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Editor

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## I THE RELATIONAL NETWORK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 2 THE RELATIONAL QUARTET

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 3 THE CONSTELLATIONAL QUADRANGLE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### 4 STRUCTURE-ACTION AS PROCESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 5 FROM ONTOLOGY TO COMPLEXITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 6 CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A GENERAL RELATIONAL SOCIAL THEORY

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

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

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

## NOTES

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

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

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

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

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

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