

Review

Culture in society, society in culture: Understanding threads of cultural-social dialectic

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This paper aims at exploring the provinces of social and cultural dialectical threads. In doing so, it offers an account of (1) why it is quite often confusingly believed that there is a methodological and epistemological “difference” between social and cultural ones¹, and (2) how this belief cloaks some inherent weaknesses and obstacles to change. It is, therefore, within this rationale that this paper locates both its hypothesis and central thesis. Its hypothesis is that there is an inherent confusing belief that there is a methodological and epistemological difference between the social and cultural; and thus each is misleadingly viewed on its own. The central thesis of the current paper, in turn, is that there are a set of dialectical threads of the social and cultural that should be explored enough to account for change. Hence, the hypothesis and thesis of this study are engineered in this way to offer an account of how the cultural and social become nervous systems of change.

Key words: Culture, society, social structure, cultural system, human agency.

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to explore one of the intrinsic paradoxes prevailing in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Art studies: The duality of the social and cultural and its effects on one's conception of transformations of human life and the world alike. In doing so, it traces and reflects upon the conceptual and methodological origins of the split between the social and cultural, on one hand, and tries to engineer a philosophical link-up between the two, on the other hand. Theoretically speaking, this study analyzes the ways in which different methodological and conceptual foundations have played their part in the construction of the split between the cultural and the social. In a dialectical development of its line of analysis,

this study investigates the ways in which both culture and society become nervous systems for one another. By remodeling the prevailing sociological conflation of 'Structure-Agency', this paper offers a socio-cultural paradigm wherein human agency, social structures and cultural systems are merged into a triad model of Structure-Agency-System. Given this line of reasoning, its ultimate objective is to suggest philosophical and conceptual turns of thought helping to understand the dialectical dynamics of culture and society in a way that opens up philosophical possibilities for social change. In particular, by revisiting the notions and pedagogies of culture and society, this study brings together different

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arguments and debates in order to provide a particularly suggestive account of the philosophical dimension of the relations, of the sorts of dialectics, between the Social and the Cultural. Its line of analysis is structured around two main moments; where one is devoted to uncover the methodological and conceptual origins of the current misleading distinction between the Social and the Cultural, the second focuses on recovering the philosophical link repressed in the current conceptions of society and culture.

Social-cultural split: Conceptual and Methodological Origins

From birth to death any human being undergoes significant changes of various sorts and dimensions by which he is both affected and driven to affect other men. These changes have been central subject-matters in a number of disciplines and sub-disciplines. What brings those changes at the heart of various scholarships are their effects not only on the individual but also on the whole group whatever its size might be, larger or smaller, or the label it may take on, society or community. Admittedly, throughout the history of human thought, the task to study those effects and the context in which they are generated has given the rise of scholarships, ranging from anthropology, sociology, psychology, social sciences, cultural history through cultural criticism and many other 'specialties' to philology. Peculiarly, the most interesting observation about those intellectual streams' 'findings' about Man and the forms of his life is their property claim over the intellectual territory each of them leads while approaching Man.

In this way, virtual borderlines are frequently established between different disciplines. For example, it has been for a long time believed that the most 'competent', 'qualified' and 'skilful' one to study and understand society remains the sociologist, and thus departments of sociology have been founded at universities all over the world to train students to be both social theorists and social workers². Likewise, it has been assumed that to better examine and understand cultures one must be trained in anthropology. In his synthesis of and for debates about further orientations of "culture" in anthropology, James A. Boon notices that "every discipline – a community of dialogue and debate – requires a fruitful paradox; in anthropology it is 'culture'" (Boon, 1973). By way of quoting A. L. Kroeber, he adds that "the anthropologist [. . .], if he wishes to remain such, has necessarily to concern himself first of all with that aspect and product of human behavior - and reinforce upon it - which is usually called culture." The same sort of thing is true of economics, psychology, political science and all other disciplines, each of which has appropriated and adopted a given terminology and claim it their own territory.

Consequently, adherents of each field, as an attempt to distinguish themselves from others, believe in their own intellectual 'territory' to be 'secured' enough that one has no access to unless one has got a terminological and conceptual passport granting one such access, so to speak. Nowhere one finds an enlightening description of such distinctions between disciplines relating to the study of man, society and culture as in the following parable of the Old Elephant:

It is said that in the recent past, five wise men and women, all blindfolded, were led to an elephant and asked to explain what they 'saw'. The first, an anthropologist, tenderly touching the trunk and the tusks, broke into the grin and said, "This is really primitive. I feel very comfortable here. Concentrate on these." The second, an economist, feeling the mouth, said, "This is what counts. What goes in here is distributed throughout the body. Concentrate your research on how it is distributed." The third, a political scientist, feeling the gigantic ears, announced, "This is the power center. What goes in here controls the entire beast. Concentrate your studies here." The fourth, a psychologist, stroking the top of the elephant's head, smiled contentedly and said, "This is the only thing that counts. All feeling and thinking take place inside here. To understand this beast, we will study this part." Then came the sociologist "...," who, after feeling the entire body, said, "You can't understand the beast by concentrating on only one part. Each is but part of the whole. The trunk and tusks, the mouth, the ears, the head - all are important. But so are the parts of the best that you haven't mentioned. You must remove our blindfolds so we can see the larger picture. We have to see how everything works together to form the entire animal" (Henslin, 2007).

However conspicuous this story might be that it needs no comment, two important repressed assumptions should not escape one's notice. First, the story evidently expresses the sociologist's capability and wisdom to study all parts of the elephants, including even those which the others are unable to see; a claim that is frequently made about the sociologist as the only 'capable' researcher who can touch upon all parts of the whole. Secondly, the story clearly neglects, in a way or another, the fact that each of the five men, including the sociologist of course, must draw upon a number of analytical methods that are most of the time borrowed from other fields. Some draw upon research methods used in Physics, others on those applied in Biology, still others on mathematical methods. Here, and mostly here, that most of the 'isms' are created. One certainly comes across a host of examples of these "isms" when studying man and his social and cultural environments. One encounters, in this respect, different analytical schools representing those 'isms', such as Functionalism,

Structuralism, post-structuralism, Interactionism, Positivism, and the list goes on.

Given this diversity, and at the first sight, one may jump quickly to hold the assumption that the distinctions (divisions) between these schools are not only methodological ones, but also they are of an epistemological as well as ontological nature. The result is that one feels it necessary to adopt this or that trend and spend a long time identifying one's self with it. It is not harmful, however, to follow and defend a given mode of analysis and try to make it appear convincing enough. However, this might run a distinct risk of misinterpretation of the social phenomenon under study. Thus, this usually culminates not only in reducing the understanding of man's life into something simplistic³, but also in reaching an intellectual impasse that has no existence, a *cul-de-sac*. For example, to study human acts only from a positivist perspective by applying biological methods certainly results in reducing human beings to no more than a set of biological organs that can be scrutinized in the same way in which other natural phenomena are often examined.⁴

But when it comes to issues, such as personality construction, social relations, political activities and human agency among many others, adopting only positivist or naturalistic approaches often leads to an analytical as well as epistemological deadlock that can only be unlocked with opening windows on other modes of analysis, especially when their 'findings' take an opposite direction. The reason is that the examination of social relationships and activities does not necessarily lead to the same results and findings when one examines the relationships between physical entities or between the organs of human body that are fixed on a platform, for one deals, in this case, with a symbolic mobile set of networks. While boiling water in both Morocco and U.S.A has the same results, fighting poverty as a social phenomenon involves different social projects, and thus has different results.

One case in point, which is at the same time the focus of this section, where the divisions between those 'isms' are obvious is the division between the social and the cultural, between the 'what' (i.e social identity) and the 'who' (i.e cultural identity), between social practices and cultural systems, between structure and agency, between practical consciousness and discursive consciousness,⁵ or in a word, between the study of society and the study of culture as two 'separate' areas of research as the claim is frequently made.

In trying to unravel the origins of these divisions, Friedland and Mohr (2004) argue that the gulf between the social and cultural stems from the classic division between two systems; "the social as an instrumental distributional system of things and the cultural as an expressive system of signs". To back up this argument, they demand that any kind of social production, especially in societies with high information density, should not

be taken as a process that involves "economic resources alone; it also concerns social relationships, symbols, identities, and individual needs." They add:

Control of social production does not coincide with its ownership by a recognizable social group. It instead shifts to the great apparatuses of technical and political decision-making. The development and management of complex systems is not secured by simply controlling the workforce and by transforming natural resources; more than that, it requires increasing intervention in the relational processes and symbolic systems on the social/cultural domain (Friedland and John, 2004).

Thus, with due recognition of this interplay of various complex systems in the social and cultural processes, and at another penetrating gaze, one recognizes that what most of the time escapes one's notice is the fact that the very act of borrowing from other fields represses a moment of overlapping between these schools of analysis and their subject-matters. The overlap between these schools certainly helps to move beyond the blocks built around those 'isms'. Anthony Giddens's introduction to the elements of his theory of 'structuration' is one helpful illuminating description of how different modes of social analysis overlap each other in a way that unblocks the analytical impasse that may be reached in the theoretical discourses about man and society. Giddens starts his explanation of his theory with a preliminary exposition of the divisions between Functionalism and Structuralism on the one hand, and hermeneutics and the various forms of 'interpretive' Sociology on the other.

Without denying the contrasts between functionalism and structuralism, Giddens maps out some noteworthy similarities that distinguish them from hermeneutics and 'interpretive' sociology. One similarity lies in their adoption of a naturalistic standpoint which makes them leaning towards objectivism. Functionalist thought, for instance, draws upon scientific methodologies used in hard sciences believing that these sciences provide a satisfactory model for social analysis which helps them "conceptualizing the structure and the functioning of social systems" and understanding the social processes. Similarly, both stress "the pre-eminence of the social whole over its individual parts (i.e, its constituent actors, human subjects)" (Giddens, 1984). In short, functionalism and structuralism adopt and adapt scientific methods so as to breath 'scientific' credibility in their social 'findings' and make them appear much more 'objective' and 'factual.' Hermeneutics, however, regards the social and hard sciences as "radically discrepant. Hermeneutics has been the home of that 'humanism' to which structuralists have been so strongly and persistently opposed." Given this 'tension' between these schools, Giddens insists that understanding the social process, as a key recurrent theme in the sociological enterprise, should be based on applying a multi-perspectives approach stemming from

both positivist and interpretive modes of analysis. Hence, he describes his own theory of structuration “as a way of overcoming what he saw as deficiencies in the two approaches dominating social analysis in the late 1970s and early 1980s,” as Mathew R. Jones writes (Mathew and Helena, 2008).

The focal point of Giddens theory is that understanding the social processes, and thus the constitution of society and individuals should not be based on analyzing social processes as dogged by objective social structures or by autonomous human agents alone. In turn, he suggests that structure and agency should be analyzed as a mutually constitutive duality, as each presupposes the other. Instructive as Giddens’s proposition is, however, one still touches upon some gaps and breaches in his theory, basically when primacy is accorded to the social over the cultural, as he focuses only on the duality of structure and agency from a sociological perspective aiming at moving beyond the limits of the traditional modes of social analysis. The important observation one can make about Giddens’ contribution is that though he manages to uncover the overlap between social structures and human agency, he renders the overlap between social structures and cultural systems uncovered.

The social-cultural duality: Recovering the overlap

As noted earlier, there are several versions of the definitional lines of society. A good deal of the heat surrounding these lines springs from how society and its constituents function. One important contribution, acknowledged to be the most cited in the field, has been Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory. It is but one part of a single, continuous intellectual project of Giddens that covers the period between 1971 and 1999. Most of his theoretical assumptions upon which his theory is based are grouped in his influential book, The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration, which was published in 1984.

The theory of structuration sketches out a number of theoretical assumptions about the dialectics of what he sees as the outstanding apparatuses of the social process. His main concern is to examine the interplay between human agency and social structures. By breaking away from the traditional views that regard “the social phenomena as determined either by objective social structures, which are properties of society as a whole, or by autonomous human agents,” (Mathew and Helena, 2008). Giddens proposes to view the production and reproduction of the social process as a result of the interplay of social structure and human agency.

The implications of this interplay, according to Giddens, can be followed on three dimensions of structure: *signification, domination, and legitimation*. At the same time, these dimensions can only be well understood in

light of three other dimensions of interaction (agency) described by Giddens as *communication, power and sanction*. Equally important, these dimensions of both structure and agency are not independent of each other, but rather are “linked through modalities of, respectively, *interpretive schemes, facilities, and norms* (italics added)” (Mathew and Helena, 2008). To illustrate what Giddens intends to develop as regards structures of both signification and domination, Jones and Karsten (2008) offer the following everyday example:

When encountering somebody in a work setting we draw on structures of signification that inform our understanding of that person’s role. So, if we meet a person in a white coat in a hospital we are likely to assume that they are a doctor (at least in many settings), or, in a laboratory, that they are a scientist. Clothes do not simply indicate who a person is, but also convey important messages about the powers that they are considered to hold (i.e., structures of domination) . . . (Mathew and Helena, 2008).

Many examples can be added to this one, such as the case of people working in offices who are likely to wear uniforms which would signify (structures of signification) their positions and reveal the powers (structures of domination) they enjoy in their community (workplace). Equally significant, dress codes sometimes imply some structures of legitimation “in a particular settings, the transgression of which may invoke sanctions,” such as in the case of military or police organizations. For example, the legitimate one to access a crime scene, as Jones and Karsten go on clarifying, is the police officer wearing a formal uniform.

These three dimensions of structure do not, however, hold absolute influences on the agents in a way that makes structures underlying dress codes unchangeable just because they are sustained by their ongoing reproduction by social actors. Rather, with due recognition of the importance of the play of human agency, these structures remain subject to change as Jones and Karsten illustrate thus:

If certain individuals or groups challenge the code, then, over time, new structures, no less influential, may develop, as can be seen in trends toward more relaxed dress codes, such as IBM staff wearing suits of a color other than blue, or British judges and lawyers no longer being required to wear wigs in court (Mathew and Helena, 2008).

Based on this example and many others, one recognizes that structure, in Giddens’ view, should not be seen as a set of “law-like regularities among social actors or patterns of aggregate behavior that [are] stable over time.” In turn, he suggests that social structures, in light of which society is frequently defined, are ever-changing

patterns of social life, and thus one “should see social life, not just as society out there or just the product of the individual here, but as a series of ongoing activities and practices that people carry on, which at the same time reproduce larger institutions” (Giddens and Christopher, 1998).

It is then understood that social structures come into being in the midst of the flow of everyday social activities. One criticism of such view is, however, found in Margaret Archer’s “Human Agency and Social Structure: A Critique of Giddens”. She argues that Giddens’ “central conflation of structure and agency” imprisons structure within bounded temporal and spatial walls, for when structure is viewed as a product of contemporary practices; it becomes no more than something that exists only in the here and now. Archer tries to avoid such “chicken-egg” puzzle by developing what she calls “morphogenetic/morphostatic approach” that explains how social structures (society) pre-exist the individuals, but the former are transformed and reproduced through the agents’ actions (Archer, 1990). However, while Archer’s second remark about the interplay between structure and agency brings nothing new to Giddens’ theory about the mutual constitution of the social-cultural duality, her first remark— that the duality of structure and agency in Giddens’ theory reduces the former to a product solely of contemporary practices – can be regarded reasonable and interesting as it raises a very problematic question of the role of time-space game in the social process. To go beyond this stumbling bloc, it is not unreasonable to follow the implications of “structure-agency conflation” by branching one’s analytical line into two directions. While the first one would be devoted to analyze the production of the social structures in light of time-space game, the second direction would unravel the key features of human agency and how it contributes to the production and reproduction of the social.

Time-space topic, as being widely recognized, stands as a serious challenge in understanding the process of the production and reproduction of social structures. Taken as a set of living entities that move everywhere at any time, one can re-address the notion of social structures as a set of floating elastic entities that stretch and shrink over and within time and space by the flow of human actions. In trying to explicate how these entities flow over and within space, an analogy would seem highly helpful here. Nowhere one finds an analogy as informative as that which is elaborated in John Urry’s examination of the concept of society and the future of Sociology.

Urry, in his account of the flow of the everyday social activities into different types of social space, borrows the metaphorical analysis of Annemarie Mol and John Law used in their examination of “regions, networks and fluids in relation to anaemia” (Mol and John, 1994). Urry traces the trajectories of the social structures in, what he terms, “three social topologies” (or social spaces) through which

they float just in the same way as blood does through “the extraordinarily complex networks of blood vessels in the human body.” The first types of these social topologies are regions “in which objects are clustered together and boundaries drawn around each particular cluster.” This type, as Urry’s argument runs, is a form of social territorialization that is “old, secure and familiar.” The second type refers to the networks “in which distance is a function of the relations between the components comprising the network.” However, this floating of social relations over distance within the network, “often crossing regional boundaries generates different spatialities” (Urry, 1998).

Though meant to mark differences between social spaces, neither boundaries (regions) nor relations (networks) are capable of keeping those differences, for “sometimes boundaries come and go, allow leakage or disappear altogether, while relations transform themselves without fracture. Sometimes, then, social space behaves like a fluid” (Urry, 1998). Hence, social forms or structures flow like a fluid. This behavior (flowing like a fluid) of the social is taken by Urry to be the third type of social topologies where one can recognize how society behaves. In this respect, he demands that society (social structures) should be seen not as a set of bounded entities (regions), nor should it be regarded as a set of relations (networks). Instead, societies, taking into consideration the impacts of the global context on them, should be seen as phenomena that resemble ‘Amaenia’ as regards the way it circulates in the human body. Hence, like blood, society flows “in and out of different regions, across different borders, using diverse networks. It changes as it goes, but often imperceptibly. It is like a fluid, like blood [undergoing] invariant transformation as it is everywhere” (Urry, 1998).

Social structures, moreover, do not flow in every social space, local or global only, but it also does so at every time, past and present. The factor of time in the production and reproduction of social structures is of paramount importance. The effects of past social structures on the present ones imply a temporal line that packages some continuity; i.e., the persistence of past social structures into the present ones. Patterson (2004) unpacks this persistence by examining how the past usually has a powerful impact on the present. In so doing, he suggests that although it is usually claimed that the past strongly influences the present, the examination of the persistence of the past into the present stays as a not-yet traveled road. He races back this ‘neglect’ to various reasons.

First, he believes that scholars, basically Sociologists and Historians, usually neglect any kind of link-up between the past and the present, because they determinedly believe in what Berger and Luckmann called “the awesome paradox” of “how human activity is capable of creating a world of stable social objects; but equally mysterious is the problem of how these objects

become things in themselves and maintain, for sometimes centuries – as is true of elements of Christianity, of the Western culture of freedom, and of central features of American civil society – recognizable patterns of identity (Patterson 2004).” The second reason is related to the scholars’ fear from generating criticisms, especially if they desire to examine the continuity of some past ‘sensitive’ issues and their effects on the present, such as racism. Patterson nicely illustrates this when he states that:

Most historical sociologists are relentlessly focused on the explanation of change: [sic] revolutions, peasant revolts, strikes, riots, movements of all kinds, are the standard fare of nearly all sociologists concerned with the past. So strong is this bias that even when a scholar has important things to say about stability he is careful to frame his argument in terms of that signal his concern for change (Patterson 2004).

Through these lines and others, Patterson attempts to make clear that most historical sociologists prefer to speak of and discuss transformation and change rather than continuity and persistence of the historical and social processes over time. They thus ignore the persistent dimension of these processes by focusing only on the different paradigms they take on along the changing line. His idea is that to speak only of change means to imply, in a way or another, some kind of discontinuity between the past and the present paradigms. Instead, he proposes to think of the link between the past and the present as something like a causal bridge which causes this continuity but often escapes scholars’ notice. Given this conception, Patterson defines continuity as “any object, structural process, or type of event that persists between two or more periods of time. It entails something that persists and some mechanism that accounts for persistence (Patterson 2004).” In this way, continuity becomes like a causal bridge, temporal in nature, which stretches over a number of causal processes in a way that links them altogether. Patterson, in this respect, classifies these causal processes into four kinds. He names them respectively as *identities or self-determining processes*, *direct processes*, *hierarchical processes*, and *post-inception or hysteretic processes* (Patterson 2004).

The first kind, *i.e. identities or self-determining processes*, refers to self-perpetuating or self-causing processes. Interestingly, Patterson argues that any object that persists through time can be a self-causing process. For example, identities of things or persons, as he goes on explaining based on Russell’s work (1948) and Quine’s (1950), can be taken as what he calls “‘time-laden process, best understood with the metaphor of identity stream.” He well explains this argument as follows:

The identity itself is the summation of all such moments, each being only a “time-slice” in a continuant process.

The object-stage at a given moment may be provisionally conceived as a “quasi-permanent” complex of related attributes. However, these attitudes not only change values, but are shed and new ones included over time. None is essential although at given identity stages some may be more important than others (Patterson 2004).

In simple expressions, the identity of objects or persons is not a fixed entity that can easily be identified, but it is a continuous process holding complex moments, each of which should be seen only as a “time-slice.” Some of these “time-slices” become “quasi-permanent” by virtue of “a special kind of causal persistence” that Russell quite often refers to as ‘intrinsic causation’ (Patterson 2004). Moreover, these ‘time-slices’ are chained with each other in a way that makes “later phases of an object [...] “grow out of” or are caused by earlier phases.”

Nonetheless, Patterson adds that these processes are only controlled and structured through observation, epistemic demarcation and social construction. In this respect, Patterson identifies three ways in which this epistemic work is done: “through the use of stereotypes which acknowledge the vagueness of boundaries that may go no further than family resemblances; through the classical use of crisp sets of sharply defined categories; and by the symbolic processes of ritual enactments in secular and religious life, [where] the human being a major symbolic source (Patterson 2004).”

While the first type of causal processes unveils the internal life of objects, so to speak, the second one, *direct processes*, explores “the external link between such objects, as well as events, over time.” According to Patterson, there is a sequence of dependencies lying over the temporal interval that exists between objects. To illustrate how this happens, he hinges his analysis on Lewis’s (1973, 2000) counterfactual explanation: “Event C causes event E if and only if there is a chain of dependencies running from C to E (Patterson 2004).” This chain of dependencies, moreover, results in several subordinate chains of consequences. The birth of these subordinate chains reveals what Patterson terms “*Hierarchical processes or multiple causal chains*”, a phrase with which he explains the third type of causal processes. However, he observes that though one can come up with a strong theory so as to make consequential connections between these chains, one’s implications and conclusions do not go beyond the reach of disturbing questions.

The fourth and last category of causal processes, *post-inception or hysteretic processes*, explains how sub-classes of causal processes function over a chain of periods. Patterson argues, in this vein, that all sub-classes of causal processes develop through time in the following way:

An event or object is generated in T_1 by causal factors peculiar to period T_1 . In the adjoining period, T_2 , the

event or object persists, but now it is due to an entirely different set of causal factors peculiar to T_2 , and so on to period T_n . Thus between T_1 and T_n there has been an uninterrupted continuity of the object or (recurring) event in question, yet no apparent continuity in the set of factors causing it (Patterson, 2004).

However instructive this analysis of how these post-inception causal lines intersect with each other might be, it is still difficult to predict with any degree of certainty the causal factors that govern them. Hence, Patterson argues that these temporal causal lines are characterized by two significant features: their unpredictability and irreversibility, whose scope still, as one can add, resists any kind of access. Only assumptions and hypotheses are frequently made.

Given this difficulty, Patterson proposes to examine the ways in which the periodicity of these causal lines is often marked by weak and strong contingencies. For him, though it is still possible to identify how periods hold strong impacts on other later periods, (Patterson 2004)⁶ one usually faces the difficulty of accounting for how the persistence of historical process originating in, “but was a wholly contingent element of, a given period,” does not sometimes reveal any kind of influence transmitted from that period. He nicely backs up this argument with a quote from Gordon Left (1971:42) explaining that many “events happen which need not happen and which could frequently have happened differently.” It is then here where the unpredictable and irrevocable interruptions of the causal processes give birth to contingencies. The latter, interestingly, pave the way for the introduction of “the play of the human agency, of freedom in history and culture, [and thus,] they may be the causal antecedents of later outcomes, sometimes even important ones, but they themselves are wholly adventitious in their appearance, bearing no particular mark of their context. For this reason, the later outcomes of the causal chains they set in motion cannot be claimed as continuities of the originating period” (Patterson, 2004).

Patterson justifies this argument by giving the example of the creation of the state of Israel. For him, the appearance of Israeli State did not originate, as the claim is frequently made, in the context of Nazism. It, in turn, “was envisioned long before Nazi Germany, and it is possible,” as he continues to argue, “to imagine a range of possible worlds in which it might have been realized through determined human agency in conjunction with a favorable concatenation of other events.” By the same token, any other event or cultural item may largely be the culmination of “contingent forces and supreme human agency” as in the case of Jazz. The latter was not, according to Patterson, a product of “racism”, but it should be seen as being originated in “the Jim Crow environment of lower-class and low-caste New Orleans where it first made its appearance” (Patterson, 2004). To make it clear, Patterson contrasts Jazz with other cultural

creations, such as the slave songs and spirituals of the slave period. He argues that while the latter “are highly contextual and meaningfully treated as legacies of their appropriate periods and contexts,” the origins of the former, Jazz, date back to “the social nightmare of the Old South, that made it so rapidly emerge as the first truly great All-American art form, as distinct from such other cultural creations (Patterson, 2004).⁷

Moreover, the two examples of Israel and Jazz are expressions of what Patterson calls “strong contingencies.” The latter, and their later outcomes, “are unidentified with the contexts in which they emerged, in spite of seemingly strong counterfactual evidence to the contrary” (Patterson, 2004). The other cultural creations stated above, on the other hand, express what Patterson terms as “weak contingencies,” which have along with their contexts “powerful identifying connections to later outcomes, in spite of seemingly counterfactual evidence to the contrary” (Patterson, 2004).

To summarize Patterson’s views on continuity and those of Urry on social topologies, one would say that however different social structures might appear over and within time and space; they still assume some effects on each other. The key player that ties them together is human agency. The latter has been the province of different ambiguities that have generated considerable debates. Here, Anthony Giddens’s analysis of human agency would furnish as a synthesis of these debates, and thus clear up the ground before the second direction offered in the course of understanding the dialectics of social-cultural constitutive duality.

In trying to unravel the drives of human agency, Anthony Giddens offers what he terms as the *Stratification Model of the Agent* as one of the key elements of his Structuration Theory. This model of the agent classifies the drives of the latter’s actions into three types: *reflexive monitoring of action*, *rationalization of action*, and *motivation of action*. The first type is, as Giddens states, “a chronic feature of everyday action and involves the conduct not just of the individual but also of others (Giddens, 1984). Actors do not only reveal the flow of their activities, but they also reflect routine aspects of the contexts in which they circulate. Secondly, the rationalization of action refers to the way in which actors routinely tend to provide “a continuing ‘theoretical understanding’ of the grounds of their activity.” Providing such understanding, according to Giddens, should not be equated with the agents’ capability of “giving reasons for particular items of conduct,” for this capability differs in degree from one agent to another and should – in turn – be viewed as “the main criterion of competence applied in day-to-day conduct” (Giddens, 1984). Hence, the rationalization of action signifies the reasons expressed by the agents to explain the grounds of their activities.

The third type of the drives of action is motivation. Unlike reasons, motives refer to the “wants which prompt” the action. In explaining what he means by motives,

Giddens writes:

Motivation is not as directly bound-up with the continuity of action as are its reflexive monitoring or rationalization. Motivation refers to potential for action rather than to the mode in which action is chronically carried on by the agent [...], for the most part motives supply overall plans or programmes – ‘projects’ in Schutz’s term – within which a range of conduct is enacted. Much of our day-to-day conduct is not directly motivated (Giddens, 1984).

As long as human conduct is not directly motivated, competent actors cannot report discursively about their motives as they do about their intentions.

To explain much more the difference between these three drives of action, Giddens remodels the Freudian traditional psycho-analytic triad: Ego, Super-ego, and Id. By way of breaking away from this triad, but making use of it, Giddens replaces the three concepts constituting this triad by three corresponding concepts: discursive consciousness; practical consciousness and unconscious motives/cognition (Giddens, 1984). In this way, Giddens prefers to replace the term ‘ego’ with ‘I’ and the term ‘super-ego’ with ‘moral conscience’ as the former remains for Giddens, a ‘clumsy term’. Importantly, Giddens argues that he uses these concepts to refer to the agent. Significantly, while the agent is used to refer to the actors, he uses the term agency to refer to action.

So, based on this terminology, Giddens tries to account for how human actions flow intentionally and how they result in unintended consequences. From such view, Giddens maintains that however intentional the flow of action might be, it has unintended consequences. Patterson would call them “unpredictable and irreversible chains of consequences,” and here where Giddens’s views on the persistence of human action converge with Patterson’s notion of continuity. Strikingly enough, these unintended consequences, as Giddens goes on explaining, “may systematically feed-back to be the unacknowledged conditions of further acts” (Giddens, 1984). To clarify the division between the intentional action and the unintended consequences of acts, Giddens states the following example:

One of the regular consequences of my speaking or writing English in a correct way is to contribute to the reproduction of the English as a whole. My speaking English correctly is intentional; the contribution I make to the reproduction of the language is not (Giddens, 1984).

This example does not, however, tell us much about what unintended consequences are as human agency has frequently been defined only in terms of intentions. This belief is claimed to have its ground in the fact that human acts cannot take place unless their perpetrators intend them, such as ‘suicide’. However reasonable this

justification may sometimes be, there remain slips of movements/actions that have unintended consequences. Thus, Giddens suggests that human agency should not be understood only in terms of intentions, but it should be looked at as a “continuous process, a flow, in which the reflexive monitoring which the individual maintains is fundamental to the control of the body that actors ordinarily sustain throughout their day-to-day lives” (Giddens, 1984). In other words, human agency does not develop only out of intentional acts, but also through some slips of movements which affect human acts and their consequences. As an example, Giddens offers the following description:

I am the author of many things I do not intend to do, and may not want to bring about, but nonetheless do. Conversely, there may be circumstances in which I intend to achieve something, and do achieve it, although not directly through my agency: Take the example of the spilled coffee. Supposing an individual, A, were a malicious spirit and played a practical joke by placing the cup on a saucer at such an angle that, when picked up, it would be very likely to spill. Individual B picks up the coffee, and it duly spills over. It would be right to say that what A did bring the incident about, or at least contributed to its coming about. But A did not spill the coffee; B did. Individual B, who did not intend to spill the coffee, spilled the coffee; individual A, who did intend that the coffee should be spilled, did not spill it (Giddens, 1984).

This description summarizes much of the interaction between the intended acts and their unintended consequences; an interplay that uncovers a good deal of the interval that exists between intended acts and the circumstances in which they are generated. This interval, ambiguous however, escapes any kind of empirical verification, and thus stays open to interpretation.

Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

Conclusion

With due recognition of the importance of this interval – as the province of what Patterson calls *post-inception or hysteretic processes* or of what Giddens refers to as *unacknowledged conditions* (slips of movements) – as such interval becomes important in understanding the duality of the social and cultural processes, it is no exaggeration to demand that the language of “structure-agency conflation” does not uncover a good deal of the nature of this interval. There are many reasons behind this all-too-brief conclusion. Two are of paramount importance to the theme this study is tackling. First, the

interaction between structure and agency is not only an interaction between different social topologies, between different contexts or periods, or between human acts and their causal drives. Rather, it also involves an interaction between cultural models (systems) and performances (practices), to follow Patterson's suggestion (Patterson, 2004). Secondly, the analysis of the interaction between social structures and agency may very much result in what Hall and Soskice (2001) refer to as "behavioral logics," whose explanations of how social life is shaped into consistent and interactive social patterns do not offer enough conceptual and theoretical frames within which this one can engineer a convergence between the social and the cultural. Hence, one way to overcome this inadequacy is to remodel "structure-agency conflation" in a way that solidifies the dialectical link-up between the social and the cultural that is being engineered along the analytical line of this paper. Therefore, should the cultural receive due attention as society does in Sociology – and should the social receive due attention as culture does in Anthropology and/or Cultural Studies – "structure-agency conflation" will be developed into a triad model of Structure (society)-Agency- System (culture)".

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Notes

- ⁱ - In Morocco, for example, there is Ministry of Culture; Ministry of Solidarity, the Woman, the Family and Social Development, Solidarity and the Family; Agency of Social Development; and National Initiative for Human Development. Meanwhile, there is Ministry of Culture.
- ² - In my academic visit to Jacksonville State University in Alabama, USA in February-March 2013, and while attending a class of social theory at the department of Sociology and Social work, Deshotels, an American professor of Sociology explained to me that her course is designed to train students to become social theorists. Similarly, Dr. Nancy Stewart, a professor of social work at the same department explained to me, while attending one of her classes, that her class is engineered to train her students to be social workers.
- ³ - Studying man and his social and cultural environments from only one perspective, or by applying one-dimensional approach, certainly reduces the complexity of his social and cultural life.
- ⁴ - In educational institutions, for example, students are quite often considered as objects on whom many programs, that are engineered based on 'scientific' findings of some sociological and psychological schools which claim some kind of 'scientism' and 'objectivism' in their research, are applied. In politics, in its broadest sense of course as a way of running a district, town, city or a country, citizens are considered as objects too for whom many social development programs and workshops stemming from the 'scientific findings' of "les bureaux des etudes" are quite often adopted – Initiative Nationale de Developpement National INDH in Morocco is an example.
- ⁵ - "discursive consciousness" and "practical consciousness" are two phrases coined by the British sociologist, Anthony Giddens to explain the elements of his Theory of Structuration replacing the Freudian concepts of Ego and Id.
- ⁶ - He argues that these influences are mediated by the persisting "objects, structures, and events that originated in these periods and persist into later [ones]." As an example, he highlights the extent to which the first coming of the Puritans has left special imprints on modern American values. (p:77).
- ⁷ - A local example would seem helpful in explaining this contrast adequately. The Jaguar Dance in Mauritania is contextual and can be meaningfully treated as a legacy of its appropriate period and context where the French air forces used Jaguar military plane to assassinate the Front POLISARIO leader, El Wali Mustapha Essayed, on June 09th, 1976, who was leading an attack at the time on Nouakchott. Since then Jaguar dance appeared into Mauritanian Hassani cultural scene as a cultural celebrity of the 'death' of Essayed. Meanwhile, El Guedra dance – as a popular dance attributed to some Sahrawi tribes in Guelmim and Assa in the south of Morocco – reveals effects of different periods and contexts dating back to the first waves of Arab and African slaves migration to Morocco.