Social Theory & Computation:

Modern Sociological Theory

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Topics

- Functionalism
  - Grand theory: Talcott Parsons
  - Middle range models
    - Merton, Davis & Moore
- The Post-Functionalists
  - Conflict theory
    - Coser, Dahrendorf, Collins
  - Critical Theory
    - Habermas, Honneth
  - Pragmatism
    - Habermas, Joas
  - Network formalism
    - Harrison White
    - Burt, Granovetter
    - Collins, Fuchs
- Microsocial Interaction
  - Charles Cooley
  - George Herbert Mead
  - Alfred Schutz
  - Erving Goffman
  - Harold Garfinkel
  - Harvey Sacks
  - Richard Hilbert
  - Anne Warfield Rawls
  - Randall Collins
  - Mikhail Bakhtin
- Cultural Turn
  - Emirbayer
  - Giddens, Sewell
Talcott Parsons

• ‘Grand’ post-WWII theorist
  – Worked toward comprehensive synthesis
    • Biology, psychology, economy
    • Durkheim & Weber
    • Pareto & the problem of social order
  – AGIL paradigm
    • Adaptation (economy)
    • Goal attainment (polity)
    • Integration (values to motive)
    • Latency (culture)

• Pattern variables
  – Affectivity/affective neutrality
  – Diffuseness/specificity
  – Particularism/universalism
  – Ascription/achievement
  – Collectivity orientation / self-orientation
  – First value is traditional society; second is modernity
    • Primary & secondary groups
  – Ideal types: empirical cases are necessarily mixed
Functionalism of the Middle Range

- **Robert Merton**
  - Manifest & latent functions
    - Unintended consequences
  - Functional alternatives
  - Reference group theory
    - Role model
  - Self-fulfilling prophecy
  - Sociology of science

- **Functional theory of stratification**
  - Kingsley Davis & Wilbert Moore
  - Determinants of rank
    - Functional uniqueness
    - Dependence
    - Scarcity of personnel
      - Talent availability
      - Training difficulty
Conflict Theory as Anti-functionalism

- **Coser** (following Simmel): conflict can itself be functional
  - Conflict is cross-cutting & integrating
  - Conflict generates in-group solidarity
- **Lockwood**: functionalism creates a utopia
- **Dahrendorf**: class relations manifest in authority structures; applies equally to corporations and unions
- **Collins**: conflict is an integral part of history
- **Garfinkel**: Norms located in situated interaction
- **Converse**: society-wide value consensus is illusory
- The era of a unified functional synthesis had passed
Duality of Structure

• Giddens: from structure to structuration (i.e., a process view of structure)
• Sewell: structures are dual, composed of schemas and resources
• Schemas require and assume resources
  – Rituals and artifacts
  – Resources are utilized according to available schemas [concepts?]
• Duality opens a fluid space for agency
  – Coordinated action requires some level of concept coherence
• Structures & cultures interwoven, presuppose each other
  – Culture as a particular system of beliefs [concept-based assertions?] and practices, woven together by a semiotic logic
    • Concepts are only partially shared
    • Collective interpretation is an accomplishment
The Emergence of Social Interaction

- **During the twentieth century**
  - Sociology was transformed by an emphasis upon fine-grain interaction
  - A source that contributed to this shift was provided by audio and video recording
  - Documents (and sometimes theorizes) that interaction is nuanced at the finest observable grain

- **At an empirical level**
  - Generalized concepts and models omit salient detail and sources of non-linearity

- **From a modeling perspective**
  - How can we best move toward representing and capturing that detail?

- **Contributors**
  - Georg Simmel
  - W.I. Thomas
  - Charles Horton Cooley
  - George Herbert Mead
  - Alfred Schutz
  - Erving Goffman
  - Harold Garfinkel
  - Harvey Sacks
  - Emmanuel Shegeloff
  - Hans Joas
  - Anne Warfield Rawls
A Century of Interaction Theory

W.I. Thomas: if a [persistent] situation is defined as real, the effects are real

G.H. Mead: take the role of the other by anticipating responses
            generalized other, I/me

A. Schutz: Because vs. in-order-to motives

C.W. Mills: When they appeal to others, motives are strategies of action

E. Goffman: social self, interpersonal rituals

H. Garfinkel: local social order is an observable accomplishment

H. Sacks: the dynamics of turn-taking and emergent meaning

R. Collins: microsituations dynamically create macro structures

A.W. Rawls: interaction order *sui generis* produced locally under constraints

R. Hilbert: interaction is scale-free, and occurs at all levels of structure

R. Collins: situated structural effects
Ethnomethodology

• Relentlessly empirical
  – Interaction in microdetail yields witnessable coherences
  – Audio & video data

• Member methods
  – Indexicality
  – Reflexivity

• Repeatably unique interaction orders
  – Mutual intelligibility
  – Social self

• Situations as scale-independent loci

“Indexicality is the other side of abstract indeterminancy” (Thomas McCarthy 1994)

“The properties of indexical expressions are only locally and endogenously witnessable” (Harold Garfinkel 2002)
Members’ Methods

Garfinkel & Sacks (1970):
1. assembling sets of alternatives
2. assembling, testing & verifying the factual character of information
3. giving account of the circumstances of choice and of choices
4. assessing producing, recognizing, ensuring, and enforcing consistency, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, planfulness and other rational properties of individual and concerted actions

Garfinkel (2002): “the indefinitely deep, inexhaustible particular specifics of just how it is done in situ”

Anne Warfield Rawls (2002):
1. Garfinkel’s view of social order takes seriously the meaning of social action, the adequacy of description, and the constitutive foundations of intelligibility
2. Members of society must, in fact, actually, really, have some shared methods for achieving social order they used to mutually construct the meaningful orderliness of situations
3. Every situation has different patterns of order, required for the coherence of action within that situation
4. The challenge is to preserve the reflexive and relational characteristics of meaningful social practices
5. Coherence is recognizable in terms of takenForGranted expectations
Endogenously Produced Coherences

• Coherence is recognizable in terms of taken-for-granted expectations

• *Mutual intelligibility* requires the production of shared recognizable practices
  – Creativity, non-conformity and even rebellion can only meaningfully occur against a background of *mutually constituted intelligibility*
  – Presumes the presence of interpretive agents

• If individuals are to achieve mutual intelligibility in their endeavors, they must produce *practices*, the meaning of which are *recognized* by others
  – To treat the social production of meaning as entirely conceptual is to overlook the essential fact these “concepts” must be produced *witnessably* before others in a form that others can recognize

• Every situation has different patterns of order that are required for the *coherence of action* within that situation
Interaction Order

- Face-to-face interaction as the bedrock of social phenomena
  - Doesn’t reduce to situational determinism
  - Wide range of interactive settings
  - Importance of ceremonies & rituals (cf., Collins)

- Interaction Order *sui generis* (Rawls)
  - Interaction has an orderly and moral character
  - Ritual self
    - Tensions between the socially projected self and the social response
  - Interaction order (and ritual self) in total institutions
    - Resistance of the interaction order to total control
  - Interaction order & meaning
    - Constraints on interaction internal to interactional situations
  - Involvement obligations
    - A moral commitment to the working consensus as a ground rule of interaction
The Interaction Order

- As formulated by Rawls, the interaction order is produced locally under constraints, such as:
  - mutually constituted intelligibility and
  - the presentational (social) self
  - reflexive accountability

- The interaction order and (situation-realized) social structure place reciprocal demands [constraints] upon, and are never found in isolation from, the other

- Interaction order as a source of macro process
  - Democracy and the ideal speech situation (Jurgen Habermas)

- Specific forms of interaction among levels may be clarified by computational models
  - May provide an opportunity to explore new scientific concepts
    - c.f., quanta, gene, tectonic plate
Network Formalism

- **Harrison White** as network theorist for a generation
  - Expositor of network realism
    - Block modeling
    - Relational reality: a move to relations rather than attributes
    - Actor embeddedness
    - Chains and structures of coordinated activities
    - Person as an epiphenomena of network structures, as myths
    - A dense & impenetrable texture of interlocking & overlapping networks

- **Burt**: Vacancy chains
- **Granovetter**: the strength of weak ties
- **Carley**: Multidimensional networks as a source of social dynamics
- **Hay**: networks as a strategic resource
- **Emirbayer & Goodwin**: reification as form of variability among networks

- **Padgett**: crisis causes networks to be repurposed
Structure, culture and agency all presuppose each other, but how?

- More general structure:
  - Many different kinds of groups, relations & institutions can be translated into networks
- More concrete:
  - Structures can be disaggregated into their constituent elements of actor and relations

Constraining and enabling dimensions of patterned relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emirbayer &amp; Goodwin</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structuralist determinism</td>
<td>Formalist/reified networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ignores or stipulates agent intent</td>
<td>Reification can be endogenous &amp; dynamic</td>
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<td>Structuralist instrumentalism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Narrow instrumental agency</td>
<td>Calibrated/strategic networks (Hay)</td>
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<td>Structuralist constructionism</td>
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<td>Identity conversion, robust action</td>
<td>Fluid/reflective networks</td>
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Structures: Formal & Informal

- The efficacy of formal structures depends on their ability to be mapped to domains of interest in a regular way
  - Arthur Stinchcombe documents the role of interleaved formality & informality in a wide range of domains, including:
    1. construction blueprints
    2. civil law and procedures
    3. the commodification and liquidification of residential mortgage pools
    4. the classification of aliens at border crossings
    5. the stratification of scientific knowledge
  - Formalisms applicable in each domain give rise to distinct abstractions
  - Structures often require the use of abstractions that evolve via the interaction of multiple self-organizing processes

- Application of formalisms requires officials, agencies and other participants to distinguish and reason about pertinent situations
Stephan Fuchs

Culture as a Network of Networks

- Modeling the fine-grain basis of culture
  - Breiger notes the rich interrelationship between networks and culture

- The orientation fields of observers are used to create distinctions

- Culture as a network of distinctions
  - Distinctions create boundaries of varying sharpness and permeability
  - Distinctions produce an inside and an outside, creating a cultural core & periphery
  - Networks consist of bounded relations
    - Self-similarity, complementary roles
    - More coherent than the larger world

- Culture can be viewed as a recursive network of communication and meaning
Culture as Shared Resources

• Modern cultures are:
  – contradictory
  – loosely integrated
  – contested
  – weakly bounded
  – thinly coherent

• All such ‘weakenes\textsuperscript{s}’ must necessarily be overcome, in interaction and in practice

• Knowing a culture (code, concept, frame) means having the ability to elaborate, modify or adapt it
  – What social capabilities are implied by this concept?

• Thin though it may be, coherence is the standard of complex interpretation
Recognition Theory

- Honneth (1996) identifies **three dimensions of recognition:**
  - **Affinity** emerges from the bonds of love and friendship, and frequently involves dependency relations which have the potential to manifest as partially fused identities.
    - For Honneth, affinity relations illustrate how early in the socialization process recognition processes originate, and how deeply they shape identity and the process of its formation.
  - **Solidarity** based on diverse forms of group identification and promotion
  - **Rights** based on universal, and frequently legal, principles
    - The theorization of recognition suggests that the same issues arise throughout history, prior to and independent of the rise of constitutional democracies.
      - Recognition is implied in the classical views of power, for example, in the neoclassical view of the state
      - The classification of constituent groups and correlative assignment of property rights can be seen as an act (or denial) of recognition.
Recognition and Interpretation

- Recognition in history is inherently an interpretive process
  - The extension, revocation or modification of democratic rights, including the right-to-life
  - The legitimacy of a state in the eyes of its own population, of minorities, of other states
  - Claims and counterclaims of states &/or violent minorities
  - The justification of war and other international actions

- Recognition is interpretive at any grain of interest, from councils of state down to momentary citizen microinteraction

- Conceived broadly, the recognition process contributes to the warp & woof of history?
Claims, Answers & Commitment

- **Mikhail Bakhtin**: Social agents communicate with each other and, thereby, create (and experience) shared public & historical discourses
  - Discourse shapes common responses to situations, actions and events
- Historical discourses exist at many scales, from short, focused policy discussions to movements that endure for centuries
  - In order to establish emergent forms of accountability, discourse focuses upon communications relating to *answerability* and *commitment*
- **Answerability** includes the process through which accountability is socially established, maintained and redefined
  - It also includes minor shifts within answerability relationships that arise from context shifts or the evolution of the relationship
Premises of Modern Theory

• Fine grain social interaction is emergent, pervasive and generative. It cannot be adequately accounted for by aggregate description or analytical reconstruction.

• Social identities range from fixed to fashionable, and cultural models must ultimately account for both.

• Order and conflict are deeply interwoven, and empirically recognizable closure (equilibrium) does not appear to be achieved.

• The existence (and thus identification) of consistent evolutionary patterns, and/or reliably recurrent cycles is currently unresolved.

• Implicitly: cross-scale social influences are mutually defining, and they continually disturb temporary local orders.

• Explanation of the social sources of unintended policy consequences is the most significant unresolved issue in the applied social sciences.
Beyond the Classics

- Note the extent to which social theory was transformed during the twentieth century
  - Microinteraction not only provides a new focus, but also provided a fine-grain substrate for more complex forms of social structure
  - Moving from structure to stucturation shifts the emphasis to process
  - The “cultural turn” shifts from stipulating shared values to investigating whether and how social coherence and solidarity are established and maintained (or not)
  - The emergence of the sociology of emotion reaches down toward neurology & biology, out toward a wide variety of behavior and beyond narrowly rational models
  - Computational models of social theory have the potential to represent and integrate these trends, strengthening both policy-oriented models and substantive social science
Social Theory and Computation

• Classical Social Theory
  – Origins of the theoretical social sciences
  – Common theme: sources and characteristics of modernity

• Modern Social Theory
  – Permutations, combinations and fragmentation
  – The emergence of the microsocial

• Toward a Theory Template
  – Expressing cross-scale dynamics
  – Multigame, structure, orientation, discourse

• Theory Construction and Evolution
  – Syntheses, application and assessment
  – Propensities, attractors, influences and symmetries

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