I

Problems of Theory and Method
In every way “culture” is the poor relation of “structure.” This manifests itself in how the properties and the powers of the two have been conceptualized over time. On the one hand, where properties are concerned, there is no ready fund of analytical units for differentiating components of the cultural realm that corresponds to those delineating parts of the structural domain (roles, organizations, institutions, systems). Instead of different “cultural structures” being analyzed, by reference to the variable relationships between their parts (i.e., as different cultural configurations), cultures are still “grasped” as a whole. Consequently, whilst in the structural domain there are well-established concepts, such as a hierarchical structure, a centralized structure, an integrated structure and so forth, “culture” remains a Cinderella in descriptive terms.

On the other hand, in relation to causal powers, consistent attention has been given to how structure exercises an influence vis-à-vis agents and considerable progress has been made away from determinism and towards less hydraulic conceptions of “conditioning,” “instantiation,” or “habitus.” Again, there is no parallel for the exercise of cultural powers. Instead, the causal status of culture within social theory swings wildly from its being considered as the prime mover (credited with engulfing and orchestrating the entire social structure) to the opposite extreme, where it is reduced to a mere epiphenomenon (charged only with providing an ideational representation of structure).

My first argument is that it is precisely because cultural properties have been treated in this undifferentiated and holistic manner (they can only be “grasped” as a whole) that cultural powers have never received a rigorous analytical conceptualization (such that they sometimes have this effect, sometimes that effect, and often different effects for different groups). Specifically, (1) because culture(s) have conventionally been regarded as homogeneous, meaning that their internal components are always coherently integrated, then, (2) members of “a culture” are also presumed to share the same ideational homogeneity – a uniformity of beliefs, collective representations, central values, ideology, mythology, form of life, and so on. The
two presumptions are canonical. However, they are equally compatible with assigning maximal causal influence to culture, as society’s bandmaster (crude functionalism), or zero efficacy to culture, as the mirror of social structure (vulgar Marxism). Something is clearly amiss because both views cannot be (universally) correct.

Generically, what is wrong is the canon itself – on both counts. A priori, there is no reason why (1) the constituents of culture should be presumed to be coherently integrated, rather than harboring ideational contradictions (as well as autonomous elements, alternative sources of variety, etc.). And a priori there is also no reason to assume, (2) that all members share a “common culture.” If both assumptions are suspended, then it is possible to theorize about variations in cultural integration and their relationship to variations in social integration. In other words, the interplay between culture and agency could be examined in the same way as between structure and agency. The latter relies, as Lockwood (1964) first suggested, upon distinguishing “system integration” (in this case, the orderly or conflictual nature of parts of the Cultural System) from “social integration” (in this case, the orderly or conflictual nature of Socio-Cultural interaction between people). Then the two levels could be allowed to vary independently of one another, contra the cultural canon, and their different combinations could be hypothesized to generate cultural reproduction or transformation.

Such is the agenda for cultural analysis promoted in this chapter. It is based upon the stratified ontology of realism (Bhaskar, 1989), according to which different “levels” of social reality posses their own emergent properties and powers, which are irreducible to other levels (Archer, 1995: ch. 5). Before proceeding to discuss how to make and use the distinction between properties and powers of the Cultural System (henceforth C.S.) and the independent properties and powers of socio-cultural interaction (henceforth S-C), it is important to identify how these two different ontological levels became conflated within the canon. This is not a quest for historical origins per se, but an attempt to explain why the conflation between the “parts” constitutive of culture and the “people” as cultural agents has, (1) endured amongst theoretical adversaries (e.g., functionalists, Marxists and structuration theorists), and, (2) why the evergreen conflation of the C.S. with the S-C continues today in new forms, such as discourse theory.

**The Myth of Cultural Integration: Composition and Conservation of the Canon**

The myth of cultural integration is held here to embody “one of the most deep-seated fallacies in social science . . . the assumption of a high degree of consistency in the interpretations produced by societal units” (Etzioni, 1968: 146). The most proximate and powerful origins of this myth, which bonds the C.S. and the S-C indissolubly together, is the heritage of anthropology. There was substantial concord amongst early anthropologists about the main property of culture, namely its strong and coherent integration. This central notion of culture as an integrated whole, grounded in German *historismus*, echoes down the decades. Malinowski’s (1944: 38) conceptualization of “an individual culture as a coherent whole” reverberates through Ruth Benedict’s “cultural patterns” (1961), Meyer Shapiro’s “cultural style”
(1962: 278), and Kroeber’s “ethos of total cultural patterns” (1963) to resurface in Mary Douglas’s notion of “one single, symbolically consistent universe” (1966: 69). This generic approach, based upon the intuitive grasp of cultural phenomena, entailed a crucial prejudgment, namely that coherence was there to be found – and a corresponding mental closure against the discovery of cultural inconsistencies.

From the beginning, this conventional anthropological approach conflated the two distinct levels (the C.S. and S-C), through eliding

- the notion of cultural coherence (or ideational unity and consistency) with
- the notion of uniform practices (or a community smoothly integrated into a common way of life).

Running the two together, as “a community of shared meanings,” conflated the “community”(S-C) with the “meanings” (C.S.). By so doing, the myth perpetrated a basic analytical confusion between these two elements, which are both logically and sociologically distinct. What were inextricably confounded in the myth and continued to be in the canon were

- logical consistency (i.e., the degree of internal compatibility between the components of culture [C.S.]) and
- causal consensus (i.e., the degree of social uniformity produced by the ideational influence of one set of people on another [an S-C matter]).

Logical consistency is a property of the world of ideas, which requires no knowing subject, whilst causal consensus is a property of people and their interaction. The proposition advanced here is that the two are both analytically and empirically distinct; hence they can vary independently of one another. Certainly, this distinction was least visible in primitive society (although Gellner (1974: 143–4) maintained that it was not invisible) and the constancy of routine practices was readily made part and parcel of ideational consistency. The intensity of this anthropological image can be gauged from Evans-Pritchard’s conflational characterization of the Azande: “In this web of belief every strand depends upon every other strand, and a Zande cannot get out of its meshes because it is the only world he knows. The web is not an external structure in which he is enclosed. It is the texture of his thought and he cannot think that his thought is wrong” (Evans-Pritchard, 1937: 195).

If this statement is taken as epitomizing the myth, it is very clear how the resulting canon conflates culture and agency, such that neither is granted distinct properties and powers. Therefore there can be no interplay between the “parts” and the “people,” and thus there is no source of internal cultural dynamics that could account for change. Consequently it is no accident that the locus of change was always located externally – in cultural contact, clash, conquest, or colonialization.

However, there is a special feature to note about the conflation of culture and agency in this early anthropological image of cultural coherence. Once culture had been defined as a community of shared meanings, thus eliding the “community” with the “meanings,” it really did not matter whether the assumption about coherence was attached to the consistency of meanings or to the smooth integration of the community, for the other element was incapable of independent variation. (Azande
culture [C.S.] was a tight-meshed web in which Zande agents [S-C] were tightly enmeshed – none of their doings, including their thinking, enabled them to reflect upon collective beliefs.) The fact that both of these statements were endorsed in relation to “cold” societies simply rendered one of them redundant, and made the resulting cultural integration of primitive society an overdetermined phenomenon.

Basically, what twentieth century cultural theorists shed was simply the idea of overdetermination. The notion of a tight bonding between stable and shared practices and consistent and common meanings was a feature of the old and cold past. It ceased to be appropriate given the social differentiation and ideational diversity, taken as definitive of modernity from Durkheim onwards. However, what proved extraordinarily resilient was the conflation of culture and agency itself. Instead, the new features of modernity, and later of high modernity, were accommodated in diverse schools of thought by the development of different versions of conflationary theorizing. Conjointly, they elaborated the Fallacy of Conflation. Fundamentally, what is wrong with conflationary theorizing is that it prevents the interplay between the “parts” and the “people” from making any contribution to cultural reproduction or transformation. This is because in every version of the Fallacy, the conflation of the C.S. and the S-C withholds any autonomy or independence from one of them, if not from both, which precludes a two-way interaction between culture and agency.

**Fallacies of Conflation**

Conflation of the two levels of analysis always takes place in a particular direction and there are only three directions possible. The first pair make either the “parts” or the “people” an epiphenomenon of the other. They differ about which is held to be epiphenomenal but not about the legitimacy of conflation itself. Thus either version renders the dependent element inert, be it the C.S. or the S-C. Consequently, proponents of epiphenomenalism advance rather crude unilateral accounts when explaining cultural stability or change. In downwards conflation, some cultural code or central value system imposes its choreography on cultural life and agents are reduced to bearers of its properties, usually through (over) socialization. In upwards conflation, cultural properties are simply formed and transformed by some untrammeled dominant group, which successfully universalizes an ideological conspectus to advance its material interests.

However, the Fallacy of Conflation does not depend upon epiphenomenalism, or on rendering one aspect of cultural reality inert. This is shown by the remaining possibility, namely “central” conflation, where elision occurs in the “middle.” Instead, what happens is that autonomy is withheld from both “parts” and “people,” which has precisely the same effect of precluding examination of their interplay. Here the properties of C.S. and the properties of S-C are conflated because they are presented as being mutually constitutive. However, this is unlike everyday terms that involve mutual constitution, such as “singing.” There, the song and the singer have separate properties, some of which are irrelevant to the practice, such as the circumstances of the song’s composition or the marital circumstances of the singer, and some of whose interplay is vital to the practice – the song’s difficulty and the
singer's virtuosity. Instead, in central conflation the intimacy of their reciprocal constitution amounts to an actual elision of the two components, which cannot be untied, and thus their influences upon one another cannot be unraveled. Once again, the net effect of conflation is that the possibility of gaining explanatory leverage upon cultural dynamics from the interplay between culture and agency is relinquished from the outset.

**Downwards conflation**

The transfer of the anthropological myth of cultural coherence to the Middle Ages was painstakingly crafted by Sorokin, who thus extended it beyond the confines of primitive society – a move that normative functionalists generalized to all viable social systems and that linguistic structuralists universalized. There are two common themes uniting these otherwise divergent forms of social theory. On the one hand, the preservation of the myth of cultural integration (C.S.); on the other, the introduction of the “downwards” inflection, through which the C.S. molded the S-C by shaping homologous mentalities.

Sorokin’s crucial contribution was his insistence on the internal “Logico-Meaningful Integration of Culture” (C.S.), which was apprehended by sweeping up a welter of cultural fragments to demonstrate its inner coherence. This entailed detecting the “major premise of each system” (Sorokin, 1957: 52), the key unlocking its governing architectonic principle. The presumption was that a key existed to be found, which is predicated on the assumption that Cultural Systems are coherently ordered. Civilizational exemplars were shown to be “supremely integrated” because . . . all the parts together form, as it were, a seamless garment” (8). This was his first bequest to functionalism. In turn, systemic (C.S.) consistency generated Socio-Cultural uniformity, because “the dominant type of culture moulds the type of mentality of human beings who are born and live in it” (606). This “downwards” systemic shaping of agency was the second element of his patrimony.

This heritage was foundational for the central value system within normative functionalism – as an a prioristic guarantor of agential integration through socialization. As Parsons declares, “cultural elements are elements of a patterned order which mediate and regulate communication and other aspects of the mutuality of orientations in inter-actional processes” (Parsons, 1951: 327; emphasis added). This brief formulation contains the leitmotif of systemic (C.S.) coherence, now elevated to a matter of functional necessity, and the downwards inflection, namely that central values shape social, that is S-C, integration – with the net result being the harmoniously functioning society.

If Parsons gave pride of place to an overtly coherent C.S., linguistic structuralism did the reverse. Lévi-Strauss (1968) accepted superficial systemic incoherence, but maintained that these manifestations could be deciphered as transformations upon an underlying code. Fundamentally, Cultural Systems could be decoded because ontologically the C.S. was a code, and therefore internally coherent. As is generic to “downwards conflation,” cultural agents were subordinated, being fully encased by the systemic mythology, which prevented any S-C exploitation of surface inconsistencies in it. Epiphenomena cannot act back to affect that which forms them. Hence, the S-C level was never deemed capable of introducing novel interpretations, transformative of the C.S. code.
Upwards conflation

Neo-Marxists take as fundamental precisely that which the downward conflationists had sedulously neglected, namely the role of power in the imposition of culture. What differentiates between the two types of conflation is not the end product, which in both cases reinforces the myth of systemic cultural integration, but how it is produced – for here we are dealing with a manipulated consensus. Consequently, conflation is from the bottom upwards, since it is Socio-Cultural conflict that generates the coherent C.S., through the basic process of ideological imposition. For Western Marxists, it is not merely that social relations produce systemic cultural integration, but also that capitalism as a whole can only now collapse from cultural undermining. Hence both cohesion and change at the C.S. level are generated upwards from the S-C level. Beyond this, the two versions of neo-Marxism most prominently associated with upwards conflation describe the causal process responsible for it very differently.

On the one hand, proponents of the “dominant ideology thesis” emphasize that ideological uniformity is accomplished by one class doing something to another, namely direct manipulation. To Miliband, for example, an ideological acceptance of the capitalist order is deliberately fostered by “massive indoctrination” (Miliband, 1969: 266), while in similar vein, Marcuse argues that “one-dimensional thought is systematically promoted by the makers of politics and their purveyors of mass information” (Marcuse, 1964: 14).

As Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner summarize the case, “through its control of ideological production, the dominant class is able to supervise the construction of a set of coherent beliefs” (Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner, 1980: 1–2). This contains two dubious assumptions: that the class seeking to produce a manipulated consensus will do so unproblematically, and that because a class has a consistent set of material interests, these will necessarily be given coherent ideational expression (which Marx himself ridiculed in relation to liberalism).

On the other hand, the Frankfurt School does not rely upon the indoctrination of one group by another, but rather on how the expanding pursuit of technical control in advanced industrial societies results in distorted communication for the whole human race. Material interest is still the motor, but the interest in technical control is no longer narrowly confined to a “ruling class,” and the instrument for the diffusion of its ideas is no longer indoctrination but the colonization of the lifeworld by the empirical-analytical sciences – producing a “technocratic consciousness.” When we think of ourselves and our social relations in these objectified terms, moral debate becomes inert and social critique moribund. Nevertheless, interest remains the source of S-C domination, which is then upwardly reproduced at the C.S. level as “knowledge.” Moreover, the consistency of the C.S. is greater than ever before because it is grounded in a network of scientific propositions that work – in their own domain. Consequently, to Habermas, “Technocratic consciousness is . . . ‘less ideological’ than all previous ideologies. For it does not have the opaque force of a delusion . . . It is less vulnerable to reflection, because it is no longer only ideology” (Habermas, 1970: 111).
Central Conflation

This position results from a critique of the previous versions. When culture is held to work surreptitiously “behind the back” of every agent (downwards version), this omits the necessary role of human agency in constituting and reconstituting culture; when culture is seen as merely the imposition of one group’s worldview upon others (upward version), what is omitted is the necessity of culture as the medium of any action at all, a fact that would have to be faced were domination and manipulation ever overcome. Nevertheless, an element is rescued from each of the earlier versions and recombined. From downwards conflation what is salvaged is the Cultural System as a semiotic order, supplying a corpus of meanings that are necessarily drawn upon in the production of each act. From upwards conflation what is rescued and “democratized” is the continuous and indispensable contribution of S-C; all social agents are held to know a great deal about the production and reproduction of their society, which thus depends upon the skilled performances of each of its members.

Central conflation is a position from which the C.S. level and the S-C levels are held to be mutually constitutive. Now it is quite possible to endorse the “centrism” of this approach, accepting that human agents shape culture, but are themselves culturally molded, without eliding the two levels (C.S. and S-C). Indeed this is the stance adopted in the rest of the chapter. However, central conflation does elide the two because they are regarded as two faces of an inseparable “duality.” The conceptualization of their mutual constitution as a simultaneous process means that there is no way of untying the constitutive elements. The properties of the C.S. and the S-C may be different, but none is acknowledged to have the temporal priority and relative autonomy vis-à-vis the other that would grant it independent causal efficacy. The intimacy of their interconnection denies this and hence it is impossible to examine their interplay.

The resulting difficulty is that central conflation precludes any theoretical specification of the conditions conducive to cultural reproduction versus cultural transformation. On the contrary, the “duality of culture” itself oscillates between endorsing (1) the hyperactivity of agency, the corollary of which is the intrinsic volatility of the C.S., and (2) the remarkable coherence of ordering rules, associated instead with the essential recursiveness and routinization of S-C life.

In structuration theory, agential (S-C) hyperactivity is an ineluctable consequence of all systemic (C.S.) rules being defined as transformational, thus enabling “people’s” interpretations to transfigure the “parts” of the system, namely rules themselves. However, if “all social rules are transformational” (Giddens, 1979: 64), it follows that agents enjoy very high degrees of freedom – at any time they could have acted otherwise, intervening for change or for maintenance of the cultural status quo. Hence the counterfactual image of agential hyperactivity, in which these generous degrees of freedom are explored and exploited at the S-C level. Hence too, the C.S. becomes highly volatile if “change, or its potentiality is thus inherent in all moments of social reproduction” (114). This face of “duality” represents an endorsement of S-C → C.S.
The other face of the “duality of culture” is intended to rectify the previous image, but overcorrects by generating a counter image of “chronic recursiveness.” Basically, agents have to draw upon rules (C.S.) in order to act and these are thus reconstituted through interaction (S-C). Here, Giddens fully endorses the linguistic analogy by claiming that when agents ineluctably draw upon systemic rules they necessarily invoke the entire matrix constituting the C.S., “in the sense in which the utterance of a grammatical sentence presupposes the absent corpus of syntactical rules that constitute the language as a totality” (Giddens, 1979: 71). Thus the myth of cultural integration resurfaces, for it is more than dubious that the rules regulating social practices have the same mutually implicative nature as syntax.

However, in this way, structuration theory is committed to the total and totalizing coherence of the C.S. – such that agents’ inescapable use of it embroils them in its stable reproduction. The pendulum swings so far the other way that we are now presented with another overintegrated view of “man,” for the “duality of culture” ineluctably entwines the smallest item of day-to-day behavior with systemic attributes, thus generating routinized patterns of action. This face of the “duality of culture” represents the contrary endorsement of C.S. → S-C.

Taken together, the two faces of the “duality of culture” can reveal nothing about the conditions that explain when cultural transformation rather than cultural reproduction will or does occur. Because both are possible at every moment, then central conflation provides no purchase upon the processes that account for cultural dynamics. Structuration theory tells us that both structure and agency are inextricably involved, but because they are inseparable in their mutual constitution, the interplay of their properties and powers cannot be disentangled to supply an explanatory account of why cultural matters are so rather than otherwise.

THE NONCONFLATIONARY APPROACH TO CULTURE: ON ANALYTICAL DUALISM

In contradistinction to every version of conflation is the social realist approach advanced here, which is based four-square upon analytical dualism. This is quite distinct from philosophical dualism, for it is not suggested that separate entities are involved. Realists regard structural properties as emergent from and activity-dependent upon agency, whilst structural powers only exercise causal efficacy by working through agency. Therefore, it is only analytically separable components that are distinguished. The same assumptions are made in a realist theory of culture. Specifically the C.S. is conceptualized as emergent from S-C interaction and is only operative through it. The two are distinguished by virtue of their different and irreducible properties and powers. This distinction is justified as follows and turns out to be familiarly quotidian.

In developing a conceptual framework for employing analytical dualism in cultural analysis, culture as a whole is defined as referring to all intelligibilia, that is to any item that has the dispositional ability to be understood by someone – whether or not anyone does so at a given time. Within this corpus, the C.S. is that subset of items to which the law of contradiction can be applied (i.e. society’s propositional register at any given time). Contradictions and complementarities are logical properties of the world of ideas, of World Three as Popper (1972: 298–9) terms it, or, if
preferred, of the contents of libraries. We use this concept every day when we say that the ideas of X are consistent with those of Y, or that theory or belief A contradicts theory or belief B. In so doing, we grant that a C.S. has an objective existence and autonomous relations amongst its components (doctrines, theories, beliefs, and individual propositions). These are independent of anyone’s claim to know, to believe, to assert or to assent to them, because this is knowledge independent of a knowing subject – like any unread book.

However, the above is quite different from another kind of everyday statement, namely that the ideas of X were influenced by those of Y, where we refer to the influence of people on one another – such as teachers on pupils, television on its audience, or earlier thinkers on later ones. The latter depend upon causal relations, that is the degree of cultural uniformity produced by the imposition of ideas by one set of people on another through the whole gamut of familiar techniques, which often entail the use of power – argument, persuasion, manipulation, and mystification.

At any moment, the C.S. is the product of historical S-C interaction, but having emerged (cultural emergence being a continuous process) then qua product, it has properties but also powers of its own kind. Like structure, some of its most important causal powers are those of constraints and enablements. In the cultural domain these stem from contradictions and complementarities. However, again like structure, constraints require something to constrain, and enables something to enable. Those “somethings” are the ideational projects of people – the beliefs they seek to uphold, the theories they wish to vindicate, the propositions they want to be able to deem true.

In other words, the exercise of C.S. causal powers is dependent upon their activation from the S-C level. What ideas are entertained socio-culturally, at any given time, result from the properties and powers belonging to that level. Obviously, we social agents do not live by propositions alone; we generate myths, are moved by mysteries, become rich in symbols, and ruthless at manipulating hidden persuaders. These elements are precisely the stuff of the S-C level, for they are all matters of interpersonal influence – from hermeneutic understanding, at one extreme, to ideological assault and battery, at the other. It is interaction at the S-C level that explains why particular groups wish to uphold a particular idea – or to undermine one held by another group. Once they do, then their ideational projects will confront C.S. properties (that were not of their own making) and unleash these systemic powers upon themselves – which they may seek to realize or to contain. However, the S-C level possesses causal powers of its own kind in relation to the C.S.; it can resolve apparent contradictions and respond adaptively to real ones, or explore and exploit the complementarities it confronts, thus modifying the cultural system in the process. It can set its own cultural agenda, often in relation to its structurally

<table>
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<th>Cultural level</th>
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<td>Cultural System</td>
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<td>Socio-Cultural</td>
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based interests, by creatively adding new items to the systemic register. In these ways, the S-C level is responsible for elaborating upon the composition of the C.S. level. Relationships between the two levels are summarized in table 1.1.

In turn, the relations between them form the three phases of an analytical cycle made up of Cultural Conditioning → Socio-Cultural Interaction → Cultural Elaboration. In fact, the final phase may culminate at T⁴ (see figure 1.1) in either morphogenesis (transformation) or morphostasis (reproduction). In both cases, T⁴ constitutes the new T¹', the conditional influences affecting subsequent interaction. This explanatory framework, which operationalizes analytical dualism for undertaking practical cultural investigations, depends upon two simple propositions: that cultural structure necessarily predates the actions that transform it, and that cultural elaboration necessarily postdates those actions.

**Cultural conditioning (C.S.)**

This phase is concerned with the effects of holding ideas that stand in particular logical relationships of contradiction or complementarity to other ideas. To hold such ideas is to activate the C.S. powers of constraint and enablement, but why they are held is an S-C question whose answer would require historical recourse.

“Constraining contradictions” exist when there is an internal or necessary relationship between the ideas (A), advanced by a given group, and other ideas (B), which are lodged in the C.S. – and yet (A) and (B) are in logical tension. Durkheim provides a superb historical example of this in his analysis of the logical inconsistencies in which Christianity was embroiled, from earliest times, because its inescapable dependence upon classicism confronted the Church with “a contradiction against which it has fought for centuries” (Durkheim, 1977: 22). Because the relationship between (A) and (B) is a necessary one, their contradiction could not be evaded by the simple renunciation of (B) – Christians could not repudiate the classical languages in which the Gospel was enunciated nor the classical philosophical concepts through which it was theologically explicated. Although substantively far removed, the “constraining contradiction” also confronts any explanatory theory (A), which is advanced in science, but whose observational theory (B) does not provide immediate empirical corroboration – that is if scientists think they have good reason not to jettison (A) (Lakatos, 1970).

What the “constraining contradiction” does in practice is to confront those committed to (A), who also have no option but to live with (B) as well, with a particular situational logic. According to this logic, given their continuing dedication to (A) (its abandonment is always possible because conditioning is never determinism), then they are constrained to deal with (B) in a specific manner. Since (A) and
(B) are logically inconsistent, then no genuine resolution is possible between them, but if (B) remains unaltered, it threatens the credibility or tenability of (A). Consequently, the situational logic directs that continued adherence to (A) entails making a correction of its relationship with (B) mandatory. Corrective action involves addressing the contradiction and seeking to repair it by reinterpretation of the ideas involved. The generic result will be some form of syncretism that brings about union between the antithetical but indispensable sets of ideas. Obviously, for protagonists of (A), their interest is in concentrating upon syncretic reinterpretations of (B), in order to make it compatible. However, they may be driven to more “generous” syncretic endeavors because the unificatory thrust of the corrective repairs can be deflected by their socio-cultural reception. Whether or not a syncretic formula can be made to stick depends upon how it meshes with the state of S-C integration in society.

At the systemic (C.S.) level, the direct counterpart of the “constraining contradiction” is the necessary or “concomitant compatibility,” because it bears the same formal features in reverse and its conditional influence is that of enablement. In other words, invoking idea (A) also necessarily evokes idea (B), but since the (B) upon which this (A) depends is consistent with it, then (B) buttresses adherence to (A). Consequently (A) occupies a congenial environment of ideas whose exploration, far from being fraught with danger, yields a treasure trove of confirmation and corroboration because of the logical consistency of the ideas involved. This was the generic feature that Weber analyzed as linking the religious beliefs, rationale for status distribution, and the economic ethos of Ancient India and China. A similar relationship obtained between classical economics and utilitarian philosophy. Modern examples are so abundant in natural science that Kuhn was tempted into portraying the whole enterprise as a succession of paradigms, each of which constituted a cluster of “concomitant complementarities” (Kuhn, 1962).

What emerges is an enlarged and highly consistent conspectus. It represents a substantial increase in cultural density, by which this sector of the C.S. becomes especially rich in fine and subtle distinctions and develops an elaborate vocabulary to describe them. The end product of this extensive exploration and inclusive formalization is a growth in ideational systematization (i.e., the “strengthening of pre-existing relations among the parts, the development of relations among parts previously unrelated, the gradual addition of parts and relations to a system, or some combination of these changes” [Hall and Hagen, 1969: 36]). The intricacies of caste rights, the detailed protocols for “normal science,” and the bulging libraries of exegetical literature are produced by the same systemic conditioning.

The more complex the internal structure of such a corpus of ideas becomes, the more difficult it is to assimilate new items, without major disruption to the delicately articulated interconnections. Tight and sophisticated linkages eventually repel innovation because of its disruptive capacity. This is the result of the situational logic of protection. Its implications within the conspectus is that it progressively accommodates fewer and fewer radical innovations until, in Kuhn’s words, it “suppresses fundamental novelties because they are fundamentally subversive of its basic commitments” (Kuhn, 1962: 5). Weber, of course, made the same point about the effects of complex ritualization in Hinduism being incapable of the innovative “germination of capitalism in its midst” (Weber, 1967). The implications for relations between the conspectus and its external environment is protective insulation.
against disruptive incursions – the most notable example being the Chinese Edict of Seclusion.

The situational logic of protection means brooking no rivals from outside and repressing rivalry inside. The former is at the mercy of “international relations”; the latter depends upon the success of its main socio-cultural thrust towards cultural reproduction in the (relevant) population. Ultimately, whether or not this sticks and endures turns upon *cui bono*; nonbeneficiaries have no interest in sustaining protection.

The conditional influences of the two types of logical relations at the C.S. level (societal or sectional), just examined, are summarized in table 1.2.

### Socio-Cultural (S-C) interaction

The whole point of distinguishing between the cultural system and the socio-cultural levels is because the orderly or conflictual relationships characteristic of the one can vary independently of the other, which is crucial to the explanation of stability or change. If conditional influences were determinants, cultural stability would ensue in both cases. Yet this is not invariably the case. An economical way to explain why not is to ask what properties and powers may be possessed by agency and exercised during S-C such that the outcome is contrary to the conditioning. In other words, what accounts for discrepancies between the orderliness (or disorderliness) of the two levels? Firstly, why can social integration persist despite the existence of tensions within society’s system of ideas? Secondly, what explains a syncretic set of ideas *failing* to take hold in society or a systematized conspectus *failing* to be reproduced?

The answer to the first question (the persistence of disproportionately high S-C integration), seems to lie in the effective exercise of cultural power. Where upholders of (A) have the position and the resources to control the diffusion of information, they can practice a variety of “containment strategies” designed to insulate the majority of the population from dangerous familiarity with B. In this context, Lukes’s (1974) three-dimensional concept of power seems readily transferable to the cultural domain. Power is used to control the social visibility of contradictions and thus to prevent the eruption of S-C controversy. Its applications can vary from the straightforward first-dimensional use of censorship to the more subtle third-dimensional strategies that induce “misrecognition of symbolic violence” – percep-

### Table 1.2 Cultural elaboration

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<th>Which condition</th>
<th>Contradictions</th>
<th>Complementarities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Constraining</td>
<td>Competitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational</td>
<td>Correction</td>
<td>Elimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic</td>
<td>Syncretism</td>
<td>Pluralism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.S. level</td>
<td>Unification</td>
<td>Cleavage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-C level</td>
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tively analyzed by Bourdieu (1964), although always presumed by him to be last-
ingly successful. However, “containment strategies” are seen here as strictly tempor-
izing maneuvers, most effective against the least influential (Archer, 1988: 189–95).
Nevertheless, whilst a week may be a long time in science, exercises of cultural power
can buy centuries of quietude in the history of a civilization – especially when ideal
interests and the structural distribution of resources are closely superimposed.

One answer to the second question (unexpectedly low S-C integration), which
seems correct, is that independent Socio-Cultural discrepancies in orderliness occur
when the social (or sectional) distribution of material interests does not gel with the
situational logic of the C.S. (or subsystem) at any given time (Archer, 1995: ch. 7).
Important as this is, if that were the end of the matter it would amount to saying,
“cultural conditioning works ceteris paribus unless structural conditioning contravenes it.” It would be to retreat from advancing a theory of cultural dynamics
because only countervailing material interests (and their promotive organizations)
would constitute the properties and powers capable of resisting cultural condition-
ing. Instead, two scenarios will be sketched, which give ideal interests their due –
thus advancing a theory of cultural dynamics that parallels one of structural
dynamics, without collapsing into it.

On the “corrective” scenario, associated with necessary and internal C.S. contra-
dictions, the unificatory thrust of the situational logic can be deflected in three ways.
Cumulatively they spell a growing disorderliness in the cultural relations between
people that may ultimately precipitate a corresponding clash in the realm of ideas.
Firstly, there is progressive desertion. At the Socio-Cultural level no one is compelled
to take part in a syncretic enterprise. Exit is a permanent possibility and a steady
stream of deserters attends the unfolding of any constraining contradiction.
Idea-
tional wranglings breed skeptics in the scientific as in the metaphysical domain, and
it has often been remarked that the ex-member of a school of thought becomes its
most virulent critic. This aggregate source of growing disorder then provides the
impetus for a bolder syncretic maneuver – a more thoroughgoing correction, invol-
vring interpretative adjustment of (A) itself. Ironically, these more radical syncretic
moves themselves become bones of contention among the “faithful.” Those who
were once united in their ideational difficulties fall into schismatism when they try to
solve them. A copybook example is the relationship between the Reformation and
Counter-Reformation, which generated lasting sectarian conflict rather than restor-
ing consensus in post-Renaissance Europe – despite both movements being equally
concerned to prevent the actualization of secular classical rationalism.

Finally, whenever the manifest systemic unity of ideas is reduced through public
wrangling, their unificatory role in society falls disproportionately. Those with an
interest in so doing can then harness social disorder to bring about a full actualiza-
tion of (B), whose contents have unintentionally become better and more widely
known as syncretic formulae made more generous adaptations to it. What is crucial
for a social group to be able to actualize a contradiction, by inducing a split along
the systemic fault-line, is that it has no cross-cutting allegiances with other social
groups to restrain it (Gouldner, 1967). This is why the French revolutionary bour-
geoisie rather than the leisured aristocracy (allied with the Clergy as the two
privileged Estates) was responsible for actualizing secular rationalism, anticlericalism
and laicization. The emergence of secularist Republicanism is a replication, in
the cultural domain, of the conditions Lockwood set out for profound structural
change – where social disintegration finally superimposes itself upon systemic malintegration, forcing the latter asunder and actualizing the changes that had previously been strategically contained.

On the “protective” scenario, linked with internal systemic complementarities, a substantial drop in Socio-Cultural integration is the exclusive motor of change, for there is no tension to exploit within the C.S. itself. However, the consistent conspectus does slowly generate a sufficient differentiation of interests to unleash social disorder. The root cause is the increase in C.S. density, as the complementary conspectus is explored and then systematized. Eventually, it becomes too great to be fully reproduced (societally or sectionally) because it has become too elaborate and expensive for all to share. Consequently, C.S. density turns into the enemy of S-C equality, and the resulting hierarchy of knowledgability progressively delineates different interest groups in relation to the CS.

As the cultural conspectus is gradually in-filled and work on systematization reduces to mopping-up, the concentration of rewards and benefits among the S-C elite (typically the intellectual hegemony of conservative old men) means that more and more of the “educated” become a category of marginals. They have made a major investment in the C.S., but are denied much return from it as it stands, yet are firmly discouraged from making cultural innovations to increase their rewards. The application of cultural power, which can maintain orderliness among subordinates, is ineffective against the marginals; culturally they are in the know and one of the things they know is that they are not rewarded for it.

The disaffection of the marginals correspondingly reduces S-C integration, but C.S. integration still remains high. The disaffected do not kick it for they have invested too much in it, but they are opportunists, ready to migrate towards new sources of ideational variety in order to increase their pay-off. Impelled by their ideal interests, boundaries (geographical, disciplinary, or paradigmatic) are crossed and the departure of these disruptive S-C elements is not resisted. In short, marginal migrants go out seeking new but complementary items (novel but consistent ideas, skills, techniques) to augment their ideal interests. From this a distinctive type of cultural change emerges – born of innovative amalgamation.

**Cultural Elaboration**

Although the above two scenarios have been presented as ones that may unreel autonomously within the cultural realm, there is no denying that in reality they are usually accelerated and decelerated by their interaction with structural factors. What is of particular importance is how far structure differentiates material interest groups that reinforce or cross-cut the Socio-Cultural alignments conditioned by the C.S. This interplay between culture and structure is even more marked when we turn, in conclusion, to the ways in which cultural elaboration can be independently introduced from the Socio-Cultural level. However, although such social conflict may well be fueled by structural cleavages and divisions, neither the form of cultural interaction involved nor the type of cultural changes induced can be reduced to epiphenomena of structure. This is because there is considerable cultural work to be done by agents when the ideas with which they are dealing are only contingently rather than necessarily related – for here, agency alone is responsible for bringing these ideas into conjunction and achieving social salience for them. It is
also because once they have done so, they have created two new forms of situational logic in which the promotion of their own ideal interests are then enmeshed.

In contrast to the “constraining contradiction,” where the alternative to a given set of ideas is also internally related to them, and thus constantly threatens them with its own counter-actualization, here the accentuation of a contingent contradiction is a supremely social matter. Accentuation depends upon groups, actuated by interests, making a contradiction competitive, by taking sides over it and by trying to make other people take their side. In brief, opposed interest groups cause the “competitive contradiction” to impinge on broader sections of the (relevant) population; it does not ineluctably confront them, as is the case with constraining contradictions, the moment that anyone asserts (A).

Perhaps the best and most important illustration of the “competitive contradiction” is ideological conflict. Were ideologies no more than passive reflections of material interests, then it would be impossible that they could advance, foster, or defend such interests. To the extent that they succeed, they necessarily do so in competition with other ideologies, which perform the same task in relation to opposed interests. In the process, their ideational conflict becomes subject to its own distinctive situational logic. In contradistinction to the “constraining contradiction,” here the situational logic fosters elimination, not correction. In the former case, agents were driven to cope with ideas that necessarily contradicted their own (compromising, conciliating, and conceding much en route), whereas those involved (and drawn into involvement) over a “competitive contradiction” have every incentive to eliminate the opposition. Because partisans of ideas (A) and (B) are unconstrained by any internal and necessary relations between these ideologies, there is nothing to restrain their combativeness, for they have everything to gain from inflicting maximum damage on one another’s ideas in the course of competition.

In principle, victory consists in so damaging and discrediting oppositional views that they lose all salience in society, leaving their antithesis in unchallenged supremacy. In practice, the cut and thrust between them has the entirely unintended consequence that far from one ideology being eliminated, both contribute to one another’s refinement. Charge is not merely met by counter-charge, but also by self-clarification and response (as is equally the case for competing scientific frameworks). Ironically, both sets of ideas undergo “progressive problem-shifts” (Lakatos, 1970: 158), thus inserting much greater pluralism into the C.S. Correspondingly, since both groups of protagonists seek to win over uncommitted agents, the effect of their refined interchanges is Socio-Culturally to increase cleavage within the population.

Finally, the existence of discoverable but wholly “contingent complementarities” at the C.S. level constitutes a source of novelty that is systemically available to human agency with few strings attached. Both the detection of these items and their synthesis are entirely dependent upon the exercise of agential powers of creativity. Certainly, the fact that such agents are on the lookout for such items is fostered by frustration of either or both their ideal and material interests, but there is nothing automatic about discontents yielding creative innovations. Certainly, too, the existence of contingent complementarities is a necessary condition for their exploitation, but the sufficient condition requires active agents to produce constructive and concrete syntheses from what is only a loose situational logic of opportunity.
When and if they do so, newly elaborated items are added to the C.S., which in practical terms represent novel areas of intensive specialization, such as radio-physics, molecular biology, experimental psychology and biochemistry. If and when they are successful (and defective syntheses are common), institutionalization usually follows, and as it does so more and more people are attracted to work upon the new source of cultural variety. In turn, variety stimulates more variety, because this interplay between the C.S. and the S-C represents a positive feedback loop. This is the exact obverse of the negative feedback mechanism that regulates the protection and reproduction of the necessary complementarity. Not only are the logics of the two kinds of complementarities the inverse of one another, but so are their results. Cultural variety is the opposite of cultural density. Variety feeds on what looks promising but is ill-defined; density deals with what feel like certainties, but are already overdefined. Variety pushes on to extend cultural horizons unpredictably; density stays at home to embellish the cultural environment systematically.

These differences are equally marked in their Socio-Cultural effects – specialization prompts ideational diversification; systematization fosters cultural reproduction. The proliferation of specialist groupings is fissiparous in its social effects, for as more and more sectional groups are carved out, they have less and less in common with one another and with the rest of society. Sectional groups, unlike polarized ones, are not defined by their opposition to others, but by their differences from everyone. The dialectics of specialization and sectionalism contribute to the progressive exclusion of vast tracts of the population from larger and larger portions of specialized knowledge. The division of the population into laypeople and experts is repeated over and over again as each new specialism emerges. This is a horizontal form of Socio-Cultural differentiation, quite unlike the vertical stratification engendered by the necessary complementarity.

CONCLUSION

The relationships discussed in the second part of this chapter are summarized in table 1.2 and figure 1.2.

By distinguishing between the C.S. and the Socio-Cultural levels and examining their interplay, the myth of “culture as a community of shared meanings” has been challenged on two fronts. On the one hand, four different components, constitutive of “meanings” (C.S.) have been differentiated – bodies of ideas which are syncretic, pluralist, systematized and specialized in their conditional effects upon the further development of ideas. This does something to rectify the prevailing descriptive
poverty of cultural units. On the other hand, the influences of the C.S. on the Socio-cultural level (those of unification and reproduction) and the independent effects of agents’ own pursuit and promotion of ideas in society (those of polarization and sectionalism) serve to replace the undifferentiated notion of “community” (S-C). They point to different sequences of causal interplay between the two levels, with different outcomes, thus challenging every version of cultural conflation.

References


Papers: 34