The Constitution of Society

Outline of the Theory of Structuration

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Elements of the Theory of Structuration

In offering a preliminary exposition of the main concepts of structuration theory[1]* it will be useful to begin from the divisions which have separated functionalism (including systems theory) and structuralism on the one hand from hermeneutics and the various forms of 'interpretative sociology' on the other. Functionalism and structuralism have some notable similarities, in spite of the otherwise marked contrasts that exist between them. Both tend to express a naturalistic standpoint, and both are inclined towards objectivism. Functionalist thought, from Comte onwards, has looked particularly towards biology as the science providing the closest and most compatible model for social science. Biology has been taken to provide a guide to conceptualizing the structure and the functioning of social systems and to analysing processes of evolution via mechanisms of adaptation. Structuralist thought, especially in the writings of Lévi-Strauss, has been hostile to evolutionism and free from biological analogies. Here the homology between social and natural science is primarily a cognitive one in so far as each is supposed to express similar features of the overall constitution of mind. Both structuralism and functionalism strongly emphasize the pre-eminence of the social whole over its individual parts (i.e., its constituent actors, human subjects).

In hermeneutic traditions of thought, of course, the social and natural sciences are regarded as radically discrepant. Hermeneutics has been the home of that 'humanism' to which structuralists have been so strongly and persistently opposed. In hermeneutic thought, such as presented by Dilthey, the gulf between subject and social object is at its widest. Subjectivity is the preconstituted

centre of the experience of culture and history and as such provides the basic foundation of the social or human sciences. Outside the realm of subjective experience, and alien to it, lies the material world, governed by impersonal relations of cause and effect. Whereas for those schools of thought which tend towards naturalism subjectivity has been regarded as something of a mystery, or almost a residual phenomenon, for hermeneutics it is the world of nature which is opaque — which, unlike human activity, can be grasped only from the outside. In interpretative sociologies, action and meaning are accorded primacy in the explication of human conduct; structural concepts are not notably prominent, and there is not much talk of constraint. For functionalism and structuralism, however, structure (in the divergent senses attributed to that concept) has primacy over action, and the constraining qualities of structure are strongly accentuated.

The differences between these perspectives on social science have often been taken to be epistemological, whereas they are in fact also ontological. What is at issue is how the concepts of action, meaning and subjectivity should be specified and how they might relate to notions of structure and constraint. If interpretative sociologies are founded, as it were, upon an imperialism of the subject, functionalism and structuralism propose an imperialism of the social object. One of my principal ambitions in the formulation of structuration theory is to put an end to each of these empire-building endeavours. The basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time. Human social activities, like some self-reproducing items in nature, are recursive. That is to say, they are not brought into being by social actors but continually recreated by them via the very means whereby they express themselves *as* actors. In and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible. However, the sort of 'knowledgeability' displayed in nature, in the form of coded programmes, is distant from the cognitive skills displayed by human agents. It is in the conceptualizing of human knowledgeability and its involvement in action that I seek to appropriate some of the major contributions of interpretative

sociologies. In structuration theory a hermeneutic starting-point is accepted in so far as it is acknowledged that the description of human activities demands a familiarity with the forms of life expressed in those activities.

It is the specifically reflexive form of the knowledgeability of human agents that is most deeply involved in the recursive ordering of social practices. Continuity of practices presumes reflexivity, but reflexivity in turn is possible only because of the continuity of practices that makes them distinctively 'the same' across space and time. 'Reflexivity' hence should be understood not merely as 'self-consciousness' but as the monitored character of the ongoing flow of social life. To be a human being is to be a purposive agent, who both has reasons for his or her activities and is able, if asked, to elaborate discursively upon those reasons (including lying about them). But terms such as 'purpose' or 'intention', 'reason', 'motive' and so on have to be treated with caution, since their usage in the philosophical literature has very often been associated with a hermeneutical voluntarism, and because they extricate human action from the contextuality of time-space. Human action occurs as a *durée*, a continuous flow of conduct, as does cognition. Purposive action is not composed of an aggregate or series of separate intentions, reasons and motives. Thus it is useful to speak of reflexivity as grounded in the continuous monitoring of action which human beings display and expect others to display. The reflexive monitoring of action depends upon rationalization, understood here as a process rather than a state and as inherently involved in the competence of agents. An ontology of time-space as constitutive of social practices is basic to the conception of structuration, which *begins* from temporality and thus, in one sense, 'history'.

This approach can draw only sparingly upon the analytical philosophy of action, as 'action' is ordinarily portrayed by most contemporary Anglo-American writers. 'Action' is not a combination of 'acts': 'acts' are constituted only by a discursive moment of attention to the *durée* of lived-through experience. Nor can 'action' be discussed in separation from the body, its mediations with the surrounding world and the coherence of an acting self. What I call a *stratification model* of the acting self involves treating the reflexive monitoring, rationalization and motivation of action as embedded sets of processes.[2] The rationalization of

action, referring to 'intentionality' as process, is, like the other two dimensions, a routine characteristic of human conduct, carried on in a taken-for-granted fashion. In circumstances of interaction — encounters and episodes — the reflexive monitoring of action typically, and again routinely, incorporates the monitoring of the setting of such interaction. As I shall indicate subsequently, this phenomenon is basic to the interpolation of action within the time-space relations of what I shall call co-presence. The rationalization of action, within the diversity of circumstances of interaction, is the principal basis upon which the generalized 'competence' of actors is evaluated by others. It should be clear, however, that the tendency of some philosophers to equate reasons with 'normative commitments' should be resisted: such commitments comprise only one sector of the rationalization of action. If this is not understood, we fail to understand that norms figure as 'factual' boundaries of social life, to which a variety of manipulative attitudes are possible. One aspect of such attitudes, although a relatively superficial one, is to be found in the commonplace observation that the reasons actors offer discursively for what they do may diverge from the rationalization of action as actually involved in the stream of conduct of those actors.

This circumstance has been a frequent source of worry to philosophers and observers of the social scene — for how can we be sure that people do not dissimulate concerning the reasons for their activities? But it is of relatively little interest compared with the wide 'grey areas' that exist between two strata of processes not accessible to the discursive consciousness of actors. The vast bulk of the 'stocks of knowledge', in Schutz's phrase, or what I prefer to call the *mutual knowledge* incorporated in encounters, is not directly accessible to the consciousness of actors. Most such knowledge is practical in character: it is inherent in the capability to 'go on' within the routines of social life. The line between discursive and practical consciousness is fluctuating and permeable, both in the experience of the individual agent and as regards comparisons between actors in different contexts of social activity. There is no bar between these, however, as there is between the unconscious and discursive consciousness. The unconscious includes those forms of cognition and impulsion which are either wholly repressed from consciousness or appear

in consciousness only in distorted form. Unconscious motivational components of action, as psychoanalytic theory suggests, have an internal hierarchy of their own, a hierarchy which expresses the 'depth' of the life history of the individual actor. In saying this I do not imply an uncritical acceptance of the key theorems of Freud's writings. We should guard against two forms of reductionism which those writings suggest or foster. One is a reductive conception of institutions which, in seeking to show the foundation of institutions in the unconscious, fails to leave sufficient play for the operation of autonomous social forces. The second is a reductive theory of consciousness which, wanting to show how much of social life is governed by dark currents outside the scope of actors' awareness, cannot adequately grasp the level of control which agents are characteristically able to sustain reflexively over their conduct.

The Agent, Agency

The stratification model of the agent can be represented as in figure 1. The reflexive monitoring of activity is a chronic feature of everyday action and involves the conduct not just of the individual but also of others. That is to say, actors not only
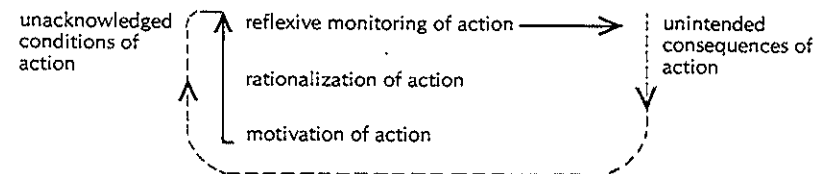

Figure 1

monitor continuously the flow of their activities and expect others to do the same for their own; they also routinely monitor aspects, social and physical, of the contexts in which they move. By the rationalization of action, I mean that actors — also routinely and for the most part without fuss — maintain a continuing 'theoretical understanding' of the grounds of their activity. As I have mentioned, having such an understanding should not be equated with the discursive giving of reasons for particular items of

conduct, nor even with the capability of specifying such reasons discursively. However, it is expected by competent agents of others — and is the main criterion of competence applied in day-to-day conduct — that actors will usually be able to explain most of what they do, if asked. Questions often posed about intentions and reasons by philosophers are normally only put by lay actors either when some piece of conduct is specifically puzzling or when there is a 'lapse' or fracture in competency which might in fact be an intended one. Thus we will not ordinarily ask another person why he or she engages in an activity which is conventional for the group or culture of which that individual is a member. Neither will we ordinarily ask for an explanation if there occurs a lapse for which it seems unlikely the agent can be held responsible, such as slips in bodily management (see the discussion of 'Oops!', pp. 81—3) or slips of the tongue. If Freud is correct, however, such phenomena might have a rationale to them, although this is only rarely realized either by the perpetrators of such slips or by others who witness them (see pp. 94—104).

I distinguish the reflexive monitoring and rationalization of action from its motivation. If reasons refer to the grounds of action, motives refer to the wants which prompt it. However, motivation is not as directly bound up with the continuity of action as are its reflexive monitoring or rationalization. Motivation refers to potential for action rather than to the mode in which action is chronically carried on by the agent. Motives tend to have a direct purchase on action only in relatively unusual circumstances, situations which in some way break with the routine. For the most part motives supply overall plans or programmes — 'projects', in Schutz's term — within which a range of conduct is enacted. Much of our day-to-day conduct is not directly motivated.

While competent actors can nearly always report discursively about their intentions in, and reasons for, acting as they do, they cannot necessarily do so of their motives. Unconscious motivation is a significant feature of human conduct, although I shall later indicate some reservations about Freud's interpretation of the nature of the unconscious. The notion of practical consciousness is fundamental to structuration theory. It is that characteristic of the human agent or subject to which structuralism has been particularly blind.[3] But so have other types of objectivist thought.

Only in phenomenology and ethnomethodology, within sociological traditions, do we find detailed and subtle treatments of the nature of practical consciousness. Indeed, it is these schools of thought, together with ordinary language philosophy, which have been responsible for making clear the shortcomings of orthodox social scientific theories in this respect. I do not intend the distinction between discursive and practical consciousness to be a rigid and impermeable one. On the contrary, the division between the two can be altered by many aspects of the agent's socialization and learning experiences. Between discursive and practical consciousness there is no bar; there are only the differences between what can be said and what is characteristically simply done. However, there are barriers, centred principally upon repression, between discursive consciousness and the unconscious.

discursive consciousness

practical consciousness

unconscious motives/cognition
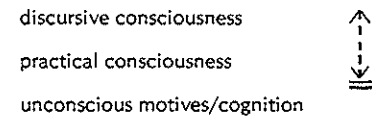
As explained elsewhere in the book, I offer these concepts in place of the traditional psychoanalytic triad of ego, super-ego and id. The Freudian distinction of ego and id cannot easily cope with the analysis of practical consciousness, which lacks a theoretical home in psychoanalytic theory as in the other types of social thought previously indicated. The concept of 'pre-conscious' is perhaps the closest notion to practical consciousness in the conceptual repertoire of psychoanalysis but, as ordinarily used, clearly means something different. In place of the 'ego', it is preferable to speak of the 'I' (as, of course, Freud did in the original German). This usage does not prevent anthropomorphism, in which the ego is pictured as a sort of mini-agent; but it does at least help to begin to remedy it. The use of 'I' develops out of, and is thereafter associated with, the positioning of the agent in social encounters. As a term of a predicative sort, it is 'empty' of content, as compared with the richness of the actor's self-descriptions involved with 'me'. Mastery of 'I', 'me', 'you' relations, as applied reflexively in discourse, is of key importance to the emerging competence of agents learning language. Since I

do not use the term 'ego', it is evidently best to dispense with 'super-ego' also — a clumsy term in any case. The term 'moral conscience' will do perfectly well as a replacement.

These concepts all refer to the agent. What of the nature of agency? This can be connected with a further issue. The *durée* of day-to-day life occurs as a flow of intentional action. However, acts have unintended consequences; and, as indicated in figure 1, unintended consequences may systematically feed back to be the unacknowledged conditions of further acts. Thus one of the regular consequences of my speaking or writing English in a correct way is to contribute to the reproduction of the English language as a whole. My speaking English correctly is intentional; the contribution I make to the reproduction of the language is not. But how should we formulate what unintended consequences are?

It has frequently been supposed that human agency can be defined only in terms of intentions. That is to say, for an item of behaviour to count as action, whoever perpetrates it must intend to do so, or else the behaviour in question is just a reactive response. The view derives some plausibility, perhaps, from the fact that there are some acts which cannot occur unless the agent intends them. Suicide is a case in point. Durkheim's conceptual efforts to the contrary, 'suicide' cannot be said to occur unless there is some kind of intent to precipitate self-destruction. A person who steps off the curb and is knocked down by an oncoming car cannot be said to be a 'suicide' if the event is accidental; it is something that happens to the individual, rather than something the individual does. However, suicide is not typical of most human acts, in respect of intentions, in so far as it can be said to have occurred only when its perpetrator intended it to occur. Most acts do not have this characteristic.

Some philosophers have argued, however, that for an event in which a human being is involved to count as an example of agency, it is necessary at least that what the person does be intentional under some description, even if the agent is mistaken about that description. An officer on a submarine pulls a lever intending to change course but instead, having pulled the wrong lever, sinks the *Bismarck*. He has done something intentionally, albeit not what he imagined, but thus the *Bismarck* has been sunk through his agency. Again, if someone intentionally spills some

coffee, thinking mistakenly that it is tea, spilling the coffee is an act of that person, even though it has not been done intentionally; under another description, as 'spilling the tea', it is intentional.[4] (In most instances, 'spilling' something tends to have the implication that the act is unintentional. It is a slip intervening in a course of action in which the person is intending to do something different altogether, namely pass the cup to another person. Freud claims that nearly all such behavioural slips, like slips of the tongue, are actually unconsciously motivated. This, of course, brings them under intentional descriptions from another angle.)

But even the view that for an event to count as an instance of agency, it must be intentional only under *some* description or another is wrong. It confuses the designation of agency with the giving of act-descriptions;[5] and it mistakes the continued monitoring of an action which individuals carry out with the defining properties of that action as such. Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place (which is why agency implies power: cf. the Oxford English Dictionary definition of an agent, as 'one who exerts power or produces an effect'). Agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently. Whatever happened would not have happened if that individual had not intervened. Action is a continuous process, a flow, in which the reflexive monitoring which the individual maintains is fundamental to the control of the body that actors ordinarily sustain throughout their day-to-day lives. I am the author of many things I do not intend to do, and may not want to bring about, but none the less *do*. Conversely, there may be circumstances in which I intend to achieve something, and do achieve it, although not directly through my agency. Take the example of the spilled coffee. Supposing an individual, A, were a malicious spirit and played a practical joke by placing the cup on a saucer at such an angle that, when picked up, it would be very likely to spill. Individual B picks up the coffee, and it duly spills over. It would be right to say that what A did brought the incident about, or at least contributed to its coming about. But A did not spill the coffee; B did. Individual B, who did not intend to spill the coffee, spilled the coffee; individual A, who did intend that the coffee should be spilled, did not spill it.

But what is it to do something unintentionally? Is it different from bringing about consequences unintentionally? Consider the so-called 'accordion effect' of action.[6] An individual flicks a switch to illuminate a room. Although this is intentional, the fact that the turning on of the switch alerts a prowler is not. Supposing the prowler flees down the road, is caught by a policeman, and after due process spends a year in gaol on the basis of being convicted of the burglary. Are all these unintended consequences of the act of flicking the switch? Which are things the individual has 'done'? Let me mention an additional example, taken from a theory of ethnic segregation.[7] A pattern of ethnic segregation might develop, without any of those involved intending this to happen, in the following way, which can be illustrated by analogy. Imagine a chessboard which has a set of 5-pence pieces and a set of 10-pence pieces. These are distributed randomly on the board, as individuals might be in an urban area. It is presumed that, while they feel no hostility towards the other group, the members of each group do not want to live in a neighbourhood where they are ethnically in a minority. On the chessboard each piece is moved around until it is in such a position that at least 50 per cent of the adjoining pieces are of the same type. The result is a pattern of extreme segregation. The 10-cent pieces end up as a sort of ghetto in the midst of the 5-cent ones. The 'composition effect' is an outcome of an aggregate of acts — whether those of moving pieces on the board or those of agents in a housing market — each of which is intentionally carried out. But the eventual outcome is neither intended nor desired by anyone. It is, as it were, everyone's doing and no one's.

To understand what it is to do something unintentionally, we have first of all to be clear how 'intentional' should be understood. This concept I define as characterizing an act which its perpetrator knows, or believes, will have a particular quality or outcome and where such knowledge is utilized by the author of the act to achieve this quality or outcome.[8] If the characterization of agency given above is correct, we have to separate out the question of what an agent 'does' from what is 'intended' or the intentional aspects of what is done. Agency refers to doing. Switching on the light was something the agent did, and alerting the prowler was also something that agent did. It was unintended if the actor did not know the prowler was there and if for some

reason, while knowing the prowler was there, the agent did not seek to use this knowledge to alert the intruder. Unintentional doings can be separated conceptually from unintended consequences of doings, although the distinction will not matter whenever the focus of concern is the relation between the intentional and unintentional. The consequences of what actors do, intentionally or unintentionally, are events which would not have happened if that actor had behaved differently, but which are not within the scope of the agent's power to have brought about (regardless of what the agent's intentions were).

I think we can say that all the things that happened to the prowler following the flicking of the switch were unintended consequences of the act, given that the individual in question did not know the prowler was there and therefore initiated the sequence unintentionally. If there are complexities in this, they are to do with how it comes about that a seemingly trivial act may trigger events far removed from it in time and space, not whether or not those consequences were intended by the perpetrator of the original act. In general it is true that the further removed the consequences of an act are in time and space from the original context of the act, the less likely those consequences are to be intentional — but this is, of course, influenced both by the scope of the knowledgeability that actors have (see pp. 90–2) and the power they are able to mobilize. We would ordinarily think of what the agent 'does' — as contrasted with the consequences ensuing from what has been done — in terms of phenomena the agent has more or less within his or her control. In most spheres of life, and in most forms of activity, the scope of control is limited to the immediate contexts of action or interaction. Thus we would say that turning on the light was something the agent did, and probably also alerting the prowler, but not causing the prowler to get caught by the policeman or to end up spending a year in gaol. Although it might be the case that these events would not have happened when and where they did without the act of flicking the switch, their occurrence depended on too many other contingent outcomes for them to be something the original actor 'did'.

Philosophers have used up a great deal of ink attempting to analyse the nature of intentional activity. But from the point of view of the social sciences, it is hard to exaggerate the importance

of the unintended consequences of intentional conduct. Merton has provided perhaps the classical discussion of the issue.[9] He points out, entirely correctly, that the study of unintended consequences is fundamental to the sociological enterprise. A given item of activity may have either (a) non-significant or (b) significant consequences; and either (c) singly significant consequences or (d) multiply significant consequences. What is judged 'significant' will depend upon the nature of the study being undertaken or the theory being developed.[10] However, Merton then goes on to couple unintended consequences with functional analysis, a conceptual move which, although conventionally made in the sociological literature, I wish to reject. In particular, it is important to see that the analysis of unintended consequences does not (as Merton claims it does) make sense of seemingly irrational forms or patterns of social conduct. Merton contrasts intentional activity (manifest functions) with its unintended consequences (latent functions). One of the aims of identifying latent functions is to show that apparently irrational social activities may not be so irrational after all. This is particularly likely to be the case, according to Merton, with enduring activities or practices. These may often be dismissed as "superstitions", "irrationalities", "mere inertia of tradition", etc'. However, in Merton's view, if we discover that they have a latent function — an unintended consequence, or set of consequences, which help to secure the continued reproduction of the practice in question — then we demonstrate that it is not so irrational at all.

Thus a ceremonial, for example, 'may fulfil the latent function of reinforcing the group identity by providing a periodic occasion on which the scattered members of a group assemble to engage in a common activity'.[11] But to suppose that such a demonstration of a functional relation provides a reason for the existence of a practice is mistaken. What is being more or less surreptitiously smuggled in here is a conception of 'society's reasons' on the basis of imputed social needs. Thus if we understand that the group 'needs' the ceremonial to enable it to survive, we see its continuation as no longer irrational. But to say that the existence of a social state A needs a social practice B to help it to survive in recognizably similar form is to pose a question that then has to be answered; it does not itself answer it. The relation between A and B is not analogous to the relation that obtains between wants or

needs and intentions in the individual actor. In the individual, wants that are constitutive of the motivational impulses of the actor generate a dynamic relation between motivation and intentionality. This is not the case with social systems, except where actors behave in cognizance of what they take to be social needs.[12]

This point having been made, there can be no quarrel with Merton's emphasis upon the significance of connecting unintended consequences of action with institutionalized practices, those deeply embedded in time and space. This represents the most important of three main research contexts — separable from one another only analytically — in which the influence of unintended consequences can be analysed. One is the turning on the light/alerting the prowler/causing the prowler to flee/etc. type of example. The interest of the researcher here is in the cumulation of events deriving from an initiating circumstance without which that cumulation would not have been found. Max Weber's analysis of the effects of the Battle of Marathon on the subsequent development of Greek culture, and thence of the formation of European culture in general, is a case in point, as is his discussion of the consequences of the firing of the bullet that killed Archduke Ferdinand at Sarajevo.[13] The concern is with a singular set of events, traced through and analysed counterfactually. The researcher asks, 'What would have happened to events B, C, D, E . . . if A had not occurred?' — thereby seeking to identify the role of A in the chain or sequence.

A second type of circumstance upon which the social analyst might focus is one in which, instead of a pattern of unintended consequences initiated by a single event, there is a pattern resulting from a complex of individual activities. The discussion of ethnic segregation mentioned above is an example of this. Here a definite 'end result' is taken as the phenomenon to be explained, and that end result is shown to derive as an unintended consequence from an aggregate of courses of intentional conduct. The theme of rationality tends to surface again here, although this time there is no logical objection to be made to it. As game theorists have convincingly pointed out, the outcome of a series of rational actions, undertaken separately by individual actors, may be irrational for all of them.[14] 'Perverse effects' are only one type of unintended consequences, although it is no doubt true

that situations where they occur are of particular interest.[15]

The third type of context in which unintended consequences may be traced out is that pointed to by Merton: where the interest of the analyst is in the mechanisms of reproduction of institutionalized practices. Here the unintended consequences of action form the acknowledged conditions of further action in a non-reflexive feedback cycle (causal loops). I have pointed out that it is not enough to isolate functional relations in order to explain why such feedback occurs. How, then, does it happen that cycles of unintended consequences feed back to promote social reproduction across long periods of time? In a general way, this is not difficult to analyse. Repetitive activities, located in one context of time and space, have regularized consequences, unintended by those who engage in those activities, in more or less 'distant' time-space contexts. What happens in this second series of contexts then, directly or indirectly, influences the further conditions of action in the original context. To understand what is going on no explanatory variables are needed other than those which explain why individuals are motivated to engage in regularized social practices across time and space, and what consequences ensue. The unintended consequences are regularly 'distributed' as a by-product of regularized behaviour reflexively sustained as such by its participants.

Agency and Power

What is the nature of the logical connection between action and power? Although the ramifications of the issue are complex, the basic relation involved can easily be pointed to. To be able to 'act otherwise' means being able to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs. This presumes that to be an agent is to be able to deploy (chronically, in the flow of daily life) a range of causal powers, including that of influencing those deployed by others. Action depends upon the capability of the individual to 'make a difference' to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events. An agent ceases to be such if he or she loses the capability to 'make a difference', that is, to exercise some sort of power. Many interesting cases for social analysis centre upon the margins of what can count as action — where the power of

the individual is confined by a range of specifiable circumstances.[16] But it is of the first importance to recognize that circumstances of social constraint in which individuals 'have no choice' are not to be equated with the dissolution of action as such. To 'have no choice' does not mean that action has been replaced by reaction (in the way in which a person blinks when a rapid movement is made near the eyes). This might appear so obvious as not to need saying. But some very prominent schools of social theory, associated mainly with objectivism and with 'structural sociology', have not acknowledged the distinction. They have supposed that constraints operate like forces in nature, as if to 'have no choice' were equivalent to being driven irresistibly and uncomprehendingly by mechanical pressures (see pp. 211—13).

Expressing these observations in another way, we can say that action logically involves power in the sense of transformative capacity. In this sense, the most all-embracing meaning of 'power', power is logically prior to subjectivity, to the constitution of the reflexive monitoring of conduct. It is worth emphasizing this because conceptions of power in the social sciences tend faithfully to reflect the dualism of subject and object referred to previously. Thus 'power' is very often defined in terms of intent or the will, as the capacity to achieve desired and intended outcomes. Other writers by contrast, including both Parsons and Foucault, see power as above all a property of society or the social community. The point is not to eliminate one of these types of conception at the expense of the other, but to express their relation as a feature of the duality of structure. In my opinion, Bachrach and Baratz are right when, in their well-known discussion of the matter, they say that there are two 'faces' of power (not three, as Lukes declares).[17] They represent these as the capability of actors to enact decisions which they favour on the one hand and the 'mobilization of bias' that is built into institutions on the other. This is not wholly satisfactory because it preserves a zero-sum conception of power. Rather than using their terminology we can express the duality of structure in power relations in the following way. Resources (focused via signification and legitimation) are structured properties of social systems, drawn upon and reproduced by knowledgeable agents in the course of interaction. Power is not intrinsically connected to the achievement of sectional interests. In this conception the use of power

characterizes not specific types of conduct but all action, and power is not itself a resource. Resources are media through which power is exercised, as a routine element of the instantiation of conduct in social reproduction. We should not conceive of the structures of domination built into social institutions as in some way grinding out 'docile bodies' who behave like the automata suggested by objectivist social science. Power within social systems which enjoy some continuity over time and space presumes regularized relations of autonomy and dependence between actors or collectivities in contexts of social interaction. But all forms of dependence offer some resources whereby those who are subordinate can influence the activities of their superiors. This is what I call the *dialectic of control* in social systems.

Structure, Structuration

Let me now move to the core of structuration theory: the concepts of 'structure', 'system' and 'duality of structure'. The notion of structure (or 'social structure'), of course, is very prominent in the writings of most functionalist authors and has lent its name to the traditions of 'structuralism'. But in neither instance is this conceptualized in a fashion best suited to the demands of social theory. Functionalist authors and their critics have given much more attention to the idea of 'function' than to that of 'structure', and consequently the latter has tended to be used as a received notion. But there can be no doubt about how 'structure' is usually understood by functionalists and, indeed, by the vast majority of social analysts — as some kind of 'patterning' of social relations or social phenomena. This is often naively conceived of in terms of visual imagery, akin to the skeleton or morphology of an organism or to the girders of a building. Such conceptions are closely connected to the dualism of subject and social object: 'structure' here appears as 'external' to human action, as a source of constraint on the free initiative of the independently constituted subject. As conceptualized in structuralist and post-structuralist thought, on the other hand, the notion of structure is more interesting. Here it is characteristically thought of not as a patterning of presences but as an intersection of presence and absence; underlying codes have to be inferred from surface manifestations.

These two ideas of structure might seem at first sight to have nothing to do with one another, but in fact each relates to important aspects of the structuring of social relations, aspects which, in the theory of structuration, are grasped by recognizing a differentiation between the concepts of 'structure' and 'system'. In analysing social relations we have to acknowledge both a syntagmatic dimension, the patterning of social relations in time-space involving the reproduction of situated practices, and a paradigmatic dimension, involving a virtual order of 'modes of structuring' recursively implicated in such reproduction. In structuralist traditions there is usually ambiguity over whether structures refer to a matrix of admissible transformations within a set or to rules of transformation governing the matrix. I treat structure, in its most elemental meaning at least, as referring to such rules (and resources). It is misleading, however, to speak of 'rules of transformation' because all rules are inherently transformational. Structure thus refers, in social analysis, to the structuring properties allowing the 'binding' of time-space in social systems, the properties which make it possible for discernibly similar social practices to exist across varying spans of time and space and which lend them 'systemic' form. To say that structure is a 'virtual order' of transformative relations means that social systems, as reproduced social practices, do not have 'structures' but rather exhibit 'structural properties' and that structure exists, as time-space presence, only in its instantiations in such practices and as memory traces orienting the conduct of knowledgeable human agents. This does not prevent us from conceiving of structural properties as hierarchically organized in terms of the time-space extension of the practices they recursively organize. The most deeply embedded structural properties, implicated in the reproduction of societal totalities, I call *structural principles*. Those practices which have the greatest time-space extension within such totalities can be referred to as *institutions*.

To speak of structure as 'rules' and resources, and of structures as isolable sets of rules and resources, runs a distinct risk of misinterpretation because of certain dominant uses of 'rules' in the philosophical literature.

(1) Rules are often thought of in connection with games, as

formalized prescriptions. The rules implicated in the reproduction of social systems are not generally like this. Even those which are codified as laws are characteristically subject to a far greater diversity of contestations than the rules of games. Although the use of the rules of games such as chess, etc. as prototypical of the rule-governed properties of social systems is frequently associated with Wittgenstein, more relevant is what Wittgenstein has to say about children's play as exemplifying the routines of social life.

(2) Rules are frequently treated in the singular, as if they could be related to specific instances or pieces of conduct. But this is highly misleading if regarded as analogous to the operation of social life, in which practices are sustained in conjunction with more or less loosely organized sets.

(3) Rules cannot be conceptualized apart from resources, which refer to the modes whereby transformative relations are actually incorporated into the production and reproduction of social practices. Structural properties thus express forms of *domination* and *power*.

(4) Rules imply 'methodical procedures' of social interaction, as Garfinkel in particular has made clear. Rules typically intersect with practices in the contextuality of situated encounters: the range of 'ad hoc' considerations which he identifies are chronically involved with the instantiation of rules and are fundamental to the form of those rules. Every competent social actor, it should be added, is *ipso facto* a social theorist on the level of discursive consciousness and a 'methodological specialist' on the levels of both discursive and practical consciousness.

(5) Rules have two aspects to them, and it is essential to distinguish these conceptually, since a number of philosophical writers (such as Winch) have tended to conflate them. Rules relate on the one hand to the constitution of *meaning,* and on the other to the *sanctioning* of modes of social conduct.

I have introduced the above usage of 'structure' to help break with the fixed or mechanical character which the term tends to have in orthodox sociological usage. The concepts of system and structuration do much of the work that 'structure' is ordinarily

called upon to perform. In proposing a usage of 'structure' that might appear at first sight to be remote from conventional interpretations of the term, I do not mean to hold that looser versions be abandoned altogether. 'Society', 'culture' and a range of other forms of sociological terminology can have double usages that are embarrassing only in contexts where a difference is made in the nature of the statements employing them. Similarly, I see no particular objection to speaking of 'class structure', 'the structure of the industrialized societies' and so on, where these terms are meant to indicate in a general way relevant institutional features of a society or range of societies.

One of the main propositions of structuration theory is that the rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time the means of system reproduction (the duality of structure). But how is one to interpret such a claim? In what sense is it the case that when I go about my daily affairs my activities incorporate and reproduce, say, the overall institutions of modern capitalism? What rules are being invoked here in any case? Consider the following possible instances of what rules are:

(1) 'The rule defining checkmate in chess is . . .';
(2) A formula: $a_n = |n^2 + n-1$;
(3) 'As a rule R gets up at 6.00 every day';
(4) 'It is a rule that all workers must clock in at 8.00 a.m.'

Many other examples could of course be offered, but these will serve in the present context. In usage (3) 'rule' is more or less equivalent to habit or routine. The sense of 'rule' here is fairly weak, since it does not usually presuppose some sort of underlying precept that the individual is following or any sanction which applies to back up that precept; it is simply something that the person habitually does. Habit is part of routine, and I shall strongly emphasize the importance of routine in social life. 'Rules', as I understand them, certainly impinge upon numerous aspects of routine practice, but a routine practice is not as such a rule.

Cases (1) and (4) have seemed to many to represent two types of rule, constitutive and regulative. To explain the rule governing checkmate in chess is to say something about what goes into the very making of chess as a game. The rule that workers must clock in at a certain hour, on the other hand, does not help define what

work is; it specifies how work is to be carried on. As Searle puts it, regulative rules can usually be paraphrased in the form 'Do X', or 'If Y, do X.' Some constitutive rules will have this character, but most will have the form 'X counts as Y', or 'X counts as Y in context C'.[18] That there is something suspect in this distinction, as referring to two types of rule, is indicated by the etymological clumsiness of the term 'regulative rule'. After all, the word 'regulative' already implies 'rule': its dictionary definition is 'control by rules'. I would say of (1) and (4) that they express two aspects of rules rather than two variant types of rule. (1) is certainly part of what chess is, but for those who play chess it has sanctioning or 'regulative' properties; it refers to aspects of play that must be observed. But (4) also has constitutive aspects. It does not perhaps enter into the definition of what 'work' is, but it does enter into that of a concept like 'industrial bureaucracy'. What (1) and (4) direct our attention to are two aspects of rules: their role in the constitution of meaning, and their close connection with sanctions.

Usage (2) might seem the least promising as a way of conceptualizing 'rule' that has any relation to 'structure'. In fact, I shall argue, it is the most germane of all of them. I do not mean to say that social life can be reduced to a set of mathematical principles, which is very far from what I have in mind. I mean that it is in the nature of formulae that we can best discover what is the most analytically effective sense of 'rule' in social theory. The formula $a_n = n^2| + n\text{-}1$ is from Wittgenstein's example of number games.[19] One person writes down a sequence of numbers; a second works out the formula supplying the numbers which follow. What is a formula of this kind, and what is it to understand one? To understand the formula is not to utter it. For someone could utter it and not understand the series; alternatively, it is possible to understand the series without being able to give verbal expression to the formula. Understanding is not a mental process accompanying the solving of the puzzle that the sequence of numbers presents — at least, it is not a mental process in the sense in which the hearing of a tune or a spoken sentence is. It is simply being able to apply the formula in the right context and way in order to continue the series.

A formula is a generalizable procedure — generalizable because it applies over a range of contexts and occasions, a procedure

because it allows for the methodical continuation of an established sequence. Are linguistic rules like this? I think they are — much more than they are like the sorts of rule of which Chomsky speaks. And this seems also consonant with Wittgenstein's arguments, or a possible construal of them at any rate. Wittgenstein remarks, 'To understand a language means to be a master of a technique.'[20] This can be read to mean that language use is primarily methodological and that rules of language are methodically applied procedures implicated in the practical activities of day-to-day life. This aspect of language is very important, although not often given much prominence by most followers of Wittgenstein. Rules which are 'stated', as (1) and (4) above, are interpretations of activity as well as relating to specific sorts of activities: all codified rules take this form, since they give verbal expression to what is supposed to be done. But rules are procedures of action, aspects of *praxis*. It is by reference to this that Wittgenstein resolves what he first of all sets up as a 'paradox' of rules and rule-following. This is that no course of action can be said to be guided by a rule because every course of action can be made to accord with that rule. However, if such is the case, it is also true that every course of action can be made to conflict with it. There is a misunderstanding here, a confusing of the interpretation or verbal expression of a rule with following the rule.[21]

Let us regard the rules of social life, then, as techniques or generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social practices. Formulated rules — those that are given verbal expression as canons of law, bureaucratic rules, rules of games and so on — are thus codified interpretations of rules rather than rules as such. They should be taken not as exemplifying rules in general but as specific types of formulated rule, which, by virtue of their overt formulation, take on various specific qualities.[22]

So far these considerations offer only a preliminary approach to the problem. How do formulae relate to the practices in which social actors engage, and what kinds of formulae are we most interested in for general purposes of social analysis? As regards the first part of the question, we can say that awareness of social rules, expressed first and foremost in practical consciousness, is the very core of that 'knowledgeability' which specifically

characterizes human agents. As social actors, all human beings are highly 'learned' in respect of knowledge which they possess, and apply, in the production and reproduction of day-to-day social encounters; the vast bulk of such knowledge is practical rather than theoretical in character. As Schutz and many others have pointed out, actors employ typified schemes (formulae) in the course of their daily activities to negotiate routinely the situations of social life. Knowledge of procedure, or mastery of the techniques of 'doing' social activity, is by definition methodological. That is to say, such knowledge does not specify all the situations which an actor might meet with, nor could it do so; rather, it provides for the generalized capacity to respond to and influence an indeterminate range of social circumstances.

Those types of rule which are of most significance for social theory are locked into the reproduction of institutionalized practices, that is, practices most deeply sedimented in time-space.[23] The main characteristics of rules relevant to general questions of social analysis can be described as follows:

intensive	tacit	informal	weakly sanctioned
:	:	:	
shallow	discursive	formalized	strongly sanctioned

By rules that are intensive in nature, I mean formulae that are constantly invoked in the course of day-to-day activities, that enter into the structuring of much of the texture of everyday life. Rules of language are of this character. But so also, for example, are the procedures utilized by actors in organizing turn-taking in conversations or in interaction. They may be contrasted with rules which, although perhaps wide in scope, have only a superficial impact upon much of the texture of social life. The contrast is an important one, if only because it is commonly taken for granted among social analysts that the more abstract rules — e.g., codified law — are the most influential in the structuring of social activity. I would propose, however, that many seemingly trivial procedures followed in daily life have a more profound influence upon the generality of social conduct. The remaining categories should be more or less self-explanatory. Most of the rules implicated in the production and reproduction of social practices are only tacitly grasped by actors: they know how to

'go on'. *The discursive formulation of a rule is already an interpretation of it,* and, as I have noted, may in and of itself alter the form of its application. Among rules that are not just discursively formulated but are formally codified, the type case is that of laws. Laws, of course, are among the most strongly sanctioned types of social rules and in modern societies have formally prescribed gradations of retribution. However, it would be a serious mistake to underestimate the strength of informally applied sanctions in respect of a variety of mundane daily practices. Whatever else Garfinkel's 'experiments with trust' might be thought to demonstrate, they do show the extraordinarily compelling force with which apparently minor features of conversational response are invested.[24]

The structuring qualities of rules can be studied in respect, first of all, of the forming, sustaining, termination and reforming of encounters. Although a dazzling variety of procedures and tactics are used by agents in the constitution and reconstitution of encounters, probably particularly significant are those involved in the sustaining of ontological security. Garfinkel's 'experiments' are certainly relevant in this respect. They indicate that the prescriptions involved in the structuring of daily interaction are much more fixed and constraining than might appear from the ease with which they are ordinarily followed. This is surely because the deviant responses or acts that Garfinkel instructed his 'experimenters' to perform disturbed the sense of ontological security of the 'subjects' by undermining the intelligibility of discourse. Breaking or ignoring rules is not, of course, the only way in which the constitutive and sanctioning properties of intensively invoked rules can be studied. But there is no doubt that Garfinkel has helped to disclose a remarkably rich field of study — performing the 'sociologist's alchemy', the 'transmutation of any patch of ordinary social activity into an illuminating publication'.[25]

I distinguish 'structure' as a generic term from 'structures' in the plural and both from the 'structural properties of social systems'.[26] 'Structure' refers not only to rules implicated in the production and reproduction of social systems but also to resources (about which I have so far not said much but will do so shortly). As ordinarily used in the social sciences, 'structure' tends to be employed with the more enduring aspects of social

systems in mind, and I do not want to lose this connotation. The most important aspects of structure are rules and resources recursively involved in institutions. Institutions by definition are the more enduring features of social life. In speaking of the structural properties of social systems I mean their institutionalized features, giving 'solidity' across time and space. I use the concept of 'structures' to get at relations of transformation and mediation which are the 'circuit switches' underlying observed conditions of system reproduction.

Let me now answer the question I originally posed: in what manner can it be said that the conduct of individual actors reproduces the structural properties of larger collectivities? The question is both easier and more difficult to answer than it appears. On a logical level, the answer to it is nothing more than a truism. That is to say, while the continued existence of large collectivities or societies evidently does not depend upon the activities of any particular individual, such collectivities or societies manifestly would cease to be if all the agents involved disappeared. On a substantive level, the answer to the question depends upon issues yet to be broached — those concerning the mechanisms of integration of different types of societal totality. It is always the case that the day-to-day activity of social actors draws upon and reproduces structural features of wider social systems. But 'societies' — as I shall make clear — are not necessarily unified collectivities. 'Social reproduction' must not be equated with the consolidation of social cohesion. The location of actors and of collectivities in different sectors or regions of more encompassing social systems strongly influences the impact of even their habitual conduct upon the integration of societal totalities. Here we reach the limits of linguistic examples which might be used to illustrate the concept of the duality of structure. Considerable illumination of problems of social analysis can be derived from studying the recursive qualities of speech and language. When I produce a grammatical utterance, I draw upon the same syntactical rules as those that utterance helps to produce. But I speak the 'same' language as the other speakers in my language community; we all share the same rules and linguistic practices, give or take a range of relatively minor variations. Such is not necessarily the case with the structural properties of social systems in general. But this is not a problem to do with the

concept of the duality of structure as such. It is to do with how social systems, especially 'societies', should be conceptualized.

The Duality of Structure

Structure(s)	*System(s)*	*Structuration*
Rules and resources, or sets of transformation relations, organized as properties of social systems	Reproduced relations between actors or collectivities, organized as regular social practices	Conditions governing the continuity or transmutation of structures, and therefore the reproduction of social systems

Let me summarize the argument thus far. Structure, as recursively organized sets of rules and resources, is out of time and space, save in its instantiations and co-ordination as memory traces, and is marked by an 'absence of the subject'. The social systems in which structure is recursively implicated, on the contrary, comprise the situated activities of human agents, reproduced across time and space. Analysing the structuration of social systems means studying the modes in which such systems, grounded in the knowledgeable activities of situated actors who draw upon rules and resources in the diversity of action contexts, are produced and reproduced in interaction. Crucial to the idea of structuration is the theorem of the duality of structure, which is logically implied in the arguments portrayed above. The constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism, but represent a duality. According to the notion of the duality of structure, the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize. Structure is not 'external' to individuals: as memory traces, and as instantiated in social practices, it is in a certain sense more 'internal' than exterior to their activities in a Durkheimian sense. Structure is not to be equated with constraint but is always both constraining and enabling. This, of course, does not prevent the structured properties of social systems from stretching away, in time and space, beyond the control of any individual actors. Nor does it compromise the possibility that actors' own theories of the social systems which they help to constitute and reconstitute in their activities may reify those systems. The reification of social relations, or the discursive 'naturalization' of the historically

contingent circumstances and products of human action, is one of the main dimensions of ideology in social life.[27]

Even the crudest forms of reified thought, however, leave untouched the fundamental significance of the knowledgeability of human actors. For knowledgeability is founded less upon discursive than practical consciousness. The knowledge of social conventions, of oneself and of other human beings, presumed in being able to 'go on' in the diversity of contexts of social life is detailed and dazzling. All competent members of society are vastly skilled in the practical accomplishments of social activities and are expert 'sociologists'. The knowledge they possess is not incidental to the persistent patterning of social life but is integral to it. This stress is absolutely essential if the mistakes of functionalism and structuralism are to be avoided, mistakes which, suppressing or discounting agents' reasons — the rationalization of action as chronically involved in the structuration of social practices — look for the origins of their activities in phenomena of which these agents are ignorant.[28] But it is equally important to avoid tumbling into the opposing error of hermeneutic approaches and of various versions of phenomenology, which tend to regard society as the plastic creation of human subjects. Each of these is an illegitimate form of reduction, deriving from a failure adequately to conceptualize the duality of structure. According to structuration theory, the moment of the production of action is also one of reproduction in the contexts of the day-to-day enactment of social life. This is so even during the most violent upheavals or most radical forms of social change. It is not accurate to see the structural properties of social systems as 'social products' because this tends to imply that pre-constituted actors somehow come together to create them.[29] In reproducing structural properties to repeat a phrase used earlier, agents also reproduce the conditions that make such action possible. Structure has no existence independent of the knowledge that agents have about what they do in their day-to-day activity. Human agents always know what they are doing on the level of discursive consciousness under some description. However, what they do may be quite unfamiliar under other descriptions, and they may know little of the ramified consequences of the activities in which they engage.

The duality of structure is always the main grounding of

continuities in social reproduction across time-space. It in turn presupposes the reflexive monitoring of agents in, and as constituting, the *durée* of daily social activity. But human knowledgeability is always bounded. The flow of action continually produces consequences which are unintended by actors, and these unintended consequences also may form unacknowledged conditions of action in a feedback fashion. Human history is created by intentional activities but is not an intended project; it persistently eludes efforts to bring it under conscious direction. However, such attempts are continually made by human beings, who operate under the threat and the promise of the circumstance that they are the only creatures who make their 'history' in cognizance of that fact.

The theorizing of human beings about their action means that just as social theory was not an invention of professional social theorists, so the ideas produced by those theorists inevitably tend to be fed back into social life itself. One aspect of this is the attempt to monitor, and thereby control, highly generalized conditions of system reproduction — a phenomenon of massive importance in the contemporary world. To grasp such monitored processes of reproduction conceptually, we have to make certain distinctions relevant to what social systems 'are' as reproduced practices in interaction settings. The relations implied or actualized in social systems are, of course, widely variable in terms of their degree of 'looseness' and permeability. But, this being accepted, we can recognize two levels in respect of the means whereby some element of 'systemness' is achieved in interaction. One is that generally prominent in functionalism, as referred to earlier, where interdependence is conceived of as a homeostatic process akin to mechanisms of self-regulation operating within an organism. There can be no objection to this as long as it is acknowledged that the 'looseness' of most social systems makes the organic parallel a very remote one and that this relatively 'mechanized' mode of system reproduction is not the only one found in human societies. Homeostatic system reproduction in human society can be regarded as involving the operation of causal loops, in which a range of unintended consequences of action feed back to reconstitute the initiating circumstances. But in many contexts of social life there occur processes of selective 'information filtering' whereby strategically

placed actors seek reflexively to regulate the overall conditions of system reproduction either to keep things as they are or to change them.[30]

The distinction between homeostatic causal loops and reflexive self-regulation in system reproduction must be complemented by one further, and final, one: that between social and system integration.[31] 'Integration' may be understood as involving reciprocity of practices (of autonomy and dependence) between actors or collectivities.[32] Social integration then means systemness on the level of face-to-face interaction. System integration refers to connections with those who are physically absent in time or space. The mechanisms of system integration certainly presuppose those of social integration, but such mechanisms are also distinct in some key respects from those involved in relations of co-presence.

Social Integration	*System Integration*
Reciprocity between actors in contexts of co-presence	Reciprocity between actors or collectivities across extended time-space

Forms of Institution

The division of rules into modes of signifying or meaning constitution and normative sanctions, together with the concept of resources — fundamental to the conceptualization of power — carries various implications which need to be spelled out.[33] What I call the 'modalities' of structuration serve to clarify the main dimensions of the duality of structure in interaction, relating the knowledgeable capacities of agents to structural features. Actors draw upon the modalities of structuration in the reproduction of systems of interaction, by the same token reconstituting their structural properties. The communication of meaning in interaction, it should be stressed, is separable only analytically from the operation of normative sanctions. This is obvious, for example, in so far as language use is itself sanctioned by the very nature of its 'public' character.[34] The very identification of acts or of aspects of interaction — their accurate description, as grounded hermeneutically in the capability of an observer to 'go on' in a form of life — implies the interlacing of meaning, normative