A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation[1]

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"Structure" is one of the most important, elusive, and undertheorized concepts in the social sciences. Setting out from a critique and reformulation of Anthony Giddens's notion of the duality of structure and Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus, this article attempts to develop a theory of structure that restores human agency to social actors, builds the possibility of change into the concept of structure, and overcomes the divide between semiotic and materialist visions of structure.

"Structure" is one of the most important and most elusive terms in the vocabulary of current social science. The concept is central not only in such eponymous schools as structural functionalism, structuralism, and poststructuralism, but in virtually all tendencies of social scientific thought. But if social scientists find it impossible to do without the term "structure," we also find it nearly impossible to define it adequately. Many of us have surely had the experience of being asked by a "naive" student what we mean by structure, and then finding it embarrassingly difficult to define the term without using the word "structure" or one of its variants in its own definition. Sometimes we find what seems to be an acceptable synonym—for example, "pattern"—but all such synonyms lack the original's rhetorical force. When it comes to indicating

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that a relation is powerful or important it is certainly more convincing to designate it as "structural" than as "patterning."

The term structure empowers what it designates. Structure, in its nominative sense, always implies structure in its transitive verbal sense. Whatever aspect of social life we designate as structure is posited as "structuring" some other aspect of social existence—whether it is class that structures politics, gender that structures employment opportunities, rhetorical conventions that structure texts or utterances, or modes of production that structure social formations. Structure operates in social scientific discourse as a powerful metonymic device, identifying some part of a complex social reality as explaining the whole. It is a word to conjure with in the social sciences. In fact, structure is less a precise concept than a kind of founding or epistemic metaphor of social scientific—and scientific—discourse.[2] For this reason, no formal definition can succeed in fixing the term's meaning: the metaphor of structure continues its essential if somewhat mysterious work in the constitution of social scientific knowledge despite theorists' definitional efforts.

There are, nevertheless, three problems in the current use of the term that make self-conscious theorizing about the meanings of structure seem worthwhile. The most fundamental problem is that structural or structuralist arguments tend to assume a far too rigid causal determinism in social life. Those features of social existence denominated as structures tend to be reified and treated as primary, hard, and immutable, like the girders of a building, while the events or social processes they structure tend to be seen as secondary and superficial, like the outer "skin" of a skyscraper, or as mutable within "hard" structural constraints, like the layout of offices on floors defined by a skeleton of girders. What tends to get lost in the language of structure is the efficacy of human action—or "agency," to use the currently favored term. Structures tend to appear in social scientific discourse as impervious to human agency, to exist apart from, but nevertheless to determine the essential shape of, the strivings and motivated transactions that constitute the experienced surface of social life. A social science trapped in an unexamined metaphor of structure tends to reduce actors to cleverly programmed automatons. A second and closely related problem with the notion of structure is that it makes dealing with change awkward. The metaphor of structure implies stability. For this reason, structural language lends itself readily to explanations of how social life is shaped into consistent patterns, but not to

[2] The term "structure" seems to play an essentially identical role in the natural sciences. Such usages originated, as far as I am aware, in 17th- and 18th-century botany, from which they spread to other natural and social sciences (see Foucault 1973, pp. 132–38).

explanations of how these patterns change over time. In structural discourse, change is commonly located outside of structures, either in a telos of history, in notions of breakdown, or in influences exogenous to the system in question. Consequently, moving from questions of stability to questions of change tends to involve awkward epistemological shifts.

The third problem is of a rather different order: the term structure is used in apparently contradictory senses in different social scientific discourses, particularly in sociology and anthropology. Sociologists typically contrast "structure" to "culture." Structure, in normal sociological usage, is thought of as "hard" or "material" and therefore as primary and determining, whereas culture is regarded as "soft" or "mental" and therefore as secondary or derived. By contrast, semiotically inclined social scientists, most particularly anthropologists, regard culture as the preeminent site of structure. In typical anthropological usage, the term structure is assumed to refer to the realm of culture, except when it is modified by the adjective "social." As a consequence, social scientists as different in outlook as Theda Skocpol and Marshall Sahlins can be designated as "structuralists" by their respective disciplines. Sociologists and anthropologists, in short, tend to visualize the nature and location of structure in sharply discrepant, indeed mutually incompatible, ways.[3]

In view of all these problems with the notion of structure, it is tempting to conclude that the term should simply be discarded. But this, I think, is impossible: structure is so rhetorically powerful and pervasive a term that any attempt to legislate its abolition would be futile. Moreover, the notion of structure does denominate, however problematically, something very important about social relations: the tendency of patterns of relations to be reproduced, even when actors engaging in the relations are unaware of the patterns or do not desire their reproduction. In my opinion, the notion of structure neither could nor should be banished from the discourse of social science. But it does need extensive rethinking. This article will attempt to develop a theory of structure that overcomes the three cardinal weaknesses of the concept as it is normally employed in social science. The theory will attempt (1) to recognize the agency of social actors, (2) to build the possibility of change into the concept of structure, and (3) to overcome the divide between semiotic and material-

[3] This bifurcation of the meaning of structure especially inhibits communication between two groups of social scientists whose current projects seem convergent but who have thus far paid little attention to one another: the growing band of sociologists who are examining the cultural dimensions of social life and the anthropologists who are insisting on the importance of power and practice in understanding culture. For an assessment of the mushrooming field of cultural sociology, see Lamont and Wuthnow (1990). For trends in current anthropology, see the remarks of Ortner (1984, pp. 144–60).

ist visions of structure. My strategy will be to begin from what I regard as the most promising existing formulations—Anthony Giddens's notion of "the duality of structure" and, at a later point in the argument, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus—and to develop a more adequate theory by means of critique, reformulation, and elaboration.[4]

THE DUALITY OF STRUCTURE: A CRITIQUE AND REFORMULATION OF GIDDENS'S THEORY

The most sustained effort at reconceptualizing structure in recent social theory has been made by Anthony Giddens, who has been insisting since the mid-1970s that structures must be regarded as "dual" (Giddens 1976, 1979, 1981, 1984). By this he means that they are "both the medium and the outcome of the practices which constitute social systems" (Giddens 1981, p. 27). Structures shape people's practices, but it is also people's practices that constitute (and reproduce) structures. In this view of things, human agency and structure, far from being *opposed,* in fact *presuppose* each other. Structures are enacted by what Giddens calls "knowledgeable" human agents (i.e., people who know what they are doing and how to do it), and agents act by putting into practice their necessarily structured knowledge. Hence, "structures must not be conceptualized as simply placing constraints on human agency, but as enabling" (Giddens 1976, p. 161). This conception of human agents as "knowledgeable" and "enabled" implies that those agents are capable of putting their structurally formed capacities to work in creative or innovative ways. And, if enough people or even a few people who are powerful enough act in innovative ways, their action may have the consequence of transforming the very structures that gave them the capacity to act. Dual structures therefore are potentially mutable. It is no accident that Giddens calls his theory "the theory of structuration," indicating by this neologism that "structure" must be regarded as a process, not as a steady state.

As a theoretically self-conscious social historian, I find Giddens's notion of the duality of structure particularly congenial. Much of the best social history of the past quarter-century has adopted an implicit theoretical strategy quite consistent with Giddens's theory. Social historians have

[4] It is not my purpose to develop a full critique or appreciation of Giddens or Bourdieu. The critical literature on both is growing rapidly. Held and Thompson (1989) and Bryant and Jary (1991) include not only a wide range of critiques of Giddens's work by prominent scholars but also useful bibliographical listings of previous critiques. On Bourdieu, see DiMaggio (1979), Brubaker (1985), Lamont and Lareau (1988), and Wacquant (1989). The last of these contains extensive references to critical works on Bourdieu.

significantly altered in practice the sociological and anthropological concepts of structure that they began to borrow so avidly in the 1960s and 1970s. Although they were probably writing more from professional instinct than from considered theoretical scruples, social historians have demonstrated how, in a great variety of times and places, structures are in fact dual: how historical agents' thoughts, motives, and intentions are constituted by the cultures and social institutions into which they are born, how these cultures and institutions are reproduced by the structurally shaped and constrained actions of those agents, but also how, in certain circumstances, the agents can (or are forced to) improvise or innovate in structurally shaped ways that significantly reconfigure the very structures that constituted them. Giddens has arrived at his position by way of a theoretical critique intended to reconcile phenomenology, interactionism, and ethnomethodology with Marx, Durkheim, and Weber; he has shown little interest in the work of social historians. Yet I believe that Giddens's notion of the duality of structure underwrites theoretically what social historians (and in recent years many historical sociologists and historical anthropologists as well) do in practice.

What Is Structure?

But in spite of its promise, Giddens's theory suffers from serious gaps and logical deficiencies that have persisted through the theory's all-too-frequent restatements (for the major statements see Giddens [1976, 1979, 1984]). Most strikingly, "structure"—the central term of Giddens's theory—remains frustratingly underspecified. Unlike most social scientists, he does not leave the term completely undefined and simply allow it to do its accustomed magical work in his readers' minds. Especially in *Central Problems in Social Theory* (1979), he discusses "structure" at some length. But I do not think that the concept of structure he elaborates there or elsewhere is sufficiently clear or robust to serve as the foundation of a theoretical system.

Giddens defines structure formally in several places, including in the glossary to *The Constitution of Society:*

> *Structure.* Rules and resources, recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems. Structure exists only as memory traces, the organic basis of human knowledgeability, and as instantiated in action. [1984, p. 377]

This far-from-crystalline definition requires some exegesis. The terms "rules and resources," in spite of their deceptive simplicity, are quite obscure and will have to be discussed at length. Let us therefore begin with the rest of the definition, which is arcanely worded but relatively straightforward in meaning. By "social systems" Giddens means empiri-

cally observable, intertwining, and relatively bounded social practices that link persons across time and space. Social systems would encompass what most social scientists mean by "societies" but would also include social units greater (e.g., the capitalist world system) or more limited (e.g., the neighborhood community) in scope than the nation-state. Social systems, according to Giddens, have no existence apart from the practices that constitute them, and these practices are reproduced by the "recursive" (i.e., repeated) enactments of structures. Structures are not the patterned social practices that make up social systems, but the *principles* that pattern these practices. Structures, therefore, have only what he elsewhere terms a "virtual" existence (e.g., 1984, p. 17). Structures do not exist concretely in time and space except as "memory traces, the organic basis of knowledgeability" (i.e., only as ideas or schemas lodged in human brains) and as they are "instantiated in action" (i.e., put into practice).

Structures as Rules

Structures, then, are "virtual" and are put into practice in the production and reproduction of social life. But of what do these structures consist? According to Giddens's definition, they consist of "rules and resources." Giddens's notion of rules is largely derived from French structuralism. This is especially clear in *New Rules of Sociological Method* and *Central Problems of Social Theory*. In both of these he relies heavily on a typically structuralist analogy with Saussurian linguistics. Giddens likens his own distinction between structure and practice to the Saussurian distinction between *langue* and *parole*. According to this analogy, structure is to practice as *langue* (the abstract rules that make possible the production of grammatical sentences) is to *parole* (speech, or the production of actual sentences; 1976, pp. 118–22). Hence structure, like *langue,* is a complex of rules with a "virtual" existence, while practice, like speech, is an enactment of these rules in space and time. For a French structuralist, structure is the complex of such rules. For Lévi-Strauss, for example, structure refers to the set of rules that enables binary oppositions to be ordered into myths (Lévi-Strauss 1963). In *Central Problems in Social Theory* (1979, pp. 62–64), Giddens affirms the similarity of his concept of structure to that of Lévi-Strauss. But he also attempts to distinguish himself from the French structuralists, in part by insisting that, because structures "bind" time and space, they must be conceptualized as including not only rules but *resources* as well (1979, pp. 63–64). However, Giddens leaves his discussion of rules dangling, and he fails to give examples of rules that underlie any actual social practices. All we know from *Central Problems in Social Theory* is that

rules are virtual and that they somehow generate social practices and social systems.

In *The Constitution of Society,* the most recent statement of his theory, Giddens retreats even farther from a Lévi-Straussian conception of rules. Now taking his cue from Wittgenstein, Giddens there defines rules simply but, in my opinion, with great promise: "Let us regard the rules of social life . . . as generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social life" (1984, p. 21). This definition of rules as generalizable procedures could of course include Lévi-Straussian transformation rules, but it also implies the possibility of rules of a wide range of types. Giddens, however, does not give examples or develop typologies of the sorts of generalizable procedures he has in mind. Consequently, his conception of rules is, if anything, more impoverished in *The Constitution of Society* than it was in *Central Problems in Social Theory,* which at least implied an analogy with Lévi-Strauss. However, I think his Wittgensteinian definition of rules as generalizable procedures can be used as a foundation for a more robust conception.

Throughout his theory, Giddens places a great deal of weight on the notion that actors are *knowledgeable.* It is, presumably, the knowledge of rules that makes people capable of action. But Giddens develops no vocabulary for specifying the *content* of what people know. I would argue that such a vocabulary is, in fact, readily available, but is best developed in a field Giddens has to date almost entirely ignored: cultural anthropology. After all, the usual social scientific term for "what people know" is "culture," and those who have most fruitfully theorized and studied culture are the anthropologists. Claude Lévi-Strauss, the one anthropologist Giddens has taken seriously, is virtually unique in his fixation on very deep or general structures. His attempt, ultimately, is to reach by successive abstractions the structure of the human brain itself. Even some of the structuralist anthropologists who have been most profoundly influenced by Lévi-Strauss (see, e.g., Sahlins 1976, 1981, 1985) have been far more interested in applying Lévi-Strauss's method of seeking out recurrent patterns of binary oppositions in order to specify the assumptions, practices, and beliefs of particular peoples than in tracing such oppositions back to the structure of "the savage mind" or the human brain.

Rather than staying at the deep structural level preferred by Lévi-Strauss, I think we should, like most anthropologists, think of rules as existing at various levels. Rules nearer the surface may by definition be more "superficial," but they are not necessarily less important in their implications for social life. "The rules of social life" should be thought of as including all the varieties of cultural schemas that anthropologists have uncovered in their research: not only the array of binary oppositions

that make up a given society's fundamental tools of thought, but also the various conventions, recipes, scenarios, principles of action, and habits of speech and gesture built up with these fundamental tools.[5] Indeed, the term "rules" is probably not quite the right word, since it tends to imply something like formally stated prescriptions—the sorts of things spelled out in statutes, proverbs, liturgies, constitutions, or contracts.[6] What I mean to get at is not formally stated prescriptions but the informal and not always conscious schemas, metaphors, or assumptions presupposed by such formal statements. I would in fact argue that publicly fixed codifications of rules are actual rather than virtual and should be regarded as *resources* rather than as rules in Giddens's sense. Because of this ambiguity about the meaning of the word "rules," I believe it is useful to introduce a change in terminology. Henceforth I shall use the term "schemas" rather than "rules"—even though this destroys the pleasing alliteration of Giddens's "rules and resources" formula.

The various schemas that make up structures are, to quote Giddens, "generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social life." They are "generalizable" in the sense that they can be applied in or extended to a variety of contexts of interaction. Such schemas or procedures—whether rules of etiquette, or aesthetic norms, or such recipes for group action as the royal progress, grain riot, or democratic vote, or a set of equivalences between wet and dry, female and male, nature and culture, private and public, or the body as a metaphor for hierarchy, or the notion that the human being is composed of a body and a soul—can be used not only in the situation in which they are first learned or most conventionally applied. They can be generalized—that is, transposed or extended—to new situations when the opportunity arises. This *generalizability* or *transposability* of schemas is the reason they must be understood as virtual. To say that schemas are virtual is to say that they cannot be reduced to their existence in any particular practice or any particular location in space and time: they can be actualized in a potentially broad and unpredetermined range of situations.

I agree with Giddens, then, that the rules or schemas making up structures may usefully be conceptualized as having a "virtual" existence, that structures consist of intersubjectively available procedures or schemas capable of being actualized or put into practice in a range of different circumstances. Such schemas should be thought of as operating at widely

[5] It is not possible here to list a representative example of anthropological works that elaborate various "rules of social life." The most influential formulation of the anthropological concept of culture is probably Geertz (1973). For a superb review of recent developments in cultural anthropology, see Ortner (1984).

[6] For a particularly convincing critique of the notion of "rule," see Bourdieu (1977, pp. 1–29).

varying levels of depth, from Lévi-Straussian deep structures to relatively superficial rules of etiquette.

Structures as Resources

Surely part of Giddens's nervousness about embracing Lévi-Strauss's conception of structure is that he wishes to distance himself from Lévi-Strauss's sublime indifference to questions of power, domination, and social change—indeed, to questions of social practice more generally. Presumably it is largely for this reason that Giddens insists that structures are not merely rules, but rules and resources, or "rule-resource sets" (1984, p. 377). But Giddens's concept of resources is even less adequately theorized than his concept of rules.[7] I agree with Giddens that any notion of structure that ignores asymmetries of power is radically incomplete. But tacking an undertheorized notion of resources onto an essentially rule-based notion of structure succeeds merely in confusing things.

In *Central Problems in Social Theory,* Giddens (1979, p. 92) defines resources as "the media whereby transformative capacity is employed as power in the routine course of social interaction." Unless I am missing some subtlety, this obscurely worded definition could be rendered in ordinary English as "resources are anything that can serve as a source of power in social interactions." This seems to me an unexceptional and theoretically uninformative statement of what we usually mean by social resources. Besides this anodyne definition, almost all he tells us about resources is that they can be classified into two types, authoritative and allocative. In *Central Problems in Social Theory,* he defines "authorization" as those "capabilities which generate command over persons" and "allocation" as those "capabilities which generate command over *objects* or other material phenomena" (1979, p. 100). By extension, authoritative resources should be human resources and allocative resources nonhuman resources—which once again seems unexceptional.

I believe that Giddens's classification of resources is potentially useful, but that it needs to be reformulated and put into ordinary English. Resources are of two types, human and nonhuman. Nonhuman resources are objects, animate or inanimate, naturally occurring or manufactured, that can be used to enhance or maintain power; human resources are physical strength, dexterity, knowledge, and emotional commitments that can be used to enhance or maintain power, including knowledge of the means of gaining, retaining, controlling, and propagating either human or nonhuman resources. Both types of resources are media of power

[7] Giddens's concept of rules has occasionally been criticized, most recently by Thompson (1989), but to my knowledge no one has systematically criticized his paired concept of resources.

and are unevenly distributed. But however unequally resources may be distributed, some measure of both human and nonhuman resources are controlled by all members of society, no matter how destitute and oppressed. Indeed, part of what it means to conceive of human beings as *agents* is to conceive of them as *empowered* by access to resources of one kind or another.

Structures as Schemas and Resources

Reformulating Giddens's concept of resources does not make it clear how resources and schemas combine to form structures. Here the most glaring problem is Giddens's definition of structures as "virtual." As we have seen, this makes perfect sense for structures conceptualized as rules or schemas. But are *resources* also virtual? It is surprising that Giddens does not seem to have considered the point. The notion of a virtual resource seems particularly doubtful in the case of nonhuman (or in Giddens's terms "allocative") resources. Nonhuman resources would surely include such things as factories owned by capitalists, stocks of weapons controlled by kings or generals, land rented by peasants, or stacks of Hudson Bay blankets accumulated by Kwakiutl chiefs. It is clear that factories, armaments, land, and Hudson Bay blankets have had a crucial weight in shaping and constraining social life in particular times and places, and it therefore seems sensible to include them in some way in a concept of structure. But it is also hard to see how such material resources can be considered as "virtual," since material things by definition exist in space and time. It is, moreover, only in particular times, places, and quantities that such material objects can serve as resources.

The case of human resources is only a little less clear. By definition, human bodies, like any other material objects, cannot be virtual. But what about knowledge and emotional commitments, the mental aspects of human resources? Examples might be the Roman Catholic priest's power to consecrate the host and hear confession, children's sense of obligation toward their mothers, or the fear and reverence that subjects feel for their king. Unlike factories or Hudson Bay blankets, such resources are not material, or at least not in the same sense. Nevertheless they seem to me actual as opposed to virtual. They exist in what Giddens calls "time-space"; they are observable characteristics of real people who live in particular times and congregate in particular places. And it is their actualization in people's minds and bodies that make them resources. It is not the disembodied concept of the majesty of the king that gives him power, but the fear and reverence felt for him by his actual subjects.

If I am right that all resources are actual rather than virtual, Giddens's notion of structure turns out to be self-contradictory. If structures are

virtual, they cannot include both schemas and resources. And if they include both schemas and resources, they cannot be virtual. He, and we, cannot have it both ways. But which way should we have it? The simplest way of conceptualizing structure would be to return to Giddens's starting point in structuralism and to assert that structure refers only to rules or schemas, not to resources, and that resources should be thought of as an *effect* of structures. In this way, structures would retain their virtual quality, and concrete distributions of resources would be seen not as structures but as media animated and shaped by structures, that is, by cultural schemas.

It is not unreasonable to claim that human resources are the products of schemas. A given number of soldiers will generate different amounts and kinds of military power depending on the contemporary conventions of warfare (such as chivalric codes), the notions of strategy and tactics available to the generals, and the regimes of training to which the troops have been subjected. The priest's power to consecrate the host derives from schemas operating at two rather different levels. First, a priest's training has given him mastery of a wide range of explicit and implicit techniques of knowledge and self-control that enable him to perform satisfactorily as a priest. And second, he has been raised to the dignity of the priesthood by an ordination ceremony that, through the laying on of hands by a bishop, has mobilized the power of apostolic succession and thereby made him capable of an apparently miraculous feat—transforming bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Fear and reverence for kings are manifestations of fundamental notions about the cosmic function of kingship, notions that are woven into a multitude of discourses and ceremonies at all levels of society; similarly, obligations felt by children toward their mothers are based in notions of the bonds of nature, of nurturance, and of obedience that are encoded in multiple routines of family life and in sermons, adages, novels, and works of political theory. Human resources, these examples suggest, may be thought of as manifestations and consequences of the enactment of cultural schemas.

But while we might reasonably speak of human resources as generated by rules or schemas, it is harder to see how nonhuman resources could be conceived of as so generated. Factories, land, and Hudson Bay blankets have material qualities that are certainly not generated by schemas. But it is also true that their condition as resources capable of producing and reproducing disparities in social power is not wholly intrinsic in their material existence. What they amount to as resources is largely a consequence of the schemas that inform their use. To take perhaps the most obvious case, an immense stack of Hudson Bay blankets would be nothing more than a means of keeping a large number of people warm

were it not for the cultural schemas that constituted the Kwakiutl potlatch; but given these schemas, the blankets, given away in a potlatch, became a means of demonstrating the power of the chief and, consequently, of acquiring prestige, marriage alliances, military power, and labor services (Boas 1966; Sahlins 1989). In this case, the schemas constituting the potlatch determined the specific value, extent, and effects of Hudson Bay blankets as a resource. But I would argue that this is true of nonhuman resources in general. For example, the extent and kinds of resources generated by a factory will depend on whether it is owned by an individual capitalist or by a workers' cooperative—in other words, on rules defining the nature of property rights and of workplace authority. The resources gained by peasants from the land they use will be determined by the conventions of land tenure, the exigencies of customary law, the sets of obligations owed to kinsmen, and the agricultural techniques employed. Examples could be multiplied at will. Nonhuman resources have a material existence that is not reducible to rules or schemas, but the activation of material things as resources, the determination of their value and social power, is dependent on the cultural schemas that inform their social use.

It is clear, then, that resources can plausibly be thought of as effects of cultural schemas. It therefore would certainly be possible to clean up Giddens's concept of structure by defining structure as schemas with a purely virtual existence, and resources not as coequal elements in structure but as media and outcomes of the operation of structure. But notice that if we adopt this definition, the rhetorical power of the term structure insinuates a single direction of causality. That which is termed structure is, by this act of denomination, granted power over that which is not termed structure. Stocks of material goods and people's knowledge and emotional commitments become inert, mere media for and outcomes of the determinative operations of cultural schemas. If we insist that structures are virtual, we risk lapsing into the de facto idealism that continually haunts structuralism however much its exponents—for example, Lévi-Strauss (1966, p. 130)—protest their materialist credentials and intentions. Schemas—mental structures—become the only form-giving entity, and agents become agents of these mental structures, actors who can only recite preexisting scripts. To define structures in this way threatens, in short, to deny their duality and, consequently, to annihilate the central premise of Giddens's theory.

The Duality of Schemas and Resources

If the duality of structure is to be saved—and as far as I am concerned the notion of duality of structure is the main attraction of Giddens's

theory—we must take the other alternative and conceive of structures as having (appropriately) a *dual* character. Structure, then, should be defined as composed simultaneously of schemas, which are virtual, and of resources, which are actual.

If structures are dual in this sense, then it must be true that schemas are the effects of resources, just as resources are the effects of schemas. This seems to me a reasonable claim, one whose plausibility can be demonstrated by a few examples. A factory is not an inert pile of bricks, wood, and metal. It incorporates or actualizes schemas, and this means that the schemas can be inferred from the material form of the factory. The factory gate, the punching-in station, the design of the assembly line: all of these features of the factory teach and validate the rules of the capitalist labor contract. Or take the priest's performance of the Mass. When the priest transforms the host and wine into the body and blood of Christ and administers the host to communicants, the communicants are suffused by a sense of spiritual well-being. Communion therefore demonstrates to the communicants the reality and power of the rule of apostolic succession that made the priest a priest. In short, if resources are instantiations or embodiments of schemas, they therefore inculcate and justify the schemas as well. Resources, we might say, are *read* like texts, to recover the cultural schemas they instantiate. Indeed, texts—whether novels, or statute books, or folktales, or contracts—are resources from the point of view of this theory. They, too, are instantiations of schemas in time-space that can be used by actors to generate power.

If resources are effects of schemas, it is also true that schemas are effects of resources. If schemas are to be sustained or reproduced over time—and without sustained reproduction they could hardly be counted as structural—they must be validated by the accumulation of resources that their enactment engenders. Schemas not empowered or regenerated by resources would eventually be abandoned and forgotten, just as resources without cultural schemas to direct their use would eventually dissipate and decay. Sets of schemas and resources may properly be said to constitute *structures* only when they mutually imply and sustain each other over time.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF DUAL STRUCTURES: OUT OF BOURDIEU'S HABITUS

A definition of structure as made up of both schemas and resources avoids both the material determinism of traditional Marxism and the ideal determinism of traditional French structuralism. But how it can enhance our ability to understand transformations of structures is not immediately apparent. Indeed, one could argue that if the enactment of schemas al-

ways creates resources that inculcate the schemas, schemas and resources should simply reproduce each other without change indefinitely. The claim that dual structures engender stasis is far from fanciful; such an argument has in fact been made with great panache in Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) widely influential discussion of what he calls "habitus" in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Any attempt to argue that duality of structure improves our ability to understand social transformations must confront this argument.[8]

Duality and Stasis

Although he uses a different terminology, Bourdieu has powerfully illustrated the mutually sustaining relationship between schemas and resources (what he calls "mental structures" and "the world of objects"). For example, his well-known discussion (Bourdieu 1977) of the Kabyle house shows how the design of the house and the placement of objects in it reproduces fundamental Kabyle cultural oppositions, such as those between high and low, male and female, fire and water, and light and dark, and thereby patterns all activities conducted in the house in terms of such oppositions. Bourdieu remarks that "all the actions performed in a space constructed in this way are immediately qualified symbolically and function as so many structural exercises through which is built up practical mastery of the fundamental schemes" (Bourdieu 1977, p. 91).

The house is given its shape by the application of schemas ("mental structures" in Bourdieu's vocabulary), and the house in turn inculcates these schemas by assigning tasks, objects, persons, and emotional dispositions to differently coded spaces. As Bourdieu puts it, in his characteristically ornate and paradoxical style,

> The mental structures which construct the world of objects are constructed in the practice of a world of objects constructed according to the same structures. The mind born of the world of objects does not rise as a subjectivity confronting an objectivity: the objective universe is made up of ob-

[8] Some of Bourdieu's more recent work, esp. *Homo Academicus* (1988), which is a study of the French professoriat in the events of 1968, deals more directly with change. I do not think, however, that Bourdieu has considered the question of how habitus itself might *generate* change. In *Homo Academicus*, e.g., change arises from sources external to the habitus he is analyzing—fundamentally from the immense rise in the population of students in French universities in the 1960s. The concept of habitus is used to argue that the professors' responses to the crisis was wholly determined by their location in the "academic field." *Homo Academicus* seems to indicate that Bourdieu has not overcome the lack of agency inherent in the concept of habitus elaborated in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.

> jects which are the product of objectifying operations structured according to the very structures which the mind applies to it. The mind is a metaphor of the world of objects which is itself but an endless circle of mutually reflecting metaphors. [Bourdieu 1977, p. 91]

In many respects, Bourdieu's "theory of practice" is fully compatible with the conception of the duality of structure for which I am arguing in this paper. Bourdieu recognizes the mutual reproduction of schemas and resources that constitutes temporally durable structures—which he calls "habitus." His discussion of habitus powerfully elaborates the means by which mutually reinforcing rule-resource sets constitute human subjects with particular sorts of knowledge and dispositions. Moreover, Bourdieu's Kabyle subjects are not cultural dopes. They are endowed with the capacity to engage in highly autonomous, discerning, and strategic actions. (See, e.g., Bourdieu's discussion of gift exchange and matrimonial strategies [1977, pp. 4–10 and 32–53, respectively].) Bourdieu's Kabyles would seem to be exactly the sort of knowledgeable actors called for by Giddens's theory.

Yet Bourdieu's habitus retains precisely the agent-proof quality that the concept of the duality of structure is supposed to overcome. In Bourdieu's habitus, schemas and resources so powerfully reproduce one another that even the most cunning or improvisational actions undertaken by agents necessarily reproduce the structure. "As an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted, the habitus engenders all the thoughts, all the perceptions, and all the actions consistent with those conditions and no others" (Bourdieu 1977, p. 95). Although Bourdieu avoids either a traditional French structuralist ideal determinism or a traditional Marxist material determinism, he does so only by erecting a combined determinism that makes significant social transformations seem impossible.

But is this powerful implication of stasis really warranted? After all, the Kabyle society in which Bourdieu carried out his fieldwork produced a momentous anticolonial revolution shortly after Bourdieu returned to France to analyze his data. It seems to me that, in spite of his devastating attacks on Cartesian and Lévi-Straussian "objectivism" (Bourdieu 1977, esp. pp. 1–30), Bourdieu's own theory has fallen victim to an impossibly objectified and overtotalized conception of society. Only in the idealized world constructed by the social scientific observer could habitus engender "all the thoughts, all the perceptions, and all the actions" consistent with existing social conditions "and no others." In the world of human struggles and strategems, plenty of thoughts, perceptions, and actions consistent with the reproduction of existing social patterns fail to occur, and inconsistent ones occur all the time.

Why Structural Change Is Possible

It is, of course, entirely proper for Bourdieu to insist on the strong reproductive bias built into structures—that is the whole point of the structure concept and part of what makes the concept so essential for theorizing social change. After all, as Renato Rosaldo (1980) and Marshall Sahlins (1981, 1985) have brilliantly demonstrated, the same reproductive biases of structures that explain the powerful continuities of social relations also make it possible to explain the paths followed in episodes of social change. What gets Bourdieu off the track is his unrealistically unified and totalized concept of habitus, which he conceptualizes as a vast series of strictly homologous structures encompassing all of social experience. Such a conceptualization, which Bourdieu in fact shares roughly with many structurally inclined theorists, cannot explain change as arising from within the operation of structures. It is characteristic that many structural accounts of social transformation tend to introduce change from outside the system and then trace out the ensuing structurally shaped changes, rather than showing how change is generated by the operation of structures internal to a society. In this respect, Marshall Sahlins's (1981) analysis of how Captain Cook's voyages affected the Hawaiians is emblematic. It is my conviction that a theory of change cannot be built into a theory of structure unless we adopt a far more multiple, contingent, and fractured conception of society—and of structure. What is needed is a conceptual vocabulary that makes it possible to show how the ordinary operations of structures can generate transformations. To this end, I propose five key axioms: the multiplicity of structures, the transposability of schemas, the unpredictability of resource accumulation, the polysemy of resources, and the intersection of structures.

The multiplicity of structures.—Societies are based on practices that derive from many distinct structures, which exist at different levels, operate in different modalities, and are themselves based on widely varying types and quantities of resources. While it is common for a certain range of these structures to be homologous, like those described by Bourdieu in *Outline of a Theory of Practice,* it is never true that all of them are homologous. Structures tend to vary significantly between different institutional spheres, so that kinship structures will have different logics and dynamics than those possessed by religious structures, productive structures, aesthetic structures, educational structures, and so on. There is, moreover, important variation even within a given sphere. For example, the structures that shape and constrain religion in Christian societies include authoritarian, prophetic, ritual, and theoretical modes. These may sometimes operate in harmony, but they can also lead to sharply

conflicting claims and empowerments. The multiplicity of structures means that the knowledgeble social actors whose practices constitute a society are far more versatile than Bourdieu's account of a universally homologous habitus would imply: social actors are capable of applying a wide range of different and even incompatible schemas and have access to heterogeneous arrays of resources.

The transposability of schemas.—Moroever, the schemas to which actors have access can be applied across a wide range of circumstances. This is actually recognized by Bourdieu, but he has not, in my opinion, drawn the correct conclusions from his insight. Schemas were defined above as generalizable or transposable procedures applied in the enactment of social life. The term "generalizable" is taken from Giddens; the term "transposable," which I prefer, is taken from Bourdieu.[9] At one point Bourdieu defines habitus as "a system of lasting transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems" (1977, p. 83; emphasis in original).

The slippage in this passage occurs in the final phrase, "permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems." Whether a given problem is similarly shaped enough to be solved by analogical transfers of schemes cannot be decided in advance by social scientific analysts, but must be determined case by case by the actors, which means that there is no fixed limit to the possible transpositions. This is in fact implied by the earlier phrase, "makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks." To say that schemas are transposable, in other words, is to say that they can be applied to a wide and not fully predictable range of cases outside the context in which they are initially learned. This fits with what we usually mean by knowledge of a rule or of some other learned procedure. In ordinary speech one cannot be said to really *know* a rule simply be-

[9] To generalize a rule implies stating it in more abstract form so that it will apply to a larger number of cases. The verb "transpose" implies a concrete application of a rule to a new case, but in such a way that the rule will have subtly different forms in each of its applications. This is implied by three of the *Oxford English Dictionary's* (1971, s.v. "transpose") definitions: "To remove from one place or time to another; to transfer, shift," "to alter the order of or the position of in a series . . . to interchange," and, in music, "to put into a different key." *Transposer,* in French (which was of course the language in which Bourdieu wrote), also has an even more appropriate meaning: "faire changer de forme ou de contenu en faisant passer dans un autre domaine," (to cause something to change in form or content by causing it to pass into another domain, *Le Petit Robert* [1984, s.v. "transposer"]). I would like my use of *transpose* to be understood as retaining something of this French meaning.

cause one can apply it mechanically to repeated instances of the same case. Whether we are speaking of rules of grammar, mathematics, law, etiquette, or carpentry, the real test of knowing a rule is to be able to apply it successfully in *unfamiliar* cases. Knowledge of a rule or a schema by definition means the ability to transpose or extend it—that is, to apply it creatively. If this is so, then *agency,* which I would define as entailing the capacity to transpose and extend schemas to new contexts, is inherent in the knowledge of cultural schemas that characterizes all minimally competent members of society.[10]

The unpredictability of resource accumulation.—But the very fact that schemas are by definition capable of being transposed or extended means that the resource consequences of the enactment of cultural schemas is never entirely predictable. A joke told to a new audience, an investment made in a new market, an offer of marriage made to a new patriline, a cavalry attack made on a new terrain, a crop planted in a newly cleared field or in a familiar field in a new spring—the effect of these actions on the resources of the actors is never quite certain. Investment in a new market may make the entrepreneur a pauper or a millionaire, negotiation of a marriage with a new patriline may result in a family's elevation in status or its extinction in a feud, planting a crop in the familiar field may result in subsistence, starvation, or plenty. Moreover, if the enactment of schemas creates unpredictable quantities and qualities of resources, and if the reproduction of schemas depends on their continuing validation by resources, this implies that schemas will in fact be differentially validated when they are put into action and therefore will potentially be subject to modification. A brilliantly successful cavalry attack on a new terrain may change the battle plans of subsequent campaigns or even theories of military tactics; a joke that draws rotten tomatoes rather than laughter may result in the suppression of a category of jokes from the comedian's repertoire; a succession of crop failures may modify routines of planting or plowing.[11]

The polysemy of resources.—The term polysemy (or multiplicity of meaning) is normally applied to symbols, language, or texts. Its application to resources sounds like a contradiction in terms. But, given the

[10] Here my thinking has been influenced by Goran Therborn (1980, esp. pp. 15–22).

[11] Although Marshall Sahlins (1981, 1985) does not explicitly include resources in his definition of structure, my argument here runs closely parallel to his. Sahlins argues that "in action in the world—technically, in acts of reference—the cultural categories acquire new functional values" because the categories are "burdened with the world" (1985, p. 138). This burdening of categories with the world is a matter of schemas being changed by the unanticipated effects of action on the resources that sustain the schemas.

concept of resources I am advocating here, it is not. Resources, I have insisted, embody cultural schemas. Like texts or ritual performances, however, their meaning is never entirely unambiguous. The form of the factory embodies and therefore teaches capitalist notions of property relations. But, as Marx points out, it can also teach the necessarily social and collective character of production and thereby undermine the capitalist notion of private property. The new prestige, wealth, and territory gained from the brilliant success of a cavalry charge may be attributed to the superior discipline and élan of the cavalry officers and thereby enhance the power of an aristocratic officer corps, or it may be attributed to the commanding general and thereby result in the increasing subordination of officers to a charismatic leader. Any array of resources is capable of being interpreted in varying ways and, therefore, of empowering different actors and teaching different schemas. Again, this seems to me inherent in a definition of agency as the capacity to transpose and extend schemas to new contexts. Agency, to put it differently, is the actor's capacity to reinterpret and mobilize an array of resources in terms of cultural schemas other than those that initially constituted the array.

The intersection of structures.—One reason arrays of resources can be interpreted in more than one way is that structures or structural complexes intersect and overlap. The structures of capitalist society include both a mode of production based on private property and profit and a mode of labor organization based on workplace solidarity. The factory figures as a crucial resource in both of these structures, and its meaning and consequences for both workers and managers is therefore open and contested. The intersection of structures, in fact, takes place in both the schema and the resource dimensions. Not only can a given array of resources be claimed by different actors embedded in different structural complexes (or differentially claimed by the same actor embedded in different structural complexes), but schemas can be borrowed or appropriated from one structural complex and applied to another. Not only do workers and factory owners struggle for control of the factory, but Marx appropriates political economy for the advancement of socialism.

Structures, then, are sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by that social action. But their reproduction is never automatic. Structures are at risk, at least to some extent, in all of the social encounters they shape—because structures are multiple and intersecting, because schemas are transposable, and because resources are polysemic and accumulate unpredictably. Placing the relationship between resources and cultural schemas at the center of a concept of structure makes it possible to show how social change, no less than social stasis, can be generated by the enactment of structures in social life.

Agency

Such enactments of structures imply a particular concept of agency—one that sees agency not as opposed to, but as constituent of, structure. To be an agent means to be capable of exerting some degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree. As I see it, agents are empowered to act with and against others by structures: they have knowledge of the schemas that inform social life and have access to some measure of human and nonhuman resources. Agency arises from the actor's knowledge of schemas, which means the ability to apply them to new contexts. Or, to put the same thing the other way around, agency arises from the actor's control of resources, which means the capacity to reinterpret or mobilize an array of resources in terms of schemas other than those that constituted the array. Agency is implied by the existence of structures.

I would argue that a capacity for agency—for desiring, for forming intentions, and for acting creatively—is inherent in all humans. But I would also argue that humans are born with only a highly generalized capacity for agency, analogous to their capacity to use language. Just as linguistic capacity takes the form of becoming a competent speaker of some particular language—French, or Arabic, or Swahili, or Urdu—agency is formed by a specific range of cultural schemas and resources available in a person's particular social milieu. The specific forms that agency will take consequently vary enormously and are culturally and historically determined. But a capacity for agency is as much a given for humans as the capacity for respiration.

That all humans actually exercise agency in practice is demonstrated to my satisfaction by the work of Erving Goffman (1959, 1967). Goffman shows that all members of society employ complex repertoires of interaction skills to control and sustain ongoing social relations. He also shows that small transformative actions—for example, intervening to save the face of an interactant who has misread the situation—turn out to be necessary to sustain even the most ordinary intercourse of daily life (Goffman 1967, pp. 5–46). Once again, knowledge of cultural schemas (in this case of interaction rituals) implies the ability to act creatively. Actors, of course, vary in the extent of their control of social relations and in the scope of their transformative powers, but all members of society exercise some measure of agency in the conduct of their daily lives.

It is equally important, however, to insist that the agency exercised by different persons is far from uniform, that agency differs enormously in both kind and extent. What kinds of desires people can have, what intentions they can form, and what sorts of creative transpositions they

can carry out vary dramatically from one social world to another depending on the nature of the particular structures that inform those social worlds. Without a notion of heaven and hell a person cannot strive for admission into paradise; only in a modern capitalist economy can one attempt to make a killing on the futures market; if they are denied access to the public sphere, women's ambitions will be focused on private life. Agency also differs in extent, both between and within societies. Occupancy of different social positions—as defined, for example, by gender, wealth, social prestige, class, ethnicity, occupation, generation, sexual preference, or education—gives people knowledge of different schemas and access to different kinds and amounts of resources and hence different possibilities for transformative action. And the scope or extent of agency also varies enormously between different social systems, even for occupants of analogous positions. The owner of the biggest art gallery in St. Louis has far less influence on American artistic taste than the owner of the biggest gallery in Los Angeles; the president of Chad has far less power over global environmental policy than the president of Russia. Structures, in short, empower agents differentially, which also implies that they embody the desires, intentions, and knowledge of agents differentially as well. Structures, and the human agencies they endow, are laden with differences in power.

Finally, I would insist that agency is collective as well as individual. I do not agree with Barry Hindess (1986) that the term "agent" must be applied in the same sense to collectivities that act as corporate units in social life—political parties, firms, families, states, clubs, or trade unions—as it is applied to individuals. But I do see agency as profoundly social or collective. The transpositions of schemas and remobilizations of resources that constitute agency are always acts of communication with others. Agency entails an ability to coordinate one's actions with others and against others, to form collective projects, to persuade, to coerce, and to monitor the simultaneous effects of one's own and others' activities. Moreover, the extent of the agency exercised by individual persons depends profoundly on their positions in collective organizations. To take the extreme case, a monarch's personal whims or quarrels may affect the lives of thousands (see, e.g., Sahlins 1991). But it is also true that the agency of fathers, executives, or professors is greatly expanded by the places they occupy in patriarchal families, corporations, or universities and by their consequent authority to bind the collectivity by their actions. Agency, then, characterizes all persons. But the agency exercised by persons is collective in both its sources and its mode of exercise. Personal agency is, therefore, laden with collectively produced differences of power and implicated in collective struggles and resistances.

VARIETIES OF STRUCTURES

The concept of structure I elaborate in this article is very general and therefore could be applied to structures of widely differing character—ranging in import from structures that shape and constrain the development of world military power to those that shape and constrain the joking practices of a group of Sunday fishing buddies or the erotic practices of a single couple. This immense range in the scope and character of the structures to which this article's concepts can be applied is appropriate, given the premise that all social action is shaped by structures. But it suggests a need for some means of distinguishing the character and dynamics of different sorts of structures. I will offer no detailed typology—both because space is short and because I feel that typologies should arise out of concrete analyses of social change and reproduction. Instead, I shall simply indicate two important dimensions along which structures vary: depth, which refers to the schema dimension of structure, and power, which refers to the resource dimension. I shall try to demonstrate that thinking in terms of depth and power can help to illuminate the very different dynamics and durabilities of three important types of structures: those of language, states, and capitalism.

Depth has long been a key metaphor of linguistic and structuralist discourse. To designate a structure as "deep" implies that it lies beneath and generates a certain range of "surface" structures, just as structures underlie and generate practices. In structuralist discourse, deep structures are those schemas that can be shown to underlie ordinary or "surface" structures, in the sense that the surface structures are a set of transformations of the deep structures. Thus the structural schemas for the performance of a fertility ritual may be shown to be particular transformations of a deeper set of oppositions between wet and dry or male and female that also underlie structures informing other institutionally distinct practices—from housebuilding, to personal adornment, to oratory. Consequently, deep structural schemas are also pervasive, in the sense that they are present in a relatively wide range of institutional spheres, practices, and discourses. They also tend to be relatively unconscious, in the sense that they are taken-for-granted mental assumptions or modes of procedure that actors normally apply without being aware that they are applying them.

Different structures also vary enormously in the resources, and hence the power, that they mobilize. Military structures or structures shaping state finance create massive concentrations of power, whereas the grammatical structures of a language or the structures shaping schoolchildren's play create much more modest power concentrations. Structures also differ in the kinds of power they mobilize. For example, the power created by apostolic succession is based primarily (although far

from exclusively) on persuasion, while that created by the military government of a conquering army is based primarily on coercion.

Language.—I believe that thinking about structures in terms of their depth and power can lead to insights about the structures' durability and dynamics. Consider, for example, linguistic structures, which scholars in many disciplines have used as the prime example of structure in general. Linguistic structures, which of course tend to be remarkably durable, actually fall at extremes on the dimensions of both power and depth. Linguistic structures are unusually deep. Intricate phonological, morphological, syntactical, and semantic structures underlie every sentence. Sentences, in turn, are aggregated into meaningful utterances or texts in accord with the discursive structures of rhetoric, narrative, metaphor, and logic. And all of these layered linguistic structures underlie the multitude of structures that rely at least in part on speech and writing—which is to say the immense preponderance of all structures.

Yet the *power* of linguistic structures is unusually slight. The enactment of phonological, morphological, syntactical, and semantic structures in speech or writing in itself has relatively modest resource effects. It confirms the speaker's membership in a linguistic community and reinforces the schemas that make the generation of grammatical sentences possible. Assuming that an utterance is made to other competent speakers of the language, the speaking of a grammatical sentence in itself creates no significant power disparities but rather establishes an equality among the conversants. Language, of course, serves as a medium for all kinds of enactments of power relations, but at the level of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics, it is as close as we are likely to get to a neutral medium of exchange. This relative neutrality with respect to power helps to account for the other peculiarity of linguistic structures: their extraordinary durability. If the enactment of linguistic schemas serves only to sustain the linguistic empowerment of speakers without sharply shifting resources toward some speakers and away from others, then no one has much incentive to engage in innovations that would transform linguistic structures.

If it is true that linguistic structures are much less implicated in power relations and much deeper and more durable than most structures, it follows that we should be wary of the widespread tendency to use linguistic structures as a paradigm for structures in general. Although the elegance of the linguistic model may set an enviable standard, structures that operate nearer the surface of social life and that are more directly implicated in power relations may have very different principles and dynamics. One danger that arises from accepting the linguistic model uncritically is a tendency to think of structures as composed purely of schemas, while ignoring the resource dimension. In studying the syntactic

structures of languages, where the enactment of schemas has minor power consequences, it does not matter much if the resource aspect of structure is neglected. But when we try to make sense of the arenas of life more permeated by power relations, it may be downright crippling to apply the linguistic analogy and conceptualize structures purely as schemas.

States.—Particularly poor candidates for the linguistic analogy would be state or political structures, which commonly generate and utilize large concentrations of power and which are usually relatively near the surface of social life. State and political structures are consciously established, maintained, fought over, and argued about rather than taken for granted as if they were unchangeable features of the world. Although one might initially imagine that large power concentrations would tend to assure a structure's durability, this may not actually be true. Although centralized states with immense coercive power impose high costs on those who would challenge them, it is far from clear that centralized and coercive states have generally proved more durable than relatively decentralized or uncoercive states. Compare, for example, Britain and France between 1750 and 1850, the United States and Germany from 1870 to 1950, Costa Rica and Nicaragua, El Salvador, or Guatemala since World War II, or India and China over the same time span. Even the relatively stable states are subject to periodic structural transformations. Although the United States has had a single constitution since 1789, it has experienced a succession of fundamental political crises that produced at least five sharply distinct party systems over the past two centuries (Burnham 1967). One might argue that state structures are relatively mutable precisely because the massiveness (power) and obviousness (lack of depth) of their resource effects make them natural targets for open struggles.

But if most political structures are characterized by both high power and low depth, an inverse relationship between power and depth is by no means necessary. There are some political structures with immense power implications that are nevertheless relatively deep, that have become "second nature" and are accepted by all (or nearly all) political actors as essentially power-neutral, taken-for-granted means to political ends. Such structures also appear to be unusually durable. This would appear to be true of political structures as diverse as the American constitutional system, the French public bureaucracy, or the English community legal structures whose persistence Margaret Somers (1986) has traced from the 14th to the mid–19th century. Durability, then, would appear to be determined more by a structure's depth than by its power.

Capitalism.—How do structures with huge power effects become or remain deep? One would normally expect the massiveness of the effects

to make social actors aware of and willing to contest the schemas and resource accumulations of those structures. I will approach this question by examining the case of capitalism, a spectacular case of a power-laden yet long-enduring structure. Capitalism is, of course, highly dynamic. Yet it is commonly maintained that the past 250–300 years (if not the entire period since the 16th century, according to Wallerstein [1974]) constitutes a unified capitalist era with a continuous dynamic of capital accumulation guided by an enduring core structure, or what in Marxian parlance is called the capitalist mode of production.

Marx himself noted the extraordinarily dynamic and changeable character of capitalist development, but he saw the change converging on a single form: the large-scale, mechanized factory staffed by an increasingly homogeneous proletariat. Recent developments have tended to make the changeability of capitalism seem more radical and permanent. Far from registering the onrush of the classic factory, the current era of world economic growth has been characterized by an increasing use of subcontracting, sweatshops, outsourcing, and "cottage industry," and by the burgeoning of services at the expense of manufacturing. At the same time, scholars are increasingly pointing out the unevenness, contingency, and openness of development patterns under capitalism, whether in the past (Samuel 1977; Sabel and Zeitlin 1985; Sewell 1988) or in the present and future (Piore and Sabel 1984). Sabel (1988) has even suggested that forms of economic change in the so-called capitalist era are so indeterminate that the very concept of capitalism, with its implication of underlying regularity, is misleading and should be abandoned. I think Sabel is right as far as he goes: a wide variety of institutional arrangements and property relations are compatible with "capitalism," and never in its history has capitalism obeyed uniform "laws of motion." Capitalist development has always been a messy and uneven affair. But I think that the messiness has been at the level of secondary or surface structures and that beneath the surface mutability lies a far more stable deep structure of schemas that are continually reinforced by flows of resources—even on occasions when the surface structures are revolutionized.

Unlike most Marxians, I see the core schemas not as those defining the wage-labor relationship but as those governing the conversion of use value into exchange value.[12] The core procedure of capitalism—the conversion of use value into exchange value or the commodification of things—is exceptionally transposable. It knows no natural limits; it can

[12] John Roemer (1982) has proved to my satisfaction that capitalist exploitation can occur in the absence of wage labor.

be applied not only to cloth, tobacco, or cooking pans, but to land, housework, bread, sex, advertising, emotions, or knowledge, each of which can be converted into any other by means of money. The surface instability of capitalism arises precisely from this interconvertibility, which encourages holders of resources to trade them for other resources as relative values change and which always makes it possible for resources not previously treated as commodities to enter the circuit of monetized exchanges. To put it otherwise, the commodity form, by making almost all resources readable as exchangeable commodities, organizes a virtually universal intersection of structures, which means that changes in any one structure—an increased or decreased accumulation of resources or a new procedure—can affect an indefinitely vast number of other structures that intersect through the medium of money. Changes at any point in the circuit of exchange will give rise to resource effects and innovations elsewhere. And these changes are not necessarily constrained to follow any particular institutional form, so long as they are profitable. Thus the rise of the automobile industry stimulated the simultaneous development of rubber plantations based on indentured or forced labor, automobile assembly operations based on immense factories manned by wage-earning proletarians, and a proliferation of repair shops run by self-employed petty capitalists.

But this chronic instability or unpredictability of capitalism's surface structures actually reinforces its deeper structures. An alteration anywhere along the vast chain of commodity exchanges is a new incitement to invest; the logic inherent in the commodity form makes any new array of resources or new procedure a potential opportunity for profit. And of course any new investment results in further changes. Even investments that fail create new opportunities that can be seized by following the normal procedures of capitalist investment and exchange—when a firm goes under there is plant and equipment to be brought up at bargain prices, a residual market for the firm's former competitors to exploit, and so on. Consequently, the procedures themselves are remarkably impervious to—indeed, paradoxically, are reinforced by—the failures of particular capitalist enterprises or industries. The displacement of handweavers by the power loom or of coal by petroleum may have destroyed skills, wrecked businesses, or blighted the economies of certain localities. But it simultaneously proved that following the logic of the commodity form creates wealth for those who do so, and even—over the long run and in spite of important local exceptions—for the capitalist economy as a whole. In some cases, structures can combine depth with great power and, consequently, can shape the experiences of entire societies over many generations.

CONCLUSION

Beginning from the premise that structure is an unavoidable epistemic metaphor in the social sciences, I have tried to specify how that metaphor should be understood. Structures, I have argued, are constituted by mutually sustaining cultural schemas and sets of resources that empower and constrain social action and tend to be reproduced by that action. Agents are empowered by structures, both by the knowledge of cultural schemas that enables them to mobilize resources and by the access to resources that enables them to enact schemas. This differs from ordinary sociological usage of the term because it insists that structure is a profoundly cultural phenomenon and from ordinary anthropological usage because it insists that structure always derives from the character and distribution of resources in the everyday world. Structure is dynamic, not static; it is the continually evolving outcome and matrix of a process of social interaction. Even the more or less perfect reproduction of structures is a profoundly temporal process that requires resourceful and innovative human conduct. But the same resourceful agency that sustains the reproduction of structures also makes possible their transformation—by means of transpositions of schemas and remobilizations of resources that make the new structures recognizable as transformations of the old. Structures, I suggest, are not reified categories we can invoke to explain the inevitable shape of social life. To invoke structures as I have defined them here is to call for a critical analysis of the dialectical interactions through which humans shape their history.

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