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The uses of Giddens' structuration theory

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Christopher G. A. Bryant

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Abstract

Anthony Giddens has made claims for the utility of structuration theory. These claims present structuration theory as a contributant to the post-empiricist reconstruction of theory and application in social science, and, consequently, as a justification for a different conception of empirical research from that favoured in the old theory-building tradition. What Giddens has not done is exemplify its use in empirical inquiries of his own or employ it explicitly in analyses of particular substantive areas. There is, however, no need to wait for Giddens himself to show us how to use his theory. Structuration theory has enabled colleagues across the social sciences to address what they perceive to be fundamental deficiencies in their disciplines and specialties as presently constituted, and it has provided all or part of the theoretical framework and conceptual vocabulary for an already large number of empirical projects. This article offers a typology of uses with examples from accountancy, archaeology, business and management studies, human geography, informatics, organisation studies, political science, religious studies and sociology. The subheadings are as follows: reconstituting a discipline, reconstituting a specialty, reconstituting an interdisciplinary field, reworking literature and past research, facilitating empirical research and reconsidering modernity. It is argued that the extraordinary take-up of Giddens is connected to his provision of user-friendly `intermediate theory'.

Zusammenfassung

Giddens hat sich für die Verwendbarkeit der Strukturierungstheorie eingesetzt. Dabei stellte er die Strukturierungstheorie als einen Beitrag zur postempirischen Rekonstruktion der von Theorie und ihre Anwendung in den Sozialwissenschaften dar und, in logischer Folge, als eine Rechtfertigung einer Konzeption von empirischer Forschung, die sich von jenen in älteren traditionellen Theoriebildungen favorisierten unterscheidet. Giddens hat es dabei jedoch unterlassen, die Anwendung der Strukturierungstheorie an eigenen empirischen Untersuchungen aufzuzeigen oder stichhaltige Analysen innerhalb besonderer Forschungsgebiete explizit auf diese aufzubauen. Es ist allerdings nicht nötig, darauf zu warten, daß Giddens selbst seine Theorie an Beispielen veranschaulicht. Die Strukturierungstheorie hat es nämlich möglich gemacht, daß sozialwissenschaftliche Kollegen und Kolleginnen grundlegende disziplinäre Mängel und Spezialgebiete, die im Augenblick zu beobachten sind, benennen können. Dabei hat sie für eine Vielzahl von empirischen Forschungsprojekten bereits zur Gänze oder teilweise den theoretischen Rahmen und das konzeptionelle Vokabular geschaffen. Der vorliegende Beitrag bietet eine Typologie der Anwendung mit Beispielen aus der Buchhaltung, der Archäologie, Betriebswirtschaft und Managementwissenschaft, Humangeographie, Informatik, Organisationsstudien, der Politikwissenschaft, Religionswissenschaft und Soziologie. Die vorgenommene Typologie richtet sich nach den folgenden Untergliederungen: Rekonstituierung einer Disziplin, Rekonstituierung eines

Spezialgebiets, Rekonstituierung eines interdisziplinären Feldes, Neufassung vorangegangener Literatur und Forschung, Erleichterung empirischer Forschung und Neukonzipierung der Moderne. Es wird argumentiert, daß die außergewöhnliche Inanspruchnahme von Giddens damit verbunden ist, daß er eine benutzerInnenfreundliche „Zwischentheorie" zur Verfügung stellt.

Keywords

Structuration theory, sociological paradigm, interdisciplinarity, modernity, reflexivity, determinism, voluntarism

Schlagworte

Strukturierungstheorie, soziologisches Paradigma, Interdisziplinarität, Moderne, Reflexivität, Determinismus, Voluntarismus

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Introduction: Relevance and Irrelevance

Anthony Giddens is one of the world's most cited sociologists but critics have often doubted whether his structuration theory has much to offer empirical social researchers and specialists in particular substantive areas. I propose to re-examine this issue first by reviewing briefly some of the exchanges between Giddens and his critics; and then by inspecting some of the uses of structuration theory made by researchers and specialists in the broad spectrum of the social sciences. I will consider examples from accountancy, archaeology, business and management studies, human geography, informatics, organisation studies, political science, religious studies and sociology. If the first task rehearses old themes, the second, much bigger task breaks new ground; it also prompts thoughts on the uses of, what I shall call, 'intermediate theory'.

When Gregson (1989), a human geographer, reflected 'On the (ir)relevance of structuration theory to empirical research', she gave a hostage to fortune. She anticipated irrelevance and she could not have been more wrong. The take-up of Giddens throughout the social sciences and humanities all over the world has been extraordinary.[1] There are already dozens of examples, and more are being published all the time. Gregson did not expect this because she thought that there are two kinds of theorising, only one of which is of help to empirical researchers whilst Giddens engages in the other. Gregson proclaimed the 'patent inability' of structuration theory to 'illuminate empirical research' (237). In offering an ontology of the social, she argued, structuration theory attends to the second-order conceptualisations of 'the general constituents of human society (i.e. agency, structure, time, space, power)' (246), whereas theorisation of value to empirical inquiry attends to first-order explanations of 'the unique ... the events or contingencies of particular periods or places' (245) and it generates 'concepts which can be transferred immediately into an empirical setting (for instance wage labour, the labour process, industrial restructuring, masculinity/femininity)' (245). In short, social ontology may have its virtues but it is too far removed from the realities or actualities which empirical researchers address to be of much use to them.

Gregson dismissed the claims Giddens makes in *The Constitution of Society* (1984) for the uses of structuration theory. In the long Chapter 6 on 'Structuration Theory, Empirical Research and Social Critique', Giddens offers three guidelines for empirical researchers and ten structurationist points from which they are derived. The three guidelines refer to firstly, acknowledgement of the anthropological aspect of all social research indicated by the double-hermeneutic, secondly sensitivity to 'the complex skills actors have in co-ordinating the contexts of their day-to-day behaviour' (1984: 285), and thirdly recognition of 'the time-space constitution of social life' (286). Gregson complains that their derivation from the ten

[1] By take-up I refer here not to citations, which now run to four figures, but to major applications from reconstituting disciplines to framing empirical research.

structurationist points is unclear, and, even if it were cleart, their vagueness with respect to issues of both substance and method makes them useless to empirical researchers: 'The key questions concern *which* "actors", *which* skills and *which* temporal and spatial structures we choose to investigate: and *how* we investigate these, *where* and *when*' (241) and on these structuration theory is silent. It is thus hardly surprising, she continued, that Giddens is reduced to illustrating the connections between structuration theory and empirical research by discussing research conducted by Willis (1977), Gambetta (1987) and others without reference to it. Additionally, the failure 'to engage with the concrete social world' (237) precludes the provision of accounts not only of what is but also of what might be, of alternatives; in other words, it renders impossible the very social critique to which Giddens declares himself committed.

Gregson was not the first to attack Giddens in this way. Her complaint recalls the acerbic comments of Stinchcombe (1987) about the 'obscurity' and 'empirical emptiness' of structuration theory. More specifically it also calls to mind criticisms levelled by Urry (1982) and McLennan (1984) that structuration theory does not offer a substantive theory of anything real or actual, but at best only specifies the *desiderata* of good theory. As such it might be deemed meta-theory rather than theory.

Replying to Gregson, Giddens proffered 'a structurationist programme of research for modern social science' which would, firstly, 'concentrate upon the orderings of institutions across time and space', secondly, 'analyse social systems in terms of shifting modes of institutional articulation', thirdly, 'be continuously sensitive to the reflexive intrusions of knowledge into the conditions of social reproduction', and finally, 'be oriented to the impact of its own research upon the social practices and forms of social organization it analyses' (Giddens, 1989: 300). For good or ill, this is still not a research programme in the Lakatosian sense. Giddens' exercises in 'utopian realism' in *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990) and subsequent works have, however, addressed alternative futures and do offer social critiques, thereby meeting one of Gregson's complaints (cf. Bernstein, 1985; Bryant, 1992).

In a later essay, Giddens readily acknowledges that 'Structuration theory is not intended to be a theory "of" anything', rather it is an attempt to supply something missing from social science, i.e. an adequate ontology of the social 'that allows one to understand both how actors are at the same time the creators of social systems yet created by them' (Giddens, 1991b: 204). Attention to this ontology has, he claims, benefited substantive researchers such as Burman (1988) on unemployment in London, Ontario between 1982-83, Connell (1987) on gender relations and sexual ideologies in Australia, and Dandeker (1989) on surveillance, bureaucratic power and war in the development of modernity. Even these are a mixed bag with which to win over doubters, however, insofar as Connell is often critical of Giddens, and Dandeker draws on the two volumes of Giddens' critique of historical materialism and other more substantive writings but none of his works on the principles of

structuration theory itself such as *New Rules* (1976), *Central Problems* (1979) or *The Constitution of Society* (1984).

Cohen (1986 & 1989) has done more than anyone else to establish the value of Giddens' ontology of the social and I have argued myself that, however recondite they may at first seem, ontologies of the social are of great practical consequence (Bryant, 1995; also Stones, 1996). Structuration theory is a contributant to the post-empiricist reconstruction of theory and application in social science. As such it justifies a different conception of empirical research from that favoured in the old theory-building tradition. Misconceive the constitution of society, furthermore, and strategies for the application of sociology in policy and practice are highly likely to go wrong. But rather than argue the theoretical case *for* or *against* structuration theory any longer, I want to take a quite different tack. Where Thrift (1985), Cohen (1989) and Stones (1996) have all looked to Giddens himself to supply the methodology and exemplars to confirm the value of structuration theory in use and been disappointed, I will approach the uses of structuration theory empirically by examining some of the take-up of structuration theory throughout the social sciences and humanities including uses made of it by empirical researchers. Users of structuration theory have not waited for Giddens to show them how to use it. I will offer a typology of uses, and some reflections on what those uses suggest about the uses of theory.

A typology of uses

1. Reconstituting a discipline

Arguably the boldest use one could make of structuration theory is the reconstitution of a whole discipline. This has been attempted in accountancy and archaeology.

In accountancy the key figures are Roberts, MacIntosh and Scapens and their main critic, albeit a critic with an alternative reading of Giddens, is Boland. In 1985 Roberts and Scapens used structuration theory to generate a new framework, or paradigm, for analysing accountability in organisations, there being, in their view, no existing framework within which to integrate understandings of both the technical and interpersonal aspects of accounting systems. Hitherto, they argued, 'the analysis of systems has typically been abstracted from the analysis of concrete practices since it is assumed that once systems are designed they will, via role prescriptions, determine what people actually do' (447). By contrast Roberts and Scapens distinguished accounting systems (bodies of rules and resources drawn upon in the practice of accounting) from systems of accountability (systems in use). In Giddens' terms the former are structures and the latter systems.

Roberts and Scapens original article was entirely theoretical, but in 1990 Roberts employed its framework, for understanding the operation of systems of accountability in organisations,

in a new case study 'of the relationship between use of accounting information for performance reporting and control and the formulation and implementation of business and corporate strategy' (107). The study examined the acquisition and subsequent management of a specialist firm by a conglomerate. In the same year MacIntosh and Scapens published a second version of structuration theory as a framework for management accounting research, this time including a detailed reworking of a case study, the University of Wisconsin budgeting system, first presented by Covaleski and Dirsmith (1988). The case had to do with reduced state funding for the university in the 1980s, the university's response, the success of the governor in outmanoeuvring the university and changes in budget discourse.

MacIntosh and Scapens' discussion of structuration theory is highly sophisticated. Its application to management accounting makes particular use of the dimensions of the duality of structure, the stratification model of the agent and the dialectic of control.

> 'Management accounting systems represent modalities of structuration in the three dimensions of signification, legitimation and domination. In the signification dimension, management accounting systems are the interpretative schemes which managers use to interpret past results, take actions, and make plans. In the domination dimension, management accounting systems are a facility that management at all levels can use to co-ordinate and control other participants. And in the legitimation dimension, management accounting systems communicate a set of values and ideals about what is disapproved; justify the rights of some participants to hold others accountable; and legitimate the use of certain rewards and sanctions. The concepts, theories, values, ideals, rules etc. upon which management accounting systems are based represent the structural properties of management accounting. Through the modalities described above, management accounting provides for the binding of social interactions in organizations across time and space. These social interactions represent the day-to-day use of management accounting sysems; in other words, management accounting practice' (462).

MacIntosh and Scapens also noted how 'management accounting systems can be a vital means of meeting agents' unconscious needs for ontological security' (461), although, like Willmott (1986), they do wonder whether 'only ontologically insecure agents would be unduly concerned to immerse themselves in routine in order to reduce anxiety' (473).

Boland (1993) complained that MacIntosh and Scapens' re-analysis of the University of Wisconsin budgetary systems is too structuralist, too distanced from individual acts and too insensitive to the open possibilities of human agency. In making his points, he drew upon an earlier study by Milne (1981). In the latter, '67 mid-career managers analyzed management accounting reports [as part of MBA class work] and decided which of ... two Divisional Managers should be promoted to the position of Corporate Director of Personnel' (128). Class members recorded their reasons. Boland examined the work of six of the students in

detail, noted that they used more than management accounting systems in reaching their conclusions, and claimed that this was enough to refute MacIntosh and Scapens.

In a lengthy reply, which includes further examination of the Wisconsin case, Scapens and MacIntosh (1996):

> 'discuss the need for methodological brackets in operationalizing structuration theory. Giddens ... distinguishes between institutional analysis and the analysis of strategic conduct. We draw on Giddens' distinction between institutional analysis and the analysis of strategic conduct to argue that both Boland's and our viewpoints can be accommodated within structuration theory' (abs, 675).

This did not satisfy Boland (1996).

> 'I argue that Giddens developed structuration theory to counter Parsons' use of shared meanings and value consensus to explain social order. In place of consensus on values and meanings, structuration theory emphasizes the skilled accomplishment of "knowing how to go on" in the temporal flow of situated practice, as described in the writings of Wittgenstein, Goffman and Garfinkel. When MacIntosh and Scapens ... employed shared values and shared meanings as an explanatory device in their structurational study, either at the individual or the institutional level, they were at odds with this central feature of structuration theory' (abs, 691).

In sum, Boland argued that specification of an interpretive scheme is tantamount to saying that it is shared meanings which provide order. But his objections to sharing are overdone, and his position is solipsistic. The ideas of Parsons which Giddens opposed, however, concern shared values, norms and role expectations as the basis of order, not shared meanings *per se*. To question shared meanings *per se* is to argue against language itself which is a strange move to make for someone who lauds hermeneutics. Contrary to Boland, I would therefore accept that Roberts, MacIntosh and Scapens have in three major papers over a decade developed an argument for the reconstitution of a whole discipline; the study of accounting systems. Whether it is a compelling enough argument to persuade their fellow accountants is a matter which I cannot pursue here.

There is a second example of the reconstitution of a discipline in archaeology, this time in combination with ideas derived from Bourdieu, in an article by Barrett (1988).[2] It is not as fully

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[2] For a third example, see Collins and Hoopes (1995) on history. This is, however, an entirely theoretical article (and comment on a long-running debate about historiography and truth in the *American Historical Review*) with no illustrations from the history of anything which could show how structurationism makes a difference. I have therefore chosen not to elaborate on it here.

elaborated as the accountancy example but there is an excellent instance of its use in new empirical research in Graves' (1989) work on English parish churches.

Barrett rejected two approaches to archaeology: the first, 'functionalism', treats evidence as a fossil record and then posits 'mechanical relationships ... between past processes and surviving imprints in archaeological materials' which afford cross-cultural generalisations (5); the second, 'the archaeology of meaning', treats evidence as a text but can only be speculative except where there are historical records to help one read the material evidence. Barrett proposed a third way: 'we should treat [archaeological evidence] not as a record of past events and processes but as evidence for particular social practices' (6). In his formulation of this approach Barrett turned to Giddens on the duality of structure, time-space, locales and regionalisation, and to Bourdieu on the material, space and *the habitus*.

> 'The material world contains acculturated structures drawn upon and invested with meaning by human action. Archaeological evidence should not be treated as a static outcome of past dynamics (a record). Instead it is the surviving fragments of those recursive media through which the practices of social discourse were constructed. Social practices are the object of our study: archaeology is the empirical examination of material evidence to discover how such practices were maintained within particular material conditions' (9).

'Discourse', Barrett added, following Bourdieu, 'is a means of communication, it draws upon and reproduces particular structures of knowledge, thus also reproducing relations of dominance between individuals and collectivities' (9). And:

> 'The field is an area in time-space occupied by virtue of the practice of a particular discourse. Such fields [of discourse] shade off in time-space and contain material conditions which contribute towards the structuring of practice. Archaeological evidence is the residue of these various material conditions' (11).

Barrett illustrated his argument with an example concerning gender. Late bronze-age and early iron-age southern Britain can, he claimed, be understood in terms other than those of technological change. 'Metalwork circulates amongst, and between, gender and age sets which were established by means other than the control of metal itself' (14).

Graves (1989) followed Barrett in her use of Giddens and Bourdieu to understand the architectural space of the later medieval parish church in England:

> 'the organisation of space is looked at ... as a medium through which society and different kinds of knowledge can be created and reproduced. It is axiomatic to this approach that society is constituted through moments of knowledgeable human

> agency, and that the spatial properties of society are analytically inseparable from its reproduction through time and the power relations which characterise it' (297).

She also used Barrett's 'field of discourse'.

> 'The "field" of discourse is the extent to which both time and space are occupied and influenced by the performers of practices within a discourse; it contains the material conditions within which the dynamic interplay of human relations occur' (300).

Having reconstituted archaeology in this way, she connected the lay-out of churches, medieval liturgy, the great chain of being and secular action with detailed reference to two English medieval parish churches, and she indicated how their connection constituted and reproduced community and social identities.

2. Reconstituting a specialty

Perhaps the next boldest use is the reconstruction of a specialty. This has been attempted in the sociology of technology. The key figure is Orlikowski.

Orlikowski first made extended use of Giddens' theory of structuration in an article with Robey on information technology and the structuring of organizations in 1991. The following year she offered what amounts to nothing less than a reconstitution of the sociology of technology. She began by rejecting three existing models of technology: Firstly, the 'technological imperative' model which treats technology as an external force that determines organisational properties, or, in the moderate contingency version, causes effects in certain contexts; secondly, the 'strategic choice' model which suggests that technology is a product of ongoing human action, design and appropriation; and thirdly, the (soft determinist) 'trigger of structural change' model which views technology as an external force which has impacts, but impacts which are moderated by human actors and organizational contexts. In their place she proposed a structurational model which emphasises the (dimensions of the) duality of technology and the interpretive flexibility of technology.

The duality of technology acknowledges that:

> 'Technology is the product of human action, while it also assumes structural properties ... technology is physically constructed by actors working in a given social context, and ... socially constructed by actors through the different meanings attached to it and the various features they emphasize and use. However ... once developed and deployed, technology tends to become reified and institutionalized, losing its connection with the human agents that constructed it or gave it meaning, and it appears to be part of the objective, structural properties of the organization' (406).

The flexibility of technology 'posits artifacts as potentially modifiable throughout their existence' (408) despite the time-space discontinuity between the design and use modes which can make them seem rigid.

The structurational model of technology comprises four components: firstly, technology as a product of human action, secondly, technology as a medium of human action, thirdly, the institutional conditions of interaction with technology, and fourthly, the institutional consequences of interaction with technology. Orlikowski applied her structurational model to her earlier study of 'Beta Corporation', a large multi-national software consulting firm, in which she had used ethnographic techniques over eight months both within Beta and at client sites (Orlikowski, 1988). She re-examined 'Beta's development and use of productivity tools in terms of the processes through which the technology was integrated into Beta's operations over time' (413). The company wanted rationalisation and greater control over its consultants. The productivity tools contributed to structures of signification, domination and legitimation.

In 1992 Orlikowski also published with Yates a report of an empirical study which uses structuration theory and the concept of 'genre' from rhetorical theory in the explanation of processes of organizational communication. Examples of genre include business letters, memoranda and meetings. Yates and Orlikowski (1992) argued that 'When individuals draw on the rules of certain genres of organizational communication (genres as the vehicle of communicative action), they also reproduce these genres over time (genres as the outcome of communicative action)' (302). Their study drew on earlier work of Yates's to illustrate the evolution of a genre by examining the use of the memo in US firms from the mid Nineteenth Century to the 1990s (Yates, 1989). Continuing to use Giddens, Orlikowski and Yates (1994) went on to develop their ideas of genre and genre repertoire in a study of the attempted development of a common artifical intelligence language (Common LISP, or CL) which would ensure the conpatibillty of programmes written in that language across computer types. The primary data for this study consisted of the transcripts of almost 2,000 CL electronic mail messages archived between December 1981 and December 1983. Orlikowski and Yates concluded that:

> 'Understanding organizing processes mediated by new technologies becomes increasingly important as more and more organizational work becomes a matter of electronic symbol manipulation and information exchange. The genres through which information is shaped and shared for particular purposes (reports, spreadsheets, meetings, or teleconferences) are no longer merely an aspect of organizational work; rather they are the organizational work. The project we studied may serve as a useful prototype for the kinds of organizing anticipated in future communities — distributed, temporary, information-intensive, and networked through electronic communication technologies' (572-3).

In a similar vein, Orlikowski and Yates applied their structurationist model in a joint study with Okamura and Fujimoto (1995) on the use of a computer referencing system in a Japanese R & D project group.

Acknowledging her debt to Giddens, among others, Orlikowski (1996) has outlined 'a perspective on [organisational] change as inherent in everyday practice and as inseparable from the ongoing and situated actions of organizational members' (66-7) in the course of an examination of the use of new information technology by the Customer Support Department of 'Zeta Corporation ... a software company headquartered in the Midwest, with sales and client service field offices throughout the United States and the world' (67). Her interest in 'situated change' has carried over into her current very sophisticated, though not yet published, reconsideration of technology-in-practice as enacted structure. In her (sometimes joint) research, Orlikowski has made major contributions to communication studies, informatics and organisation studies, but in her latest work, as in her 'Duality of Technology' (1992) article she is again shaping a whole specialty, i.e. the sociology of technology.[3]

Orlikowski's reconstitution of the sociology of technology is more thorough going and better exemplified by case studies, including some by followers unconnected to her own US network such as Brooks (1997) in UK, than structurationist interventions in other specialties. There are, however, applications of structuration theory in other specialties. In effect their authors argue that structuration theory is a useful contributant to a necessary restructuring of a specialty. Shilling (1992) on the sociology of education in Britain, Shilling and Mellor (1996) in the sociology of the body, and Horne (1998) in the sociology of sport and leisure provide three interesting examples.

3. Reconstituting an interdisciplinary field

Two geographers, Goss and Lindquist (1995), have used a structurationist perspective to reconstitute an interdisciplinary field that of migration studies. They reject an array of functional, structuralist and integrative approaches to migration. Instead they present a structurationist theory of international labour migration which theorises 'migration as the result of knowledgeable individuals undertaking strategic action within institutions, specifically the institution of migration, which operate according to recognizable rules and which distribute resources accordingly' (344). They use Giddens on institutionalisation to characterise the institution of migration.

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[3] Orlikowski is, in turn, one of the key sources in the development of `adaptive structuration theory' (AST). DeSanctis and Poole (1994) first proposed AST `as a framework for studying variations in organization change that occur as advanced technologies are used' (122) and claimed that its central concepts are structuration, derived from Bourdieu and Giddens, and appropriation, derived from Ollman (1971). In their original article they applied AST to their own and other studies of group decision support systems. Relevant references before and after their 1994 article are Poole and DeSanctis (1990), Contractor and Seibold (1993), Gopal, Bostrom and Chin (1993) and Chin, Gopal and Salisbury (1997).

> 'Through the routinization of the social practices of migration and the articulation of strategic goals and institutional agents, international labor migration becomes structured by specific modalities of interaction, and access to international migration is conditioned by the operation of specific rules and mobilization of resources' (335-6).

They also refer to the dialectic of control. Goss and Lindquist use their structurational approach in the discussion of Philippine migration in general and migration from 'Malinaw' in the Southern Philippines in particular.

For a second, highly elaborated, example of the reconstitution of an interdisciplinary field, one can turn to Sydow and Windeler (1997), two German management specialists. They use structuration theory, especially the duality of structure, the stratification model of the agent and the dialectic of control, 'to describe, and eventually explain, the managing of inter-firm networks' (455), thereby reconstituting the interdisciplinary field of the management of inter-firm networks. They are attracted to four features of structuration theory. Firstly, it:

> 'overcomes the deficiencies of functionalist and interpretative approaches, of deterministic and voluntaristic views, of objectivist and subjectivist paradigms ... by interconnecting institutional analysis of structural properties with strategic analysis of social action' (460).

Secondly, it encourages 'the development of a ... processual perspective on the praxis of managing inter-firm networks' by treating the economy 'as recurrently reproduced in and through social practices' (460). Thirdly, it combines attention to both the symbolic and cognitive dimensions of social systems with the analysis of power and efficiency, when rival theories mostly do one or the other. Fourthly, it 'focuses on structural contradiction and dynamics rather than on equilibrium and stability' (461). In so doing, it avoids the 'prevailing "decontextualisation of networks"' (Knights et al 1993, 979; 461).

Following a systematic application of structuration theory to inter-firm networks in economic context and to their managing, Sydow and Windeler conclude that:

> 'Structuration ... refers to the process of social interaction in which agents such as managers draw upon structural properties of the inter-firm network as a social system and thus reproduce these structural properties ... In fact, the theory of structuration allows for an analysis of the managing of inter-firm networks which is not, as is much of the the theoretical and empirical research to date, ahistorical, aprocessual and acontextual. Structuration theory thereby opens a critical perspective in at least two respects. As an "ontology of potentials" (Cohen 1989), structuration theory directs the researcher's attention to alternative possibilities of acting; to alternative modes of signifying and legitimizing, and to alternative usages of

> resources in particular. At the same time, structuration theory allows one to clarify the relevant aspects of the reproduction process itself' (486-7).

Managing inter-firm networks is all about 'mastering the structural tensions of cooperation and competition, of stability and change, of trust and control, and of autonomy and dependence' (487). It is the successful use of structuration theory in empirical studies of these which, they say, will confirm its value.[4]

4. Reworking literature and past research

It is sometimes instructive to rework accounts of familiar institutions and practices in terms of the duality of structure. In his review of the American literature on household migration, Halfacree (1995), a geographer, points to the centrality of a particular institution, patriarchy, and reconceptualises it in structurationist terms.

> 'Turning to the labour migration of a "typical" American family, the various actors — principally the wife, husband and employers — draw upon the structures of patriarchy, represented by the exploitative position of the wife in both the home and waged workplace, in order to constitute the migration. However, this action, which tends to result in the wife being a secondary migrant, also serves to reproduce the "original" patriarchal structures - in Giddens' terms, the rules of signification and legitimation, and the resources of domination - through which the migration was constituted. In the domestic sphere, the wife's role and status as a coprovider is undermined and her labour market marginalization as a support for her husband is enhanced. In the sphere of waged labour, the secondary migration serves to legitimate the sex-typing of occupations by reinforcing both employers' and fellow male workers' perceptions of women as "uncommitted". Such lack of commitment also helps to undermine women's struggles against patriarchal oppression in both the home and the waged workplace. In sum, the structures of patriarchy, principally but not exclusively in the domestic and waged labour structures, are both the medium and outcome of the gendering of "labour migration"' (172-3).

As Halfacree says, '[M]arried women do not become secondary migrants in order to reproduce the subordinated position of women within both the home and waged workplace. Yet this is an unintended consequence of what happens, just as this subordinate position was a necessary condition for their "tied" migration in the first place' (171).

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[4] There is, however, already copious evidence of the use of structuration theory by management specialists in general and German management theorists in particular. In addition to Sydow and Windeler, see Whittington (1992) and Ortmann (1995).

5. Facilitating empirical research

Although perhaps the least ambitious, the use made of elements of structuration theory in empirical research is arguably the most significant insofar as it is both the commonest and the one that has figured in most disciplines. I have room to give just four examples here, which I will present in chronological order.

(i) Burman (1988) draws on structuration theory, especially the duality of structure, for the theoretical framework for a study of the experience of unemployment in London, Ontario, in the first half of the 1980s. At the heart of study are long semi-structured interviews with 75 unemployed people. Burman says that he wanted to accept Wright Mills' famous invitation to connect private troubles and public issues, but found it difficult in the face of separate structural and action literature which did not connect. His solution is to turn to Giddens in *The Constitution of Society* and to attend to:

> '"social practices ordered across space and time" (1984: 374). Because it is within such practices that structural processes from "above" converge with interpersonal and self processes from "below." So labour market and other structures are internalized by agents who, being so formulated, act back on and shape those environing processes' (8).

He also makes some use of Bourdieu on time as mediated by Giddens (1984: 133).

Burman offers vivid and often moving accounts of what it was like to be unemployed at that time and place based on respondents' testimony and very sympathetic analysis. The 'killing time' of his book title refers to filling the day; 'losing ground' to the geographical and social contraction of life.

> 'To express any personal agency at all the informants had to look to the intermediate and microsocial spheres of local community and family and friends. On intermediate ground, a substantial minority became involved in the unemployed organizations which were set up to serve their needs' (210).

Burman's study is typical of one of the uses of Giddens. He wanted theoretical tools which would enable him to grasp both structure and agency, constraint and choice, in the things people do. In Giddens he found them. He makes no claim that Giddens is the only possible source of such tools. For Burman it is simply enough that the theoretical tools he obtained from Giddens enabled him to get the research job done.

(ii) Lee (1992a) provides a different kind of example, one from library rather than field research. Building on an earlier article on structuration theory (Lee 1990), Lee uses the 'dialectical principles of structuration theory', especially the distinctions between structure and

system, and structures and structural properties, to organise an explanation for the different engagements with modernity of Islam and Hinduism. He

> 'treats change as a characteristic of systems but not of structure which, in terms of rules and resources, comprises the basic asymmetries feeding social change and are thus reproduced irrespective of surface transformations. Thus the apparent linear changes in systems may mask the reproductive cycles inherent in structure' (380).

Lee recasts secularisation in non-linear terms, acknowledging Giddens on the non-linearity of change form one societal type to another. He distinguishes (i) structural charisma (in the divine message) and systemic charisma (in the virtuoso), and (ii) a theocentric worldview (Islam) with its transcendentalism and personal god and a cosmocentric worldview with its immanentism and impersonal divine made personal in charismatic individuals (Hinduism).

> 'The structural charisma of Islam collides with modern institutions, such that secularization in Muslim societies transforms social and political relations, but at the same time reproduces the message of Muhammad through institutional conflicts. The systemic charisma of Hinduism produces many virtuosi repackaging the ancient teachings of India to worldwide audiences. The Hindu Renaissance tailored the secularizing influences of the West to rebuild paths of enchantment for Indians seeking atavistic pride and Westerners seeking refuge from cultural anomie' (398).

In a related article, Lee (1992b) explores 'the empirical utility of structuration theory by applying it to comparative materials' on charisma, Islam and Hinduism (41).

> 'If we take Sohm's original idea of charisma to mean a type of authority embedded within a set of teachings, then it is appropriate to conceptualize charisma as a structural property of the early Christian community. ... On the other hand, Weberian charisma is systemic because it is not treated as a structural property underlying social relations, but is characterized as an individual attribute made significant in personal interactions under conditions of intense crises (45-6). ... Thus, structural charisma can only manifest itself through the knowledgeability and practical consciousness of acting subjects, who working within a given social system, are able to draw upon relevant symbols and available resources to legitimate their mission' (46).

Islamic charisma is structured in Muhammad's teachings, in scriptures. 'The fission of Islam into the Sunni and the Shia camps is an empirical instance of the transformative permutations of a contested structural base, i.e. who should be the rightful conduit of a primordial charisma encoded in Muhammad's message' (49). Sunni look more to the consensus of the *ulama* (the learned); Shia to the traditions of the *imams*. 'Hindu charisma is ... systemic in nature because Hinduism ... is not a prophetic religion and at best produces moral exemplars of virtuous living' (51).

Lee analyses how the structured or systemic character of charisma affected the 'fate' of charismatic authority. He concludes that attention to structuration theory raises awareness 'of the incommensurability of charisma in all the world religions, so that future studies of religious development and change will not necessarily assume the presence of an unrestrained agency but its subtle relationship with an often uncompromising structure' (60).

(iii) Bastien, McPhee and Bolton (1995) conducted a longitudinal case study of an administrative unit of a large city government following the election of a new chief executive intent on cost cutting and reorganisation. They rejected approaches to organisational climate which treat it as an attribute of organisation or an aggregate of individual psychological climates.[5] Instead they adopted a structurational view because it posits that organisational climate is intersubjective. They concede that it is not alone in this; their claim is only that they turned to structuration theory, including *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990) and *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991a) on trust and security, and it worked - it got the job done.

Bastien *et al* elaborated their structurational view of climate in three ways. Firstly, they looked at the production of climate rather than its more usual reproduction; actors drew on climate themes as resources in discourse and action. Secondly, they looked at themes initiated by staff rather than, more usually, management. Thirdly, they looked at trust. 'The case illustrates the way focal, thematized distrust can corrode experience and managerial work in an organization' (91).

The study was conducted over a year and information was gathered in three waves of in-depth interviews of a stratified and non-random sample beginning shortly after the new chief executive officer was elected. The team examined the emergence, spread and sedimentation of climate. Sedimentation could be formal, i.e. in documents, policies; practical, i.e. in everyday practices; or mediated, i.e. where one theme is developed in the language of, or talk about, another. 'Mediation, one of structuration theory's major concepts, refers to the reproduction of one structural feature through the production/reproduction of a different resource' (94). Bastien *et al* give an account of the restructuration of climate, using the concepts of kernel themes and surface climates, that accompanied change which was initially widely supported but subsequently widely resisted.

> '[T]he case demonstrates the complexity of organizational climate, with several processes interacting simultaneously to generate a constantly changing climate in the course of reproducing the organization's culture and beliefs. Importantly, the case shows how these complex climate processes are related to demoralization and counter intentional results in organizational change' (abs 87).

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[5] For a very good example of the use of structuration theory in the analysis of organizational culture, a similar concept to organizational climate, see Witmer (1997) on the world's largest Alcoholics Anonymous group.

(iv) Cash (1996), a political scientist, in his *Identity, Ideology and Conflict: The Structuration of Politics in Northern Ireland*, rejects sociological (modernisation, etc) and psychological (internalisation) approaches to ideology in favour of structuration. Similarly, he rejects pluralist and Marxist approaches to intergroup relations in favour of structuration. He follows Giddens on the duality of structure, but regards his stratification model of the agent as incomplete.

> 'Giddens uses psychoanalytic theory to ground a concept of ontological security; to be able to go on routinely we need to be capable of trust, autonomy and initiative. Yet miraculously, for Giddens, these capacities, once established in the early years, are insignificant so far as the characteristics of "normal" social interaction are concerned; for normally interaction does not challenge our core assumptions about trust, autonomy and initiative' (56).

The latter are only challenged in critical situations. In these there can be an irruption of the unconscious into social life, triggering individual defence mechanisms. This amounts to a regression from culture to nature. 'For Giddens, in radical contrast to critical situations, routine situations are organised by the specific rules of structuration which are peculiar to a cultural formation' (57).

Unlike Freud and Habermas, Giddens omits any dynamic relation between the unconscious ('a transhistorical species attribute upon which is grounded the basic capacities for trust, autonomy and initiative which are ... central to the capacity of individuals to enter into social interaction' (60-1)) and practical and discursive consciousness. Cash seeks to remedy this omission by specifying 'the unconscious rules of structuration of a particular ideological formation'(59), that of Ulster Unionism/Loyalism, and, by acknowledging affect. He defines ideology as 'a dynamic and relatively autonomous system of signification, communication and subjection which operates by constructing a social and political order and subjecting individual human beings to cathected positions within this order' (70). Like Klein, Cash 'regards the human psyche as a complex and conflict-ridden mental apparatus capable of "rational" calculation, but always subject to paranoid and depressive anxieties and the defensive formations which attend these' (76). 'Building upon Kleinian theory', he argues that 'three psychodynamic positions within an ideological formation can ... be distinguished' (80), the dehumanising, the persecutory and the ambivalent. By reconsidering the stratification model of the agent and the ontology of the self, Cash is able to offer 'a revised structuration theory ... which specifies a variety of unconscious rules of structuration' (113). These rules, it should be noted, belong to the unconscious rather than any virtual order.

Cash applies his revised structuration theory to an analysis of two tendencies in Ulster Unionism, exclusivism (from Brookeborough to Paisley) and inclusivism (from O'Neill to support for the British and Irish Governments' joint 1995 Framework Document for a settlement in Northern Ireland).

6. Reconsidering modernity

Giddens has always argued that the development and use of sociology is an integral feature of modernity itself. It is thus particularly apt that some writers draw on Giddens himself in their accounts of what they variously call late, high or post-modernity. The themes they draw on often link work on the principles of structuration theory published in the main between 1976 and 1984 and work on modernity published subsequently; especially since *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990). At their heart are issues of reflexivity, trust, risk and security.

In one such paper Mellor (1993) picks up on Giddens' comments on justified traditions in *The Consequences of Modernity* in order to delineate the contours of contemporary religiosity. He argues that Giddens associates modernity with reflexivity, a propensity for the radical reappraisal of anything and everything, and thus with radical doubt. 'High modernity is necessarily a post-traditionalist order: its pervasive reflexivity orients us to the future since there is nothing to rely on in the past' (116).

Giddens also refers to 'justified traditions', i.e. traditions justified by reflexive questioning, but with the crucial qualification that justified tradition is 'tradition in sham clothing and receives its identity only from the reflexivity of the modern' (CM: 38). Mellor complains that Giddens has here and elsewhere an unduly static view of tradition. For Giddens, he claims, 'traditions in pre-modernity functioned as normative structures, contextualizing all activity and exprience' (118). It is this normativity which has gone; religion, now, is just a lifestyle sector.

Contrary to Giddens, Mellor argues that 'traditional norms have often been reflexively constructed in contexts other than high modernity' (118) and discusses Buddhism and, especially, Pentecostalism with special reference to white women preachers in the rural US whose female voice has significantly altered the [patriarchal] Pentecostalist tradition. For Mellor 'reflexivity and normativity are not necessarily mutually exclusive options', and it is therefore more appropriate to speak of reflexive traditions than sham ones (125). But even if he is wrong to exclude reflexivity from pre-modern religiosity, Giddens is right to acknowledge that 'the ability of modern persons to respond knowledgeably and constructively to their social and cultural context' (125) extends to religious contexts and it is this which enables Mellor to make his most fundamental point: the association of reflexivity with high modern religiosity challenges the pervasive narrative of secularisation.

Conclusion: Intermediate Theory

Theorists dispute whether Giddens' resolution of the dualisms of structure and agency, determinism and voluntarism, and order and change is satisfactory both in general and in all its particulars; or whether, in some circumstances, resolution is even called for at all. What I

want to note here, however, is that Giddens' structuration theory has enabled colleagues across the social sciences to address what they perceive to be fundamental deficiencies in their disciplines and specialties as presently constituted, and it has provided all or part of the theoretical framework and conceptual vocabulary for an already large, and seemingly ever expanding, number of empirical projects. Why is this? The fundamental answer is that Giddens is used because he is usable, usable that is, by research oriented social scientists uninterested in the arcane disputes of theorists. In other words, the dualisms of which Giddens complains strike a chord with researchers throughout the social sciences, whatever other theorists might say and the ways of dealing with them which he supplies they can understand and put to work.

The dimensions of the duality of structure and their connection with institutional orders; the idea of structure as a virtual order of rules and resources; the distinction between structure and system; the stratification model of the agent; the idea of ontological security and existential anxiety; the conception of time-space and its bearing on the difference between social integration and system integration; the connections between agency, power and the dialectic of control; the double-hermeneutic; all of these analysts and researchers throughout the social sciences have been able to grasp and use. There are theorists who sometimes seem wilfully obscure; Giddens, by contrast, is notable for an urge to communicate, evidenced in his production of glossaries and his texts for students, which is paying off handsomely. Contrary to Gregson, many social scientist welcome help with what she calls second-order conceptualisations. In addition Giddens does supply concepts which researchers can transfer to empirical settings and use in what she calls first-order explanations. The double-hermeneutic, the dialectic of control and ontological security are obvious examples from Giddens' works on the principles of structuration theory. Giddens has also further considered trust, and above all reflexivity, in his 1990s writings on late modernity beginning with *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990). These, too, have been taken up by researchers.[6]

In his recent wildly self-indulgent, but also highly entertaining, book on Giddens, Mestrovic (1998) variously accuses Giddens of grand theory à la Parsons and 'rationality-lite' (though it is hard to see how anyone could be guilty of both). Both these characterisations are wrong. Parsons sought a categorial system for all the social sciences as a stage on the way to achieving an empirical-theoretical system which would afford predictions under real, as

[6] In his 1990s writings on late modernity and self-identity, Giddens has coined, appropriated and given currency to a host of concepts some of which are already proving transferable into empirical settings: reflexive and radicalised modernity, institutional reflexivity, detraditionalisation, manufactured uncertainty and global risk environments, emancipatory politics and life politics or the politics of self-actualisation, narratives and projects of the self, the sequestration of experience and ontological security, the democratisation of democracy and dialogic democracy, the pure relationship, the transformation of intimacy and confluent love, utopian realism and many more. For discussions of Giddens which consider the connections between his work on the principles of structuration theory and more recent work on late modernity, see Bryant and Jary (1997, and forthcoming).

distinct from experimental, conditions. In the process he offered concepts and formulations, such as the pattern variables, which researchers were often able to put to use without necessarily subscribing to Parsons' general project. Giddens rejects the very ideas of theory-building and deductively-linked laws which are at the heart of Parsons' project. Parsons was a foundationalist; Giddens is not. Parsons never made the linguistic turn; for Giddens it is central. But if Giddens, for all his syntheses, is no grand theorist, neither is he the author of bland concepts and undemanding formulations. What he does offer is what I would call 'intermediate theory'. By this I allude not to theory of the mlddle-range, Merton's version of which was as firmly part of the theory-building tradition as anything in Parsons, but rather to intermediate technology. Structuration theory offers concepts, frameworks and formulations of intermediate complexity, i.e. something beyond piecemeal bricolage but short of the kind of theoretical system which theorists love to interpret and contest. So far as many specialists throughout the social sciences are concerned, Giddens' resolutions of the dualisms of structure and agency, determinism and voluntarism, and order and change work because they have helped them address perceived past deficiencies in their disciplines and specialties and get their research done. Menzies (1982) introduced the notion of a theory gap between theoreticians' theory and researchers' theory. His distinction is between systematic theory-building and the researchers' pursuit of such limited connections between phenomena as the complexity and messiness of the social world permit. In a similar vein, I have noted the big gap between the theoretical concerns; conceptual, analytical, hermeneutic, critical, 'metatheoretical', etc; of self-styled theorists and the narrow theoretical focus of those researchers for whom theory refers only to hypotheses for test, and the labelling of connections confirmed by test, within discrete areas of inquiry (Bryant, 1995, ch. 6). Either way structuration theory as intermediate theory has proved its value in filling the gap.

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