical modelling of relationships gives work a greater sense of legitimacy and chance of generating impact. It is not, however, without limitations.

Relations in a co-determinism approach are reduced to relationships. These relationships are constituted through measurement. With the privileging of mathematical models (e.g. correlation matrices, structured equation modelling, and social network analysis) relationships are social constructions generated by observers to explain interactions between two (or more) entities. They can be measured for strength and direction but do little to explain what constitutes, sustains, or negates, among others, the relations. As an example of co-determinist social network theory, Wang and Bowers (2016: 246) state:

Social network theory holds that the actors are not independent of one another, but interdependent through ties serving as the conduit for resource exchange (Burt 1982; Degenne and Forse 1999; Wasserman and Faust 1994). By this view, the presence or absence of ties and the strength of ties exert influence on resource flow in the network and thereby hinder or enhance individual actor performance and collective performance of the network as a whole (Borgatti and Foster 2003; Burt 1982). By performing social network analysis, each actor's structural position in the network can be quantified by analyzing the patterns of ties in order to measure to what extent resources flow to and from each actor (Borgatti and Everett 1992; Burt 1976, 1980). (p. 246)

Despite the increasing sophistication of statistical analytical tools, as with the adjectival, the absence of an underlying generative theory of relations means the co-determinism remains somewhat vacuous outside of the entities.

This does not necessarily have to be the case and should not be interpreted as a disregarding of statistical-based approaches. In the broader social sciences, Crossley (2011, 2015) has consistently used social network analysis in his work and it retains a relational dynamism by avoiding essentialism and substantialism. Significantly, with a cultural sociology edge, Crossley sees matters such as gender, ethnicity, and occupational class as positions in a social scape rather than individual attributes. Tastes and preferences are acquired through interactions in social networks rather than essentialised.

This is a very different approach to the implied causal structuralism of a substantialist argument. The distinction, to think with Bourdieu, is the underlying generative assumptions regarding relations. Unfortunately, co-determinist approaches in educational administration literatures continue to mobilise relationships as a measurement construct rather than building upon a theory of relations. Entities are constructed and the focus is on the relationship between those entities rather than the relations themselves.

Co-determinism is, however, not limited to quantitative analysis. An underlying generative principle of structuralism can exist in more qualitative-based studies (mindful that the quantitative and qualitative binary is not particularly productive). For example, Zembylas and Iasonos (2010) use semi-structured interviews to build an argument relating multicultural schools and leadership styles. The absence of a mathematic structure to build the argument does not exclude a theoretical position that still relies on different variables that interact to determine an outcome. Beginning to blur the boundaries of determinism

and conflationism, Cusick (1981) provides an ethnographic-inspired study of networks among staff in secondary school via a combination of interviews and participant observation. This comes close to providing an alternative beyond co-determinism, but he cannot take his argument beyond a foundational belief in the substantialist conceptualisation of the teacher–student relationships and, more importantly, the analytical dualism of individual/collective. Once again, the space in-between remains elusive and simply explained away as relationships. Despite this stream having a very long history in systems thinking, Daly (2015) argues:

Placing interactions and important outcomes from those interactions front and central I believe reflects a promising next generation of education research. The question facing us all as researchers/practitioners is not whether or not relational capacity and the climates in which people do their work is important, but rather how we should create, nurture, and sustain these networks in support of equity and excellence for all shareholders.

Apart from falling back upon a normative stance at the end, this idea that relational approaches offer a new generation or alternative to existing approaches is arguably foundational to the next two forms of relational scholarship.

6 CONFLATIONISM

Some conceptualisations of the relational engage with, if not overcome, the space between. The work of Greenfield (Greenfield and Ribbins 1993) explicitly challenged the orthodoxy of logical empiricism in educational administration. However, his work is more than just advocacy for the subjective (as his intervention is frequently reduced to, if at all acknowledged) and instead opened up the subject–object relation and the role of social constructivism and constructionism. Social practices, including organising, are interactional and situationally emergent. In other words, organisations are generated through actions and only exist in those actions and our memories. Greenfield sought not to conflate the subject and object but to overcome the binary thinking by denying its very existence. In attempting to take this challenge seriously, but without paying attention to the underlying generative resources, educational administration researchers often engage in a form of conflationism.

Unlike the atomistic approach of co-determinism, where entities are conceived as discrete and knowable, conflationism seeks to grant a single identity to what have traditionally been seen as separate entities or even analytical dualisms. As an example, Gray (1981) claims “Managers and organizations are inseparable; like love and marriage they go together” (p. 157). Without significant attention to the ontological and epistemological assumptions of claims, conflationism more often blurs rather than overcomes the underlying separate entities. As Gray (1981) continues, “You cannot manage unless you have an

organization to manage but you can have an organization that is completely unmanageable” (p. 157). Although Gray was unable to advance his claims without immediately defaulting back to separate constructs (one where management was dependent on organisations but not the reverse—therefore an error of logic for the conflation argument), conflationism is one way that educational administration researchers have sought to engage with the relational.

Globalisation is one issue frequently claimed to have recast spatial relations and relationships in educational administration. Conflationism offers an approach which appeals to attempts to blend the global (universal) with the local (particular). In educational administration there have been several attempts to overcome this layering of the social world such as the rather awkward “glocal” perspective (e.g. Brooks and Normore 2010). Any sense of relational thinking based on layers is caught within relationships between distinct entities (e.g. levels). Insufficient attention to ontology and epistemology means that such approaches rarely overcome the dualisms and merely conflate them. The layered conceptualisation relies on a form of scalable infrastructure, or external social structures.

Grounded in classic sociology and the centrality of the nation-state, globalisation is limited to a form of causal structuralism and a transactional model of exchanges between the local and the global. Therefore, despite appearing as a theoretical necessity for understanding contemporary spatio-temporal conditions, conflationism of global–local relations meets neither the empirical virtues of the classic empiricist through fuzzy categories nor the theoretical sophistication of the social theorist. To overcome the layered conceptualisation of the world would require a flat ontology. This is something that is well beyond existing accounts of educational administration.

In another example of, or attempt at conflationism, Helstad and Møller (2013) address leadership as relational work. In particular, they set out to explore how participants position themselves and others through negotiations in meetings, arguing that relational work affects the ever-changing status of the division of authority (arguably what Branson and colleagues were seeking to illuminate). There is an explicit attempt in this work to see leadership as a relational activity (as was hinted at by Leithwood and Duke many years earlier). However, as with the globalisation example, overcoming substantialist orthodoxy remains problematic for Helstad and Møller (2013: 246):

A relational perspective views leadership as a process of social construction with a focus on participating in interaction (Edwards 2005; Uhl-Bien 2006). Hence, leadership exists in relation to other positions, and therefore, is interactive and culturally sensitive. Further, dialogical processes are central aspects of leadership, and these processes distribute leadership and unfold in collective interactions within the organization (Gronn 2000; Spillane 2006). However, while recognizing that multiple leaders concerned with leadership practices exist in school, the principal, as the formal head, still holds a central position (Scribner et al. 2007; Harris and Spillane 2008). (p. 246)

Traces of two key separations remain in the above example despite an attempt at conflationism. First, there is still a distance between “leaders” and “leadership practices”, meaning that leaders enact leadership practices. This is a subtle but important move as it is symbolic of an underlying substantialist ontology where “leadership practices” are only a subset of the practice of “leaders” and therefore a set of practices which could potentially be enacted by others (including non-leaders), rendering a separation between “leaders” and “leadership practice”. Second, despite an interest in leadership as relational work, the paper relies on the bureaucratic division of roles as key markers of leadership activity—mobilising a causal structuralism. This is not uncommon, and I have used this one paper as an example, but it does highlight some significant limitations of conflationism as an approach to advancing relational theorising in educational administration.

7 RELATIONAL

Recently, but building on a range of literatures, there has been a specific articulation of a relational approach that recognises the relations of subject—object and the relation as the basic unit of analysis. My own work, best articulated at this point in *Educational Leadership Relationally* (2015) and *Beyond Leadership* (2018), has been debated by a number of scholars including, but not exclusively, Bush (2017), Crawford (2016), Oplatka (2016), Riveros (2016), and Wallin (2016), with forthcoming pieces from English and Gunter. Built on a very Bourdieuan craft of scholarship, but without any great loyalty or reverence, my work is based on five relational extensions:

- The centrality of *organising* in the social world creates an ontological complicity in researchers (and others) that makes it difficult to epistemologically break from ordinary language.
- Rigorous social scientific enquiry calls into question the very foundations of popular labels such as *leadership*, *management*, and *administration*.
- Spatio-temporal conditions are constantly shaping, and shaped by, the image of organising.
- Foregrounding social relations enables the overcoming of the contemporary, and arguably enduring, tensions of individualism/collectivism, universalism/particularism, and structure/agency.
- In doing so, there is a productive—rather than merely critical—space to theorise educational administration.

In shifting the focus from entities/substances to relations, the approach moves beyond the application of an adjective, does not limit the conceptualisation of relations to measurable relationships, nor seeks to conflate analytical dualisms. Instead, the approach offers a means of composing theoretically inscribed descriptions of emergent action. It directly engages with the relations between the researcher and the researched, the uncritical adoption of everyday language in scholarship, the role of spatio-temporal conditions in shaping

understanding and vice versa, and the limitations of binary thinking—and seeks to productively theorise, not just critique. As an approach, it does not definitively resolve the ontological and epistemological issues of educational administration, but it does engage with them. In doing so, it offers the potential to bring about new ways of understanding beyond simply mapping the intellectual terrain with novel ideas and vocabularies.

My approach is not without critique: ranging from the difficulties of thinking through context relationally rather than in a layered way (Oplatka 2016), its value in an applied field (Crawford 2016), and whether it offers anything “new” compared to existing theorisations (Bush 2017). Wallin (2016) in particular is critical as to whether feminist (and arguably poststructuralist) approaches have provided relational theorisations of educational administration in the past but have been marginalised until legitimised by male (usually white) scholars. This is a fair critique, as examples in the sampled literature from the likes of Blackmore (2013), Fuller (2010), and Coleman (2003) have mobilised feminist, poststructuralist, and gendered positions to offer relational arguments. But in relation to my own research programme, Wallin (2016: 38) notes:

Eacott’s developing work is of interest because it attempts to deal with the messiness and complexity of social organizations and its legitimation. Feminists the world over have attempted to address these same concerns. The advocacy for openness to multiplicity in perspective, attention to temporality and sociospatiality, and the dangers of hegemonic discourse provide fruitful and exciting avenues for scholarly theorizing and research in educational administration. The tensions inherent in the work are both empirical and theoretical tensions that cannot be untangled without creating new paradoxes but they are worthy of dialogue in the interests of rigorous scholarship. (p. 38)

There is some momentum in the trajectory of the relational research programme in educational administration (although I am biased on this matter). A growing number of papers, book chapters, theses, and full book-length treatments are being generated and building a key corpus. The primary distinction between this work and others adopting adjectival, co-determinist, or conflationist relational approaches is the shift to relations as the central focus. Rather than seek to illuminate relationships within or beyond organisations or advocating for a particular type or set of relations, the relational approach I am advancing arguably confronts orthodox thinking regarding organisations and organising activity.

8 WHEN RELATIONAL APPROACHES CONFRONT THE LOGIC OF ORGANISING

Organisations, and by virtue organisational studies, have traditionally employed an underlying generative principle of substantialism. To study organisations requires a belief in the idea of external objective structures—namely organisations—and the interplay of actors/agents. Relational approaches, at

least those taking relations as their focus, explicitly challenge the core assumptions of organisations. To move beyond the orthodox usage of relations, relational, and relationships in educational administration literatures a key question raised is: *Can organisational studies, and specifically educational administration, survive a relational turn?* This is more than a rhetorical question. Relations challenge many of the underlying generative principles of organisational studies. For example, how can one study organisations if they do not exist? Who or what is the focus of enquiry? Does a relational approach destroy the notion of the organisation?

The main problem for advocates of relational approaches is that we do not have a convincing theory of relations. This is arguably the product of a diverse set of scholars and approaches identifying as relational. Excluding the adjectival and its normative basis for claims, interest in relational approaches emerged from a dissatisfaction with substantialist accounts of the social world. To this end, relational scholarship in educational administration is about seeing and understanding the world. Co-determinist and conflationist approaches are problematic in this regard. The demarcation of what is a relationship (e.g. a measurement construct) and the measurement of that connection for direction and strength does not address the concern regarding substantialist approaches. Instead, it reinforces the substantialist ontology through data points. Similarly, conflating what were once considered to be discrete entities does not resolve substantialist critiques unless the theoretical recasting of the entities negates the original separation (which most do not).

All this being said, simply asking ‘what is a relation?’ is somewhat contrary to a relational approach. The requirement for explicit parameters and operational definitions is unnecessary for thinking relationally. To make a universal statement as to what is and by virtue is not a relation would be to outline a static and immovable object. To argue for relational scholarship is an open call. This is why the focus is on relations and not relationships. As a consequence, scholarship becomes a little fuzzy. Given my trajectory in Bourdieuan social theory, I am drawn to the opening passage of Ladwig’s (1996: 1) *Academic Distinctions*:

In the midst of a very academic lecture and debate which took place in the Social Science Building on the campus of the University of Wisconsin, Madison on 4 April 1989, Pierre Bourdieu was questioned about the degree to which his sociology provides a fuzzy picture of the social world. The questioner clearly did not see this fuzziness as a virtue. But in response, Bourdieu explained that while he generally declines from making universal proclamations about how sociology ought to be conducted (forevermore), there was one tenet he himself tried to follow. In Bourdieu’s words, when constructing his sociological accounts, the one rule he has tried to follow has been, “Do not be more clear than reality.” (p. 1)

For the purpose of this chapter and for educational administration as a field of enquiry, the question “what is a relation?” arguably still remains. A key insight here is provided by Donati (2015) when he contends that society does not have

relations but *is* relations. Following Donati, a relational approach to educational administration (or any field of enquiry) arguably needs to conceive of relations as emergent (this emergence can also be found in the works of Weber and Durkheim). From this point of view, a relational approach is a way of seeing (ontological) and knowing (epistemological) the world. It is not a conceptual framework to be applied but a methodological lens for scholarship.

To this end, it is not possible to articulate in advance what is, and is not, a relation. To do so would be to construct the relation as an entity, an approach that would fall into the measurement construct critique, and be contrary to the initial stimulus for relational scholarship. Instead, a relational approach uses relations to understand. The research object is located relationally in time and space. Even the construction of the research object is related to the observer. A relational approach mobilises relations throughout the entire scholastic enterprise. There is no stepping outside of relations.

Our lack of understanding of relations in educational administration needs to be understood in the trajectory of systems thinking and bureaucracy. The orthodoxy of structural arrangements and substantialist approaches goes relatively unrecognised. However, a relational approach to educational administration must break free of the ambition of grounding in (rational) reason the arbitrary division of the social world (e.g. leaders, organisations), and, instead, take for its object, rather than getting itself caught up in, the struggle for the monopoly of the legitimate representation of the social world. A shift from substances to relations focuses enquiry on organising activity rather than organisations. This also asks some questions regarding how activity takes place. Rather than interacting with external objective structures there is a need to rethink the nature of these relations. Core categories of time and space are potentially recast through relational approaches. The external measure of clock time and the idea of practice taking place in context reflect substantialist thinking more so than relational.

Despite relations being recognised as important, if not essential, for organising activity, educational administration has proceeded without a productive theoretical or methodological lens. Scholars working and identifying with relational approaches—in all its many forms—remain on the margins. But as Ladwig (1998) argues, “it is quite possible (and plausible) to see alternative stances take up positions on the periphery of a field at the very same time as the core or center changes very little” (p. 35). As a methodological lens, relational approaches can productively engage with both the theoretical and empirical questions of educational administration.

Well-rehearsed arguments of leadership stress it is relational (Uhl-Bien and Ospina 2012). Twenty years ago Emirbayer (1997) argued that “social thinkers from a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds, national traditions, and analytic and empirical points of view are fast converging upon this [a relational] frame of reference” (p. 311). Educational administration has a lengthy history of relational approaches in the field’s literatures. The challenge that remains is to what extent scholars in the field are willing to engage with the frontiers of

these knowledge claims and in pushing them further. There is a real opportunity for educational administration scholars to engage with the “relational turn” (Prandini 2015) of contemporary social thought and analysis. Given that schooling is a modern institution, relational approaches can be significant in generating new understandings through illuminating the ontological and epistemological preliminaries of scholarship and theorising relations in ways that open new problems and possibilities.

9 CONCLUSION

Mone and McKinley (1993) argue that “organizational scientists should attempt to make unique contributions to their discipline” (p. 284). Although novelty or uniqueness are often major components of what are regarded as contributions, by virtue of arguments making it into print, editors and reviewers are to some extent the custodians of a field’s traditions, and challenging prevailing views and trends is difficult. The generative logic of scholarly work—argument and refutation—requires locating new theorisations and empirical examples in relation to the existing body of knowledge. Fragmentation of scholarship, or the absence of meaningful dialogue and debate across research traditions, is a major impediment for advancing knowledge. The parallel monologues that have come to dominate educational administration literatures sustain themselves without necessarily contributing to increasingly sophisticated understandings of the social world.

Hallinger (2013) argues that reviews of research are the “under-appreciated workhorses of academic publication” (p. 127) while Bush (1999) contends that the “prize for a successful review could be a new beginning and continued growth” (p. 249). Orthodox reviews of educational administration research have focused on content, method, geographic location, or a combination in the form of descriptive analysis of contributions. These approaches rely upon a substantialist-based ontology that separates the social world into various entities capable of being identified and measured. What I have sought to offer is a commentary on contemporary educational administration literatures—primarily journals—with particular attention to the underlying generative principles of scholarship claiming some affiliation with relations. Foregrounding relations has enabled me to move beyond the positivist ideal, concerned with the accumulation and linear progression of knowledge—the next big thing, or breakthrough, being the incremental development of all that has gone before.

Engaging with issues of knowledge production is a demanding task and whether what I have offered qualifies as a “successful review” cannot be known in advance. Unlike sociology, educational administration does not have a clearly defined stream of relational scholarship. In this chapter I have sought to survey contemporary debates and developments in research grouped loosely under the label of relational. Building on existing categorisations (e.g. Dépelteau, Donati, Prandini) four main approaches were identified: adjectival, co-determinism, conflationism, and relational. As educational administration

is centrally concerned with the workings (in all its forms) of organisations, relational approaches pose a significant challenge for the field. In shifting attention to relations rather than structures, what is the value of educational administration?

A, if not the, key argument of this chapter is that relational approaches offer a methodological rather than conceptual framework for the study of educational administration. Attention to relations throughout the research endeavour means engaging with ontological and epistemological assumptions as well as empirical data. It is unclear at this point as to whether relational approaches will continue to gather attention and traction within educational administration. Currently, the bulk of relational scholarship is co-determinist with some conflationary and adjectival work. As momentum builds in sociology, of which this handbook is a major milestone, it will be interesting to see if relational approaches become of greater appeal in educational administration. In the contemporary academy, the distance between disciplines is currently being recast through calls for interdisciplinary work to engage with complex problems. Relational approaches offer educational administration the means to theorise how the latter is perceived, understood, and enacted within the contemporary spatio-temporal conditions. Significantly, as relations are always in motion, relational approaches provide a set of theoretical resources for understanding the ways in which organising is achieved, and because of the dynamic and contradictory nature of the social world, this is an ongoing and inexhaustible intellectual project.

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Marcel Mauss, the Gift and Relational Sociology

Christian Papilloud

I INTRODUCTION

Marcel Mauss (1872–1950) is the nephew of Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), the founding father of French academic sociology. Marcel Mauss introduces himself as the faithful collaborator of Emile Durkheim, and the first supporter of his scientific project (see Besnard and Fournier in Durkheim 1998, 5ff.). He not only proves this after Durkheim’s death, when he undertook the publication of the second series of Durkheim’s journal *L’Année sociologique* (1896–1913), but supports him throughout his life as well. From the beginning, Mauss supports Durkheim’s intellectual project—to found the science of society—and contributes to Durkheim’s institutional prospect—to establish sociology at the French university. Mauss plays a critical role in developing the statistics for Durkheim’s famous book on suicide (1897). He recruits other collaborators for *L’Année*, and along with his friend Henri Hubert, he becomes the director of the section *Sociologie religieuse* in *L’Année*—the most important section of the journal (Besnard 2003, 319–329). Finally, for nearly twelve years, Mauss contributed to the foundations of Durkheim’s major work on the elementary forms of religious life (1912), providing his uncle with material for elaborating his theory of society, which is “exactly opposite to the so coarse and so simplistic historical materialism, and in spite of its objectivism, will make religion, rather than economy, the matrix of social facts” (Durkheim to Mauss in June 1897, in Durkheim 1998b, 71). For Durkheim, religion and society are interdependent, and society is at “the core of religion” (Durkheim 1998a, 599). This complementarity of the two concepts reflects the Durkheim–Mauss complementarity to the extent that commentators often situate the nephew’s work as the prolongation of the uncle’s. Moreover, when it comes to underlining

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their differences (see, for example, König 1978, 239; Gephart 1990, 137ff.; Fournier 1994, 334ff.; Strenski 1997, 132ff.; Mürmel 1997, 214 and 217), it is generally done in order to better highlight their resemblance (Isambert 1976, 39). However, although Mauss undoubtedly remains close to his uncle, and contributes to his intellectual prospect, he also makes an original contribution to sociology with his *Gift* (Mauss 1925, 30–186). In *Gift*, he presents the formula of a relational scheme, which will later become popular in sociology, based on the three following terms: to give, receive and return presents.

2 MAUSS' RELATIONAL SCHEME

Mauss' *Gift* represents, in his time, the convergence point of the broad majority of works carried out on the gift in the various scientific disciplines at an international level. In his *Gift*, Mauss succeeds in synthesizing the ethnographic research results on the practices related to the gift, while at the same time putting them in a historical and intercultural perspective. The gift is not an anecdotal ethnic phenomenon, and it is not solely related to the development of Indo-European exchange. Gifts can be found in all human cultures on the five continents. Mauss, who works with Henri Hubert on religions and particularly on cultural forms of sacrifice, discovers the work of ethnographer Franz Boas regarding forms of sumptuary codes of consumption in Kwakiutl and Eskimo societies. Mauss pays attention to one of the most spectacular of these sacrifices, namely the potlatch, which plays an important role in his *Gift*. The potlatch is the ceremonial destruction of the most valuable goods of a tribe at regular intervals in time. Mauss was also inspired by James Frazer, John Swanton and Charles Seligman in his extension of the potlatch beyond the American continent, for example to Papua New Guinea; his work, in turn, influenced the works of Pitt Rivers and Richard Thurnwald on reciprocity in Melanesian societies. Finally, the works of Marcel Granet, Georges Davy, Raymond Lenoir, and material delivered by Bronislaw Malinowski about the Kula (on the exchange of wristlets and sea snails between the populations of the Trobriand Islands) will convince him of the existence of a common core (Mauss 1925, 167) of all social practices in all known cultures. This "core" is the gift, as a relational and universal principle of exchange leading to the peaceful association of human beings through mutual obligations to give, receive and return presents. The gift as a relational scheme first means that there is an obligation to give, to receive and to return a present. Second, such obligations foster a circulation of objects, rituals, human beings and symbolic figures (for example gods) between actors, groups and societies. Mauss sees the gift as a collective phenomenon, or, as he puts it, as a total social fact, as well as a means to change modern society by making modern human beings more aware of their anthropological roots. Mauss supposes that such an archaic exchange as the gift remains vivid in contemporary societies, but is veiled by the omnipresence of economic exchanges. Thus, the gift is not a phenomenon specific to foreign societies and cultures. It is at the core of all our societies.

3 MAUSS' GIFT: CONCEPTS AND METHODS

The giving of a present is the first moment of Mauss' relational scheme in his Gift. To give a present not only means passing something on to another actor. It cannot be reduced to an economic transaction. The things given create specific obligations and expectations on the side of the giver, as well as on the side of the recipient. The giver exerts power on the recipient, as he gives him something. This act—to give—symbolizes the “magic” character of his power, that is, the ability of the giver to ensure the recipient enters into a relation with him. In this context, Mauss refers to the *hau*. The *hau* is the spirit of the things given. This term comes from the Maori lawyer Tamati Ranapiri, and it has been employed by Elsdon Best, whom Mauss refers to in his Gift (Mauss 1925, 46). The *hau* reflects, at the level of the things given, the character of the giver, as well as the power which the things exert on the recipient, which is the power of the giver over the recipient through the things given. The *hau*, according to Best, also means that the things given claim their return to the giver, ensuring the giver that the things he gives do not get lost, but come back to him in due course. Receipt of a present is the second moment of the gift directly bound to the first one—giving a present—and it has a critical meaning for the gift. Indeed, the recipient could refuse the gift, and thus break the circulation of gifts. Marcel Mauss mentions two typical examples illustrating possible refusal of a gift, namely: (1) refusal of a gift due to the fear of not being able to return the gift (Mauss 1925, 62ff.); and (2) the refusal of gifts by the Indian Brahman, particularly his refusal of anything acquired on the basis of economic exchanges (Mauss 1925, 147ff.). However, in both cases, Mauss indicates that an absolute refusal of the gift is impossible: “One does not have the right to refuse a gift” (Mauss 1925, 105). Rather, the possibility of the recipient refusing a gift highlights the double challenge attached to their position as “recipient” of a gift. First, the recipient poses a challenge to the giver, who must give in such a way that their gift can be accepted by the recipient. At the same time, the recipient is expected to return the gift, either in a direct manner by returning the gift to the giver, or indirectly by giving it to another recipient, who will be charged with the obligation to return the gift to the giver. This double challenge of receiving the gift best demonstrates that each position in the circulation of gifts supposes the triple obligation to give, receive and return a present—or, to put it in other words: givers and recipients will one day be recipients and givers. This triple obligation is, at the same time, a powerful motivation to restrict the possibility of refusal, thus ideally making it impossible to refuse to give, to receive and to return gifts. If it is always possible to refuse a gift, this is more of a theoretical concern than a practical one. In practice, there is virtually no possibility for such a refusal, because the circulation of gifts is socially controlled and sanctioned. This can be best illustrated using the third moment of the gift: returning the present.

The returned present is either the same object as the one received, or another object; because what counts is not the object itself, but the return of the gift.

Yet, if the returned object is not the same as the given one, it should not be radically different from the given one. It should have certain qualities by which the giver can recognize it as similar to the object he gave. This is why returning presents is not an easy task; it always supposes a lot of consideration regarding what, how and when the present should be returned, as well as the kind of object or service to add to it. Indeed, returning a present always implies returning it with something more, in order to compensate the gift of the giver, and in order to challenge him to give again. The return of the gift is thus also an important moment of the gift—it punctually closes the cycle of the gift, which it has to renew at the same time. Therefore, there are persuasive systems of sanctions aimed at ensuring the return of the thing given, of which the most repressive ones appear in the examples of the potlatch (Mauss 1925, 108–109). In the potlatch, the actors who do not return the gift can—and sometimes must—be killed. Apart from the potlatch, the systems of sanctions can be more flexible, adapted to the various failures of the gift to return. They do not directly threaten the life of the recipient, but they rather aim at disrupting his social recognition. The recipient “loses his face”, is reduced to “slavery for debt” or is “banned” from society (Mauss 1925, 108). The variation of the systems of sanctions thus indicates a corresponding variety of possible ways to return presents, and, therefore, various ways of practising reciprocal exchanges.

At a theoretical level, Mauss does not assign to the circulation of gifts a strictly ethical or theological meaning, where the circulation of donations should always compensate for an infinite debt, as if the gift symbolized the original debt of human beings towards gods. Debt definitely plays an important role in the circulation of gifts. But Mauss insists on the sense of obligation between the actors of the gift, which exists primarily because of their exchanges. Once taken up in the circulation of gifts, the actors have practical obligations to fulfil, of which they cannot be discharged—at least not without exposing themselves to strong social sanctions. In a similar way, the gift escapes the commercial economy. The exchange of gifts does not lead to an accumulation of material resources, or to profit, but to obligations, and further exchanges with further actors. It makes the actors more aware of these obligations, which become even more compulsory. An actor refusing a gift because he does not need it, or because he considers the gift inappropriate to him, all the more engages him to receive gifts, and from there to return, and to give them. Finally, Mauss’ thesis also escapes an ontological conception of the gift as total or pure donation. The gift is never total, nor pure, because it cannot be understood without its counterpart—the refusal of gifts—even if this refusal is almost impossible in practice, given the social systems of sanctions attached to the circulation of gifts. The circulation of gifts represents a kind of inalterable force, the one Mauss depicts with the term *mana*. The *mana*, the magical power of things, makes the things exchanged in the circulation of gifts sacred things, which put their owners in the position to fulfil their social role (Mauss 1925, 97, 156, 175). Mauss sees in *mana* a kind of practical force in the form of techniques, strategies and rituals coming from society, and affecting its actors as

well as its processes. The *mana* makes things, people and society circulate, and in order to understand this circulation, one has to reconstruct the kind of specific practices contributing to it, where what has been called the *mana*—as Mauss supposes—finds its origin.

At a methodological level, the Gift is a great piece of writing through which to understand how Mauss works. Mauss did neither sociological nor ethnological fieldwork. In this sense, his methodology is more like a kind of practical recipe to stabilize his interpretation of the materials collected by others—it is a kind of secondary analysis. It associates the comparative methods inherited from the fields of linguistics and philology, and the genealogical perspective on history, both applied to works in the field of ethnology and of religious studies. The gift is not only a present, but brings with it a lot of social actors and social institutions. In order to investigate the gift, one should first understand the relations between these things, actors and institutions. For this reason, it is important to initially limit the investigation to precise contexts, and to inspect them systematically. It will then be possible to compare the variations of similar or at least comparable facts in other comparable contexts, as well as to describe the causes of such variations. This leads to a genetic reconstruction not only of one society, but of several interrelated societies, which should give an explanation of collective habits. With this method, Mauss undertakes a “pragmatic” turn within Durkheimian sociology, that is, a descent to the concrete social phenomenon—the level which Mauss calls, after Durkheim, “social morphology”. Mauss wants to understand each of these kind of phenomena in their complexity—explaining their variations compared to other varying phenomena—and in their totality—as part of something which is bigger than them (society), which they reflect, and at the same time in which they play a defined role—defined by practical collective habits. The gift is such a totality; in order to analyse it, one cannot reduce it to one or another of its facets. Rather, one has to understand the process which brings these facets and phenomena together, and which result in a specific kind of gift, that is, a specific circulation with specific actors, things, institutions. In this sense, Mauss’ Gift inserts a relational scheme in Durkheimian sociology based on the comparative analysis of practices and macro-social processes operating in supposedly every society.

4 RECEPTION

The first reactions to Mauss’ Gift are relatively moderate. This has three main reasons. The first one is that the gift causes a polemic in the group of Durkheimians even before Mauss publishes his essay, a polemic which extends beyond the group of scholars around Mauss after the publication of Georges Davy’s doctoral thesis “*La foi jurée*” (Davy 1922). Davy’s thesis will be the object of many criticisms coming from two new Durkheimians, Marcel Granet and Raymond Lenoir (Besnard 1985, 247–255). Davy, a former student of Mauss, is portrayed as having borrowed Mauss’ intuitions about the gift, which he condenses and alters in order to be the first author to publish on this topic.

Moreover, Davy asserts that the origin of the gift is the potlatch, detracting from the idea that the gift is a common core of our exchanges. Davy gives the impression that he wants to disqualify Mauss' interpretation of the gift in advance by stating that the gift has been developed after the phenomenon of sumptuary codes of consumption as discussed by Boas, and at the same time by establishing the precedence of English literature over the research work done by Mauss and the Durkheimians on these topics. In an attempt to slow down the polemic, Mauss tries to clarify his interpretation in order to show that Davy only overestimates the role of the potlatch. In the way of a teacher to his student, Mauss writes to Davy:

You did not follow my distinction between the societies with exhaustive contracts (phratry to phratry; clan to clan with nearly no confrontation), and those with exhaustive agonistic contracts—or potlatch. You confuse the particular case with the general one. Your reasoning on marriage is right, and it is adjusted to the general case; it is useless and dangerous to act as if it were restricted to the potlatch, to the particular case. (Mauss to Davy printed in Besnard 1985, 248)

This polemic eventually ends with Davy leaving the group of the Durkheimians and taking an administrative position in the French educational system in the city of Rennes. However, there is another reason why Mauss' Gift remains controversial: his supposed misinterpretation of the hau.

Mauss refers to Elsdon Best when he interprets the Maori term hau. Best's articles for the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* do not deliver only one signification of the hau, but insist on multiple meanings. Generally speaking, the hau refers to a vital essence, or a principle of life (Best 1900, 189–191). But it is also close to the concepts of personality, of resemblance (ahua; *ibid.*, 186, 189), of wind, breath, breathing (*ibid.*, 190), as well as of the mana (*ibid.*). It can also mean “king” or “supreme leader” (*ibid.*), and it can be found within animated objects, as well as inanimate ones (*ibid.*, 191). Best makes several suggestions about how the hau can be interpreted in European cultures, thus opening the word to multiple interpretations. Raymond Firth uses the multiple meanings of the hau to criticize Mauss. In choosing a specific interpretation of the hau, Mauss distorts its original meaning, which shows that Mauss did not understand the hau correctly:

In his *Essai sur le don* he had taken a Maori text as the pivot of his argument about reciprocity of the gift. But I felt he did not really understand the Maori, and in fact he illuminated one word of the text quite the wrong way. The Maori elder spoke of a gift having an immaterial essence which demanded a proper return. Mauss misread this as implying that part of the personality of the giver was involved. (Firth's letter from 7 April 1998, printed in James and Allen 1998, 23)

Firth's criticism will be taken up again by further scholars dealing with Mauss' Gift (for example, Lévi-Strauss 1950, xxxviii; Lefort 1950, 1402; Weiner 1985, 211–215), and it will also be put into perspective (Sahlins 1972,

155–170; Leach 1983, 536; Karsenti 1997, 381, footnote 1); the commentators emphasize that despite his interpretation of the *hau*, Mauss' thoughts on the gift cannot be reduced to the *hau* only. Moreover, the critical message of *Gift* does not regard the things themselves, but rather the kind of exchange which structures societies. The conclusion of *Gift* delivers key elements which clearly show what Mauss' intentions are in his essay: he wants to stress the specific relationship between gift exchanges and economic ones.

This prospect is also subject to criticism directly after the publication of Mauss' essay, and the first one to support this criticism is Mauss' closest colleague and friend, Henri Hubert. For Hubert, Mauss' *Gift* certainly delivers an important contribution to the sociology of social exchanges, because Mauss provides a rich summary, as well as a rich classification, of a wide variety of archaic forms of those exchanges. Nevertheless, Hubert is surprised to read in Mauss' *Gift* a theory of social exchanges in which Mauss tends to distinguish gifts from economic exchanges:

You write that Germanic law, rite (?) did not consider the economic market. But the life of the Germanic world in the Bronze Age cannot be understood without the economic market. (...) I have a thousand tracks of foreign trades, of true trade with economic goals, I have extremely important vestiges of them. I also have tracks of ups and downs in the pace of societal development, the phenomena did not develop in a straight line, but like on a strong cascading line. I expected to find in your paragraph on the Roman law, in any case in your second part and in your conclusions, your way of seeing the continuation of the economic evolution starting from the beginnings which you describe. (Hubert to Mauss 21 December 1925)

In contemporary sociological contributions which discuss the importance of Mauss' relational scheme for current relational sociology, this aspect of the debates surrounding "Gift" is of foremost importance, and it has been marked by several controversies, of which we will mention the most important ones.

5 THE GIFT AS RELATIONAL PROSPECT AFTER MAUSS

Following Mauss, Alain Caillé wants to refresh the sociological perspectives on the gift. For Alain Caillé and the authors affiliated with his programme—the MAUSS for *Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste en Sciences Sociales* (Anti-Utilitarian Movement in Social Sciences)—the gift is against the market. It is deeply anti-utilitarian, like all our social practices (Caillé 2000; see also Testart 2001, 723; Anspach 2002, 76). According to Caillé, anti-utilitarianism is a radical criticism of the hegemony of the economic rationality framing our daily life, as well as of the theoretical narratives of social sciences. It should not lead to sociologists putting time and effort solely into critiques of economic semantics. Anti-utilitarianism is rather a matter of delivering a sociological theory able to rank all social practices within the gift. The gift as a paradigm, so says Caillé, is the control of the market by the state, and both the state and the market's support

of a social order made of gift exchanges, which makes sense for all social actors (Caillé 1994). Pushed to the extreme, it is a cosmological principle and the axiom of social theory, the origin of the unique paradigm which can be conceived and legitimated in the social sciences. In the framework of the MAUSS, the gift consequently links to a wide range of contemporary problems, such as, for example, the donation of organs, sponsoring, technology transfers between rich and poor countries, support of civil associations, forms of national and international—governmental or non-governmental—aid and so on. For the Canadian sociologist Michel Freitag, however, Caillé reverses the order of priorities between gift and society.

Gifts do not create societies. Societies create the gift. This epistemological consideration at the basis of an ontological conception of society—at the same time, one of the controversial discussion topics in relational sociology about relation as the product of society (for example, Donati 2011), or society as the product of relations (see Kivinen and Piironen 2006, 303–329; Dépelteau 2013, 163–186)—is very important for Freitag. Indeed, saying that the gift is the core of society does not enable one to distinguish the thin differences between society, social relationships and social practices. The gift as a total social fact mixes them together. Should sociologists pay attention to such thin differences? According to Freitag, if sociologists want to make their tribute to Mauss' Gift and to the spirit of the Durkheimian school in sociology, they cannot ignore these differences. The spirit of Gift undoubtedly shows that gift exchanges are expressions of society, or, in other words, that there is a relationship between society, social exchanges and social practices. Therefore, Mauss' Gift should encourage sociologists not to focus only on the gift, but, more generally, on the ways in which society can be translated into social relationships and into social practices—these two levels reproducing society itself. Sociology—and a relational sociology all the more—has no other choice than to conceive of society as an ontological entity, which will be immanently reproduced by social relations and social practices (Freitag 1986b, 14ff.). Society is not only an ontological entity, it is also a normative one, because any of its expressions in relations and practices are non-neutral ones, and, as Mauss shows in his essay, cannot be reduced to others (*ibid.*, 177ff.). Society is the “symbolic mediation” in social life (Freitag 1986a, 11ff.), of which the gift is only one expression, which is neither the first one historically, nor the one which could resist its own disruption in time. Regarding Caillé's understanding of the gift as opposite to utilitarian economic exchanges, Freitag retorts that utilitarianism, as well as modern economic exchanges, are, like gifts, expressions of society. Thus, they tend to reproduce society in another way than do gifts, but in a way which nevertheless enables society to survive as a symbolic mediation, i.e. a bridge between actors. Therefore, there is no radical separation between gift exchanges and economic ones. Rather, there is a rationalization of gifts, which, in ancient societies and all the more in current ones, do not contribute alone to the reproduction of societies. Economic exchanges undertake this function in contemporary societies as the kind of relations and practices needed in order to

reproduce society. Instead of celebrating the virtues of gift exchanges as the supposed remaining “core” of our contemporary relations, the sociological agenda after Mauss should investigate these new forms of societal reproduction, their consequences regarding the kind of relations and the subsequent practices taking place in these societies, as well as their normative impact on social life. This relativization of the gift as the origin of society, and as one specific way among others to practice social relations in societies, also finds support outside sociology, for example, in archaeology, in history and in philosophy.

For historians and archaeologists, it is difficult to separate gift exchanges and economic ones. Regarding the history and the evolution of mankind, these categories are neither well defined nor strictly separated. Before 8500 BC in Mesopotamia for example, we observe above all a great diversity of exchanges. They prevail within groups of hunter-gatherers. They happen less between these groups. These exchanges between groups supposes that some members of a group cover several hundred kilometres in order to get some precious items from another group that they do not have—such as, for example, obsidians. This kind of exchange has been portrayed as “reciprocal gifts” between these groups (Renfrew and Dixon 1976, 148). But such gift exchanges do not predominate among the variety of exchanges which persisted until the development of agriculture around 8500 BC. It is only between 5000 BC and 3000 BC that exchanges of a stronger economic nature developed in Europe, in the Mediterranean countries, in the Middle East and in India. They led to an important circulation of more goods at a larger scale—particularly metals like silver or copper, obsidians, as well as artistic or ritual objects. From 1500 BC onwards, civilizations appeared which gave more importance to these economic exchanges: societies like the Mycenaean and Phoenician (McIntosh 2006, 166–167). However, if we consider ancient Egypt around 1550 BC, such a distinction between gifts and economic exchanges does not exist (Chadefaud 1979, 107–114). As Jansen emphasizes (Jansen 1988, 10–23), what we would consider to be an economic transaction appears less economic once we take its context into account. For example, the Egyptians did not have an accurate conception of prices. The value of a good was often roughly evaluated according to its weight, which was consistent with the concrete way in which the Egyptians thought and imagined their world, and their social life. They cared more about the practical value of goods than about their exchange value. A sharper distinction between gift and economic exchanges appeared in the time from Antiquity to the Christian era. Items considered as gifts were often kept in the royal treasury, and they were used to honour the power of the king at times of religious ceremonies or popular festivities only (Cahill 1985, 373–389). They were used in diplomatic relations with their neighbours (Van Der Mije 1987, 241–267; Morris 1986, 1–17), or between dominating and dominated groups in society (Veyne 1976; Brown 1992). The gifts kept this characteristic of being associated with honour and prestige through the Middle Ages, as well as during the Renaissance. Gifts contribute to making power relationships visible between groups of competing aristocrats (Curta 2006, 687–688).

While the distinction between gifts and economic exchange becomes sharper from this time onwards, this distinction is not antithetic (Appadurai 1986; Godelier 1977; Gregory 1982; Beckert 2009, 245–269). Thus, for historians and archaeologists, there is no evidence supporting the idea that the gift is the “core” of our social exchanges, or that there is a kind of antithesis between gift exchanges and economic ones. Contemporary philosophers deliver a more radical statement: there is no such thing as a gift.

In the secondary literature about the gift, this thesis has been mostly supported by Jacques Derrida. For Derrida, the gift is a practical impossibility. When we give something, we do not give everything. For example, we cannot give what we are, or what is intimately attached to us, so that, for Derrida, there is no gift in the strong meaning of this term. The examples of time and death, his own and that of others, led Derrida to question the gift in the most radical way: “If I can give life, or if I can kill others, I can neither live, nor die in their place, and I can neither give them eternity, nor immortality. It is the same regarding the gift. I can experience the given, received and returned gifts as events, but I cannot possess them, I cannot make them mine, even if I preserve a vestige of them in me. This vestige does not refer to these gifts, but only to me, to my experience of the gift” (Derrida 1992, 47). Thus, while giving, one can never be sure that the gift will be recognized by others as such. Therefore, it is unclear whether others will receive it, return it or give it further. The obligation, the duty which makes the circulation of the gifts happen, only refers to the “I” of the giver. He is responsible for the gift, and he cannot delegate his responsibility to others without being irresponsible at the same time. Because when he gives, giving the gift turns into a calculation which destroys the value of what is given, and of the act itself (Derrida 1992, 104). Giving cancels the gift. Jean-Luc Nancy avoids this extreme conclusion while following a similar path to that of Derrida. Derrida shows that the absolute gift does not exist. But it does not mean that the gift is not possible. One can even benefit from criticism of Derrida in order to investigate how, if the gift cannot exist as an absolute gift, phenomena occur in our daily life that we name “gift”. Taking this into account, we can put an end to the myth of a pure gift (Nancy 1988, 33), and we can also manage to deconstruct—as Marcel Hénaff proposes it—the relationships between gifts and economic exchanges which, as Hénaff suggests, may never have been bound together (Hénaff 2002).

This deconstruction of the gift also has ramifications for very different theories supported by anti-globalization authors such as, for example, Serge Latouche. Since 1990, Latouche has cast doubts on the viability of a social theory using the gift idea (Latouche 1998, 311–322). In all non-capitalist societies in the world, there is no true gift because there is nothing truly free, since nothing has to be bought. On the contrary, where one must pay and where it is normal to do it—where the capitalist economic system pertains to almost all cultures and to all facets of the social life—there are gifts of various forms. Thus, the gift is not a strong paradigm—it is a Western phenomenon, with the help of which one tries to ennoble and to excuse the violence of the capitalist

economy. Anyone who defends the gift defends a (post)colonial kind of ideology linked to the market economy of industrialized societies. All in all, there is no viable alternative to capitalism apart from a firmly anti-globalization attitude. This can lead to giving up on helping countries in need of economic and technological support, such as Third World countries. But this attitude must favour their autonomous development. If another world is possible, it comes from the world of the others and not from First World societies. The only thing which these latter societies should do is express their solidarity, while decreasing their life standards to the same level as those of Third World countries (Latouche 2003, 18–19). The gift is dead, long live the gift!

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Between economy and society, freedom and constraint, gratuity and interest, us and the others, the gift is a multifaceted and deeply ambivalent concept, as noted very early by Benveniste regarding the ancient Anatolian verb *da* (Benveniste 1966, 315–327). The conclusions drawn from the first analyses on the gift show it—in proximity with Polanyi (Polanyi 1944) and Gouldner (Gouldner 1960, 161–178)—as the point where morals and economy converge, and as the symbol of the core of all human exchanges. Contemporary analyses of the gift deconstruct these certainties. Without denying the interest of the research on the gift, they tend to relativize its obligatory and its reciprocal characters, and they criticize the link between the gift and an idea of morally viable social economy in industrialized societies. Does the gift represent the fundamental standards of our exchanges? Or does the gift only show our blind idealization of these standards, unveiling our ethnocentrism when it comes to analysing the various features of social and cultural exchanges? These questions are likely to find neither an immediate, nor a final answer. Nevertheless, they contribute to punctuating a vast field of interdisciplinary problems echoed by the history of the gift, while expanding reflection on the gift to include transformations of the forms of our exchanges throughout history and cultures. These questions are indubitably at the core of a relational sociology in the tradition of Marcel Mauss, and they not only concern the object of such a sociology, but also the possibility of a new way of doing sociology.

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