

# HUMAN ACTION AND POWER

Gerardo  
Otero

Sociology/  
Anthropology,  
Latin American  
Studies, and  
International  
Studies

**SFU**

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY  
ENGAGING THE WORLD

# OUTLINE

---

- × Classical sociology
- × Bourdieu
- × Archer
- × Emergentist Ontology

# KARL MARX

---

- ✘ Humans make their own history, but
- ✘ they do so under circumstances already given from the past

## C. WRIGHT MILLS

---

- ✘ “The individual can understand his (or her) own experience and gauge his (or her) own fate only by locating himself (or herself) within his (or her) period”

# EMILE DURKHEIM

---

- ✘ **Discipline** = restrain one's egoistic impulses, do one's moral duty.
- ✘ **Voluntary** attachment to a group.
- ✘ **Autonomy** or self-determination, or rational criticism of morality.

# MAX WEBER

---

- ✘ Social Action
- ✘ Behaviour

# SOCIAL ACTION AND BEHAVIOUR

## **Social Action**

Responds to  
subjective  
meanings,  
rational

## **Behavior**

Reaction without  
thinking,  
non-rational

# NON-RATIONAL SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

## **Affective**

Determined by emotional state of individual

## **Traditional**

Determined by habitual or customary ways of behaving

# RATIONAL SOCIAL ACTION

**instrumental,  
Means-ends  
rationality**

**Value rationality**

Conditions or means  
for attainment of  
goals

Acting on principle,  
ethical values,  
religious, aesthetic –  
independently of  
prospects for  
success

# PIERRE BOURDIEAU

---

- ✘ Double structuration of the social world:
- ✘ Social field
- ✘ Habitus

# SOCIAL FIELD

---

or social space is constituted by:

- ✘ symbolic space
- ✘ lifestyles
- ✘ economic, social, political, and symbolic capital
- ✘ positions

# HABITUS

---

- ✘ internalization of the social world
- ✘ each individual knows what is his or her place and that of others in the social world
- ✘ schemes of perception

# HABITUS ARE

---

- ✘ “systems of durable, transportable **dispositions**, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and **organize practices and representations**” (bourdieu 1990:467)

# HABITUS PROVIDES

---

- ✘ “a spontaneity without consciousness or will” (bourdieu 1990:56)

# PROBLEM WITH BOURDIEAU

---

- ✘ If habitus is internalized social world, does individual have the power to make rational choices reflexibly or with deliberation?
- ➔ substitutes agency for habitus

# THE FALLACY OF CONFLATION

---

- ✘ *Downwards conflation*: integrated cultural system (CS) mandates socio-cultural interaction (S-C) among people.
- ✘ *Upwards Conflation*: CS seen as epiphenomenon of S-C.
- ✘ *Central Conflation*: negates independent action of CS and S-C by amalgamating them.

# MARGARET ARCHER

---

- ✗ conscious reflexive deliberations at centre
- ✗ reflexivity is a causal power
- ✗ deliberations affect our behaviour in social world

# MARGARET S. ARCHER

---

- ✘ “. . . [I]t is part and parcel of daily experience to feel both free and enchained, capable of shaping our own future and yet confronted by towering, seemingly impersonal, constraints”

## ARCHER SAYS

---

- ✘ “we do not make our personal identities under the circumstances of our own choosing. Our placement in society rebounds upon us, affecting the persons we become, but also and more forcefully influencing the social identities which we can achieve” (2000:10)

# EMERGENTIST ONTOLOGY

---

- ✘ Individual agency seen as emergent powers of human individuals
- ✘ part of hierarchy of emergent powers, including biological parts of human beings
- ✘ and social structural determinants

# EMERGENCE OF THE MENTAL

---

1. post-event reason
2. conscious reason (deliberation)
3. unconscious reason (habitus)

# BASHKAR'S CAUSATION MODEL

---

1. belief formation
2. decision making
3. decision storage
4. action implementation

# DECISION MAKING

---

- ✘ “the causal powers of reasons to motivate actions are contingent on the operation of other causal powers with the capacity to co-determine our decisions and our subsequent behavior” (Elder-Vass, 2007:340).
- ✘ the point is to separate causal forces

# REFLEXIVITY

---

- ✘ “becomes a critical attitude toward the dispositions we have acquired from our past, as well as toward the contemporary social situation that we face” (Elder-Vass, 2007:344).

# BOURDIEU'S INSIGHT ON HUMAN ACTION

- ✘ “a permanent dialectic between an organizing consciousness and automatic behaviours” (cited in Elder-Vass, 2007:344).
- ✘ The trouble is he overemphasizes habitus and social reproduction