



Editor's Introduction: Methods of Interpretive Sociology

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The Rationale

The term 'interpretive' in the discussion of sociological methods is the most common translation of the German word 'verstehen,' but the German term is also translated as 'understanding'. There are many discussions and disputes over the translation of words between languages. What can be said about the meaning of interpretive method in sociology can be seen in discussions and disputes within the English language over what such a term should be understood to mean. From the outset, and in line with the key German authors whose works frame discussions of interpretive method, verstehen should not be understood as empathy, the purely subjective experience of others. As such, verstehen requires the ability to get not inside the skin of other people, but rather the concepts they use to organize their experience of the world. As such, you do not have to have stood in someone else's shoes to gain some understanding of how they saw the world, and how such an understanding informed their actions and interactions. Concepts, within language, are by their nature, shared, and therefore in common, not purely subjective. That different languages correspond, to some degree at least, with significantly different conceptual frames that require translation, but this is also true within a language, between different communities and groups and across different historical eras and generations. The difficulty of translation should not be underestimated. The task of the interpretive method is precisely that. Discussions over translation into English, and between academic fields and traditions that has gone on in academic journals over the last one hundred years represents the best vantage point from which to discern both the nature of the difficulties involved and the various ways in which solutions have



been developed.

The works collected here include academic journal articles from over one hundred years of social scientific and philosophical scholarship. Each item in this collection was originally published as a journal article, and whilst some of these articles were themselves translations of previous journal articles in foreign languages, in particular German, all the works contained in this collection are reproductions of the English language versions. A very small number of the articles reproduced in this collection have appeared in edited collections of works by particular authors, but the vast majority have not. It is not the purpose of this collection to reproduce extracts from books, but rather to bring together the key journal articles that have marked the history and diversity of what can be called the interpretive method. This editor's introduction will refer to the most important monographs and edited collections of key authors' writings in the development of this tradition, and as such, readers keen to locate these books will be able to do so.

That the works contained in this collection are all journal articles published in the English language raises significant issues. It does mean of course that this collection can make no claim to be bringing any original new translation of non-English work into the English language debate over the meaning of the interpretive method, but this is not its purpose. This collection presents the debate over the meaning of the interpretive method as it has taken place in the English language academic community. The way works in other languages have been translated into this debate is significant, as it became an important part of ongoing and emergent developments of both fields and traditions within and across academic disciplines.

It is my contention that the way the idea of *verstehen* or interpretive sociology was understood in English language debates cannot be reduced to correct or incorrect translations of original, and in particular, German authors. As will be discussed in more detail later in this introduction, Weber's conception of the interpretive method cannot be simply pinned down to a single correct translation. His ideas developed over many years and changed significantly over that time. The relationship between his ideas and those of earlier neo-Kantians (in particular, Dilthey and Rickert) can withstand divergent readings. The translation of his work into English by Talcott Parsons can be questioned, but just as Parsons can be accused of translating Weber in a fashion partial to Parsons' (1949) particular interpretation, this is as much a question of interpreting Weber in line with a more Durkheimian sociology than it is just a question of conversion into English. Alfred Schutz is no less guilty of reading Weber through the prism of his own adherence to the transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. Translation is as much a question of intellectual tradition as it is one of the native languages. Schutz's reading of Weber and Husserl went on to inform the development of phenomenological sociology in the English-speaking world. Whether he had

really got inside Weber's head better than Parsons is neither here nor there.

That Weber's work was of limited significance in its original form for the development of English language interpretive sociology can be seen from the fact that those articles by Weber or by his translator on this topic were not published in English language journal form until the 1980s, and the translation of his book 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism' (1930) and other works by Parsons in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as Parsons' journal articles about Weber at that time, meant that Weber was locked into a particular form of theoretical sociology, and had next to no influence on the development of qualitative empirical sociology. This approach, within the Chicago school of urban sociology, was very much more heavily influenced by the work of Georg Simmel, whose articles in the *American Journal of Sociology* and elsewhere at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century made him far more of an established figure in English-speaking sociological circles than he was in his native Germany. Simmel's formal sociology of social relationships had a far more significant impact in shaping the development of symbolic interactionism in the United States than did Weber, or for that matter, Dilthey, Sobert or Rickert, none of whom had articles translated into English during their lifetimes.

It was only in the 1940s and beyond, with exiled German-speaking intellectuals entering English speaking academic circles that a discussion of the meaning of Weber's interpretive sociology really 'took off' in English. Weber became central to disputes between phenomenologists and structural functionalists, and disputes between positivism and anti-positivism in the social sciences. In a similar vein to the way Parsons and Schutz can be seen to have translated their own versions of Weber, so it was the case that critical theorists from the Frankfurt School of Social Research also read Weber through the filter of Weber's friend and associate Georg Lukacs. Lukacs' version of Marxism encouraged a non-reductionist approach to understanding how capitalist economic relationships not only shape culture, but also require cultural forms to sustain their continued inequalities and repressions. Critical interpretivists read Weber through other filters too. Herbert Marcuse, through engagements with phenomenology (both Husserl's transcendental and Heidegger's existential versions) and psychoanalysis. Jurgen Habermas, Karl Otto Apel and other 'later' Frankfurt School thinkers read Weber in the light of linguistic pragmatics. Cultural ethnographers read Weber through the filter of Ludwig Wittgenstein's ideas about forms of life and rule following.

As the above paragraphs have pointed out there is no singular interpretive method, and it is wrong to seek a singular authoritative source. Whilst Max Weber's article 'Some categories of Interpretive Sociology' might seem to be a definitive place to start, this (it will be shown below) is a highly problematic assumption. The way an interpretive method was understood by 19th century German authors, then by Weber, Simmel, Parsons, Schutz, critical theory,

symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology and by cultural anthropology, as well as in a number of attempts to produce new forms of synthesis, cannot be boiled down to a singular form. Rather, what exists is a set of related perspectives on the significance of meaningful action in the production of social life.

A Very Brief History of Ideas

Interpretive sociology has its origins in the neo-Kantian reaction to positivism in the social sciences. The development of an interpretive or *verstehen* approach to understanding social life draws itself in distinction from approaches that seek value-free causal explanation in terms of variables external to the beliefs of social actors. However, within this interpretive approach there were differences and divisions right from the start. Whether cultural meaning was to be understood in terms of psychological motivations and intentions, or in terms of collective codes and belief systems led to disputes over subjective and objective interpretations of the culture, meaning and belief to be researched. Also, there were disputes concerning the nature of interpretation. Was the nature of cultural life fundamentally different from the physical world of things, such that causal explanation was not an appropriate method of understanding society, or was it rather only that the difference simply lay in the way cultural life could be researched through a more direct access to its causal mechanisms, i.e. through a knowledge of cultural experience itself? This latter view suggested that social action could be explained in terms of causes, just as in the physical world, and that it was only a question of method that the two sciences should be distinguished. Rather than having to attribute underlying realities beneath the phenomena of human experience, the social sciences could cut straight to the reality of human life; as such a reality was the phenomenal realm of experience. This early double divergence, from positivist ontological claims to be able to emulate the natural sciences, and then within interpretivism itself, between more and less radical versions of this first break, set in place a range of positions that have played themselves out in a number of different forms and traditions in the last one hundred plus years.

Very early proto-interpretivism can be seen in the work of Herder and Vico, as well as in the early hermeneutic work of Schleiermacher, but this set will start with the work of Wilhelm Dilthey (2008) and Heinrich Rickert (1962). Where the former came to adopt the more radical distancing of the social from the physical sciences, the latter took the less radical methodological distancing. For Dilthey meaning could only be understood as part of the cultural life of which it was a part. That an utterance or action made sense was to be distinguished from the way a physical process or behaviour was

made to happen. Rickert's dispute with positivism was not so much with the idea of causes (in principle), but rather with mechanical, physical and reductionist forms of causal explanation, the idea of universal laws in social explanation, as well as with the belief that it was possible to select which aspects within the web of interactions to attend to and which not to (see below).

The work of Max Weber drew heavily upon both, but tended to lean more to the latter than to the former, even while most of those who have come to call themselves interpretive sociologists practice in the tradition of the former. Where Weber was keen to complement interpretative and causal explanation in the production of a comprehensive sociological account of society, the term 'interpretive sociology' has come to stand for an opposition to causal, positivist and macro sociological explanation. Norman Denzin has gone so far as to locate this interpretive tradition as a 'loyal opposition' to positivism in American sociology at least. This collection will attempt, at least in part, to disrupt the comfortable polarities between macro and micro, structure and agency, and explanation and description that dog sociology and in which the term 'interpretive' has been quarantined in the latter of each simple binary.

The position that Weber became associated with, in Talcott Parsons' early work at least (though subject to later contested elements of translation), saw the task of the interpretive sociologist as that of reconstructing the objective and subjective rationality of ideal typical actors in particular social and historical positions. The attempt to reconstruct the meaning of actions and outcomes, and to relate such meanings to external social conditions relied on a conception of *verstehen* (understanding) that was, if not a form of naïve empathy (Weber rejected this), then at least the belief that it was possible to comprehend relatively easily a person's beliefs based on their actions (including expressions) and on the consequences of such actions. Given, precisely, the unintended nature of the outcomes in Weber's classic study of the Protestant Ethic (at least in terms of the stated goals of Calvinism), this assumed ease of reconstruction became the point of challenge for Alfred Schutz in his 'Phenomenological' critique of Weber. For the phenomenological extension of interpretive sociology, much more attention needs to be given to the lifeworld of everyday belief and action. Schutz shifted attention away from locating meaning within a causal framework of social and historical conditions, as Weber had sought to do, and instead sought to build an account of social life more fully from meaningful social interaction alone, including the maintenance of taken-for-granted assumptions about social life that appear as causal structures but which are rather just shared and bracketed (taken for granted) conventions within particular lifeworlds.

The work of Georg Lukacs developed in parallel with that of Weber, whilst Herbert Marcuse draws at least in part on the phenomenological tradition in

the reinvention of a critical theory that is shorn of the tendencies to reductionism found in earlier versions of Marxism. Jurgen Habermas, Paul Ricouer and others have sought to develop these early insights within a critical and interpretive version of the social sciences. The work of Lucian Goldman extended Lukacs's attention to the relationship between culture and society with an explicitly sociological approach to literature and art that binds the phenomenological and Marxist approaches to the production of everyday life through human meaningful interaction. For critical interpretivists, the role of social science is to challenge the reduction of human life to forms of instrumental control, whether that be in social relations themselves or in the attempt to research them.

Symbolic Interactionism developed in parallel with its European equivalents during the early years of the twentieth century, largely ignorant of the works of Dilthey, Weber and Schutz, though some connections were made. It is noteworthy how many of the same themes and challenges to positivism and to macro-quantitative social explanation that were taken up in the name of interpretive sociology in Europe were undertaken in North America under the title of symbolic interactionism. It was Herbert Blumer (1969) who brought together the ideas of James, Dewey and Mead with the more explicitly sociological work of Cooley, Park and the Chicago School to formulate the classic 'SI' perspective, in the 1930s, but the second generation of Blumer's programme, taken on by Chicago graduates Becker, Goffman, Strauss and others took the interactionist tradition more directly into contact with its European interpretivist twin.

In ethnomethodology, and anthropology, the radicalization of Parsons' early work (in his reading of Weber's action frame of reference) and of Schutz led to a stronger re-specification of key elements of the phenomenological version of interpretivism. The work of Harold Garfinkel on the development of ethnomethodology, and Clifford Geertz in cultural anthropology, and their various collaborators and challengers created innovative re-specifications of the problem of social order, how the impression of structure emerges from the process of social interaction and the formation of shared meaning.

The development of interpretive forms of anthropology draw upon Weber, but also a wider range of work, such as that of Peter Winch and Charles Taylor, who seek to challenge the social scientific disposition to 'explain away' culture through reference to some kind of reduction to a deeper level of causal explanation. Both Winch and Taylor apply the ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein, again adding to the mix that makes up interpretive social science.

Whilst ethnomethodologists and interpretivists in anthropology have been amongst the most radical developers of a phenomenological approach to social life as the product of meaningful action alone, rather than as the product of causal processes, both Garfinkel and Geertz were not entirely hostile to Parsons and his attempt to view society as in some sense a structure influencing

the conditions of individual actors. It should be constantly remembered that whilst followers of academic traditions have tended towards the most extreme rejections of all other approaches, key founders have tended to be more balanced. In this respect, Garfinkel and Geertz are closer to Weber in their thoughts about causation and understanding than the more pragmatic interpretations of their works often suggest.

The new millennium has seen many in the social sciences proclaim the age of triangulation, mixed methods, and of methodological pluralism. The supposed end to the 'wars of religion' in sociology between macro and micro, quantitative and qualitative social research, and the belief that today's contrast between critical realism and social constructivism has somehow improved upon older binaries such as between interpretation and explanation, structuralism and hermeneutics, or even agency and structure, may be naïve, but it is interesting to reflect just how much closer we are today to the reconciliation Weber hoped for in his methodological writings. As has been noted above, and as will be elaborated below, the history of interpretive methods is a mix of contrast and accord. Symbolic interactionism was a balance between interpretive and structural tendencies, just as was Weber's work. Critical interpretivists sought to balance an account of what can be said to impose structural constraints upon the actions of individuals (such as capitalism, state bureaucracy and patriarchy) and the goal-oriented nature of human meaningful action that underpins the difference between humans and things, and hence the difference in the way we should orient to human beings morally and methodologically. Even Garfinkel and Geertz qualify their rejection of structural and functional approaches to social science. As such, talk of balance is nothing new. As such, talk of balance, triangulation and third ways, is no guarantee of resolution. A nod to the other can be as much a justification for getting on with one's own side of the coin, as it can be a real invitation to challenging one-sidedness. An awareness of the history of such claims and developments may help. It is certainly not the intention of this introduction, or this collection, to create a unified and self-contained 'interpretive tradition' that could form the basis for a singular way of doing sociology.

It is also an important part of this editor's introduction to highlight the crucial role played by interpretive tradition in carrying forward much of what has become known as 'classical sociology' from the early days of the discipline to the present. This middle period is often overlooked as being merely the point between origins and destinations, but it is the journey as much as the foundations that shape the present. It is the interpretation along the way that is as significant, if not more significant, than what was there to begin with. At least that might be what an interpretive sociology would tell us, and if we have any sense, we should certainly attend to the possibility. The way that Simmel, Weber and Schutz, Mead and Cooley, Parsons and Wittgenstein,

and Dilthey and Rickert are understood by sociologists today, and the fact that they are remembered at all, is largely thanks to the traditions of phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, critical interpretivism, ethnomethodology and interpretivist anthropology.

Structure of this Four-Volume Set

This collection has been divided into eight parts:

1. The classic statements of authors (Dilthey, Weber, Simmel, early Parsons)
2. The interpreters and challengers of the classic interpretivists
3. The phenomenological critics (Schutz, Berger, Tiryakian et al.)
4. The critical phenomenologists (Lukacs, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Habermas et al.)
5. American pragmatists and symbolic interactionists (Dewey, James, Mead, Shaw, Thomas, Blumer, Becker, Goffman, Strauss et al.)
6. Ethnomethodologists (Garfinkel, Cicourel, Coulter et al.)
7. Interpretive anthropologists (Geertz, Winch, Clifford and Marcus)
8. Contemporary interpretations, extensions, fusions and applications

Strands Within this Collection, Texts and Contexts

The Classic Statements and Authors

The first strand in this collection is made up of classical statements. Wilhem Dilthey's 'The Rise of Hermeneutics' outlines the classic statement of *verstehen* to which others then dissented. Dilthey (here and 2008) seeks to avoid both causal explanation and psychological reduction of meaning. His focus is upon the cultural form of life in which meaning for individuals can be said to exist. Culture forms a hermeneutic circle, in which the part makes sense only in terms of the whole and vice versa. The method of the human sciences is to interpret this totality of meaning. For Dilthey, culture as a system of meaning is available to the human researcher in a fashion distinct from the way physical causes may be studied. Culture can be grasped only by means of an understanding of its systematic coherence as a meaningful system. Dilthey contrasts this mode of comprehending the totality with the reductive mechanics of causal explanation in the physical sciences. The absence of journal articles in the English language by Heinrich Rickert and Werner Sombart means their work, on the question of cultural meaning in relation to social and economic conditions, are here presented in works written to draw out the meaning of *verstehen* in the writings of Max Weber (by Gary

Oakes and Talcott Parsons, respectively). Rickert asserted a less radical separation between explanation in the social and physical sciences than did Dilthey, suggesting that meaning and causation complemented each other in the study of human history, a view taken up by Weber. Weber also took up Rickert's assertion that, even accepting the validity of causal claims in the social sciences, it remained a question of cultural value relevance as to which elements of causality would be considered important in giving an account of historical change and or stability. He was also in agreement with Rickert in a consequence of the above-mentioned dependence upon value relevance when selecting significant elements in the infinity of causal relations that can be investigated in relation to questions of historical development and comparative difference between cultures. This is Rickert's suggestion that social science is, primarily' engaged in explaining the particular, where the physical sciences seek universal explanation. Sombart (2001) asserted that economic systems (such as capitalism and feudalism) could only be accounted for in their own terms, as systems of both cultural meaning (shaping motivation) and technique (shaping action). He rejected any notion of evolution or progress based on the belief that one system was superior to another, as, for him, the criteria of efficiency and productivity that might be used within capitalist conditions to judge success would not be meaningful criteria for evaluating a different way of life (such as feudalism). Sombart draws his notion of system from Marx, but ideas about divergent value systems meant he rejected Marx's evolutionary evaluation of human history as one of progress. whilst accepting the significance of cultural belief in shaping action. Weber rejected the holism of Dilthey and Sombart in favour of methodological individualism. This was not however, simply, to reduce meaningful action to a product of subjective psychology. Meaningful action, for Weber, has to be understood in terms of what is meaningful to individual actors not abstracted systems or cultures, but Weber does share with Dilthey and Sombart the sense that shared meanings create cultural forms by which sensations and material conditions are made sense of. As such, society cannot be reduced to economic laws or evolutionary progression; nor to psychology. Shared meanings influence subjective experience and shape objective conditions.

Max Weber's 'Some Categories of Interpretive Sociology' was published in English in 1981, but was published originally in German in 1913. This work represented a transitional development in Weber's writing. His attempt to locate the significance of culture and meaningful action in historical change had undergone a number of iterations since the publication of his 'Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism' (****). These developments are discussed in more detail in the articles contained in section two of this collection. It is sufficient at this point to note that the 1913 article (which was originally published in the journal *Logos*) was itself to be restructured and added to in the formation of the opening chapter of Weber's 'Economy and Society: An

Outline of Interpretive Sociology' (1978). As such, there is no single and definitive formulation.

The inclusion of two articles by Georg Simmel (one from 1898 and the other – published posthumously – from the middle of the twentieth century) draw attention not only to the significance of Simmel from the earliest years of English-speaking sociology through the next half century, but also to the specific character of his sociology of cultural forms (see Wolf's 1950 collection of Simmel's most influential essays). This attention to social forms, of patterns of cultural interaction that regulate in non-structural/causal fashion the conduct of social life, is very different from what Weber sought to identify in his method of ideal types, but is similar to Weber's attention to the objective meaning of social action, action that can be understood as social insofar as it is oriented to the shared beliefs of other meaning-oriented actors. For both Simmel and Weber, meaning is not to be reduced to individual psychological experience nor to external causation, and for both, the method for studying meaningful action is in attendance to what is social, i.e., actions, expressions and forms of interaction, not attributions of inner motives, beliefs and feelings. Though Weber acknowledged the influence of Simmel on his thinking, Weber's last comment on Simmel (1978: 4) accused Simmel of not making the distinction between subjective intentions and objectively valid meanings (i.e., culturally sanctioned conceptual frameworks, held in common, and which regulate interaction in particular social contexts) sufficiently robust.

The Interpreters and Challengers of the Classic Interpretivists

This second part begins with the challenge set by Theodore Abel in 1948, which proposed that any kind of verstehen method was incapable of generating verifiable results and was therefore only really good for generating hypotheses which might then be researched (properly) by scientific methods of measurement and correlation. Abel sought to debunk the claim that there was a fundamental difference between the social and the physical sciences, and sought to uphold the positivist unity of the scientific method of causal hypotheses tested by quantitative methods. This argument was further supported by Ernest Nagel, which is also reproduced here. Both critics start from the premise that verstehen methods require a form of empathetic comprehension of the inner state of the person being 'understood,' and both assert the impossibility of validating such subjective experience. Responding to Abel and Nagel, Peter Munch and William Tucker highlight the rejection of any such empathetic model of verstehen in the writings of Weber, Dilthey, Rickert (and Simmel can be added to this list). Far from delving into the inner feelings and motives of actors, for Weber and others (including Schutz) meaningful social action is action oriented to the comprehension of other

social actors and is therefore comprehensible only in terms of the conceptions of life held in common, not simply in terms of the inner motives of isolated minds.

The following two articles, by Stephen Turner and Mary Fulbrook, offer two rather different takes on the apparent contradictions in Weber's writings, the former tracing the shift in his influences and frames of reference in attempting to discern the relationship between meaning and causation in social developments, and the latter in the tension between his methodological writings and his specific studies of the major world religions, in which he sought to explore the significance of culture in reflecting, fostering or inhibiting social change. These articles are then followed by John Rex's discussion of Weber's attempt to avoid reduction to either scientific laws or cultural relativism. His conception of *verstehen* must be understood in relation to this tension. Articles by Fritz Ringer, Thomas Burger, and Klaus Lichtblau further explore the balance Weber sought to articulate in different fashion through the course of his career between rationalism and relativism, causation and meaning, historical/cultural context and a methodological orientation to adequacy at the level of meaning as it is held and understood by the actor. Zenonas Norkus's article highlights how Weber's methodological individualism, which set him apart from those neo-Kantians and Hegelians who sought to analyze culture purely as a collective reality, shaping the individual, opens his work to alignment with today's rational choice theorists. As will be noted in section three, Alfred Schutz's critically appropriated Weber's *verstehen* method within a fusion of Husserl's phenomenology and Austrian neo-classical economics, with its uncompromising formulation of methodological individualism. As has been noted above, Schutz's take on Weber in its attempt to construct a purer version of methodological individualism, is no more less correct than Parsons' incorporation of Weber's action orientation within an increasingly structural functionalist sociological grand theory. Both take Weber in ways hinted at in his writing, but which could not reasonably be seen as 'what he really thought,' but that should not be the criteria by which they ought to be judged.

Section two ends with two articles that highlight the way Weber's *verstehen* method did, and to a large extent did not, influence the development of qualitative sociological methods thinking in the English-speaking sociological world until well after Weber's death. His work was successfully appropriated within Parsons grand theoretical scheme for a good many decades, and the development of symbolic interactionism in the United States was in almost no way related to his work.

The Phenomenological Critics

Alfred Schutz had been a student in Austria in the 1920s and had been heavily influenced by the form of methodological individualist economics that had developed there in opposition to the German school of historicism that tended to view economic systems as frames rather than as the sum of individual rational actions. Schutz's 'The Phenomenology of the Social World' (originally published in 1932) drew heavily upon Weber's method of *verstehen* in the attempt to rationally reconstruct the meaningful actions of human conscious beings within intersubjectively constructed relationships based on shared meanings. Schutz made very explicit use of Weber's language and method, but combined this with the transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. Husserl's version of phenomenology started from a radical re-emphasis upon the unique and fundamental character of human consciousness as the basis of both human ontology (what it was to be human) and any epistemology (what it was possible to know), and fused with Weber's *verstehen*, Schutz produced a version of interpretive sociology that placed far greater attention on the actor's conscious conduct in the construction of social reality, than it did upon the historical and particular conditions in which such action took place. For Schutz, actors create social reality through interactions based upon intersubjectively shared frames of belief. The extent to which common sense 'brackets' off certain forms of construction as natural, necessary and unquestionable, is for Schutz how the appearance of social reality is preserved over and above the actions of those who create social reality through their actions. Schutz distinguishes between 'because' accounts and 'in order to' accounts. The former refer to what are seen to be the conditions that frame an actor's decision to act. Such conditions include internal motives and the perception of external factors that will have to be engaged with in order to fulfill a goal. The latter refer to the action orientation of individuals when they undertake to perform an action. Where, for Weber, such 'because accounts' may include a range of causal factors that externally condition the possibility for meaningful action, for Schutz, such 'because of' conditions are best understood only as the sum of the actions of others. My 'in order to' actions become constraints upon yours. As such, Schutz's conception of *verstehen* requires a far more complete account of intersubjectivity, as, for him, this is almost all there is to the social.

The articles presented here give a flavor of Schutz's approach to interpretive method. In his famous account of 'The Stranger' Schutz uses the figure of the outsider as the person who must learn the ropes, as it were, and who must learn what it is that the insider takes for granted. The common sense by which the taken-for-granted is bracketed as something understood, even insofar as it cannot then easily be articulated without disrupting the lifeworld of those who share that way of life, is that which the stranger has

to learn. To the stranger, the orientation of the insiders to what are manifestly arbitrary conventions, seems strange, but it is only to the extent that the stranger can overcome this sense of arbitrariness that they too can become an insider. For Schutz the distinction between common sense and social science is the opposite to that which the causal positivist would suggest. In bracketing the taken-for-granted and treating such conventions as objective realities within their lifeworld, the insider fails to notice how such conditions are only ever the achievement of their ongoing interactions and the conventions they sustain together through such interactions. The job of the social scientist is to highlight the absence of underlying or overarching conditions determining interaction. For Schutz it is not for the social scientist to disclose the reality beneath appearances, but rather to take away the illusion of such a structure.

Other articles in this section engage with Schutz's relationship with Weber, Husserl and rational choice theories of spontaneous social order. Whilst supporters of Schutz's phenomenological version of *verstehen* argue his work strips Weber of the vestiges of a positivistic desire to locate meaningful action within a causal framework of historical and social 'conditions', Schutz's critics argue his approach renders invisible relations of power and constraint. It is worth noting that the most famous example of phenomenological sociology in the English language, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's (1967) 'The Social Construction of Reality,' which explicitly claimed to be following Schutz's approach, adopts a far less trenchant form of methodological individualism than is found in readings of Schutz by economists and rational choice sociologists. Berger and Luckmann place greater emphasis upon the constraining character of convention, however intersubjectively achieved, in regulating the actions of members of such socially constructed institutions as the family, class hierarchy and religious organizations.

The Critical Phenomenologists

The criticisms made of Schutz's phenomenological reading of Weber, that such a focus upon the intersubjective co-construction of reality by actors tends to obscure power relations and to the constraining force of social relations upon the action of individuals, parallels criticisms made by Marxist critical theorists of interpretive social science in general. But critical theory also took on board the significance of human consciousness and meaningful action, both in the maintenance of social relations of domination and also as an ethical foundation for the rejection of any reduction of human beings to the status of objects to be manipulated. Max Horkheimer's evaluation of Dilthey's version of *verstehen*, as valuable, in its anti-positivist distinguishing of the human from the physical sciences, but at the same time limited in its emphasis on how culture works 'in its own terms' (the hermeneutic circle),

rather than in its relationship with the material conditions of its age, is not dissimilar to Weber (ironically perhaps). Herbert Marcuse's examination of Sartre's existential phenomenology similarly values its attention to human action and resistance to any reduction to the status of objects, but criticizes its abstraction of history into historicity (temporality as finite mortality), even if existential versions of phenomenology are far more historically grounded than is Schutz's version of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology.

Whilst Marcuse had been close to existentialism, his version of critical theory became far less influenced by it than did that of French writers, such as Paul Ricoeur and Alain Torraine. Ricoeur's use of existential phenomenology sought to develop a more critical version of literary criticism than that which was achieved by Dilthey. This can be usefully paralleled with the work of Lucian Goldman, whose approach to literary hermeneutics drew upon Georg Lukacs' version of critical theory, itself a radicalized version of his earlier collaborations with Weber and Rickert. Sartre's existential version of phenomenology is developed by Alain Torraine into what he calls an actionist sociology, which not only seeks to account for the social at a macro level without recourse to structures external to the actions of actors, it also seeks to develop a phenomenological account of power (something phenomenology is often criticized for failing to do), seeks to study social movements rather in the fashion that Schutz used the stranger as a means of exposing the taken-for-granted that regulates interaction and thereby creates the impression of order, and sees the role of the sociologist as a facilitator in enabling movements to overcome the taken-for-granted.

The work of Jurgen Habermas and Karl Otto Apel are perhaps the most clearly articulated attempts to integrate critical theory's attention to power and constraint with an interpretive attention to the intersubjective construction of meaning within the lifeworld. What is of particular interest in the work of these two authors is in their movement from *verstehen*, simply as understanding, towards *verstandigung*, which emphasizes the possibility of coming to an understanding. The combination of elements from Weber and Schutz, as well as from linguistic pragmatics allow Habermas and Apel to explore the possibility of a more critical approach to meaning making, for the possibility of emancipatory knowledge and for the basis of a critique of distorted communication/ideology (see also Habermas 1984/7). Robert Antonio outlines a number of tensions that exist in the work of later critical theorists, not least between Marxism and pragmatism (as will be explored in section five). Alejandro Portes applies critical interpretive methods in the attempt to explore the situated rationality of marginalized slum communities. Rob Shields (following Bakhtin, 1981) uses a dialogical approach to interpretive research in the attempt to empower participants to actually articulate their intersubjectivity, rather than to have their voices subsumed within the researcher's construction of their meaning.

American Pragmatists and Symbolic Interactionists

George Herbert Mead (1934) described himself as a social behaviourist and not as a symbolic interactionist. He was primarily a philosopher and psychologist, not a sociologist. Mead's account of the social self, the constitution of the subjective actor 'I' through reflection upon the objectified 'me', the way the self comes to understand itself through the way it is seen and acted towards by others, is in some ways at odds with the phenomenological view of the self, but in its emphasis upon the construction of meaning through social interaction, Mead represents another founding figure in the development of interpretive sociology. His ideas were taken up by Herbert Blumer, who was primarily responsible for the tradition labelled as Symbolic Interactionism.

Where Mead primarily addressed the philosophical principles of the social self, Charles Cooley (1911) went further in developing a sociology based upon similar, though not identical, pragmatist lines. Cooley's sociological approach gives as much emphasis to the sense of 'we' as to the sense of an objectified 'me' in the formation of the social self, and it is in this process of group identification that social consciousness, public opinion and the social will are said to develop. Cooley, as did Mead, and as would Blumer and his SI pupils, sought to articulate a distinction between natural science explanation and social scientific understanding that was remarkably similar to Rickert and Weber. For Blumer, it was essential to think through this distinction between natural causes and symbolically guided actions. The language of social science had to shed itself of reductive conceptions (such as the belief that attitudes cause actions) and unreflective concepts which are neither internally homogeneous nor externally discrete, but which are simply easy to measure numerically.

For Blumer it is essential to study action as it is undertaken and to explore the meanings actors give to such actions, rather than to impose explanatory variables in advance. The interpretive reflexivity of actors muddles the boundaries required for the conduct of quantitative variable analysis to be of any real value. Following in the footsteps of his Chicago School predecessors Blumer suggested to his students that they had better get out there and get the seat of their pants dirty in the 'real world' of everyday symbolic interaction. In this respect, Blumer is far removed from the abstract theorizing of Weber, Schutz and the Frankfurt School, and much closer, in spirit, to Simmel, in not seeking ideal types to reconstruct, but rather real-life symbolic interactions to observe.

The work of the next generation of SI researchers, and most famously Erving Goffman (1961) and Howard S. Becker (1963), highlighted the power of social interaction in the shaping of the social self, whether this be in the career of the mental patient, the labeling of the underdog, the training of

medical students or the induction of the marijuana user. In attending to the power of such social interactions within institutional settings these SI researchers challenged many invisible forms of power and domination, forms that were carried on within the protective walls of schools, hospitals and asylums that claimed only to be there to help. Both Goffman and Becker consciously sought to champion the underdog, to challenge bureaucratic regimes that crushed the self. Rather as with Mead and Cooley, so it was with Becker and Goffman, that their attention to the power of social interaction in shaping the individual through the labels by which they are understood, stands in strong contrast to the phenomenological emphasis upon 'in order to' actions within a consensually sustained intersubjective lifeworld. That SI became mainstream, and even dominant, despite Denzin's suggestion of permanent (if loyal) opposition, is therefore a curious outcome (as explored by Kuhn and Hall).

Ethnomethodologists

For ethnomethodology, the question is not what social structure is, but rather how it is achieved. The problem of order in Parsons is taken back to its original framing within an action frame of reference (i.e. via Weber) and this is radicalized by means of Schutz. Ethnomethodology is the study of members' methods of achieving social order, through their spontaneous interaction. It is not that social order is just an impression being managed. Garfinkel suggests that there really is substantial and ongoing routine and regularity in social life, it is just that this is not sustained by anything other than the interactions of actors. He is interested in how social orders are performed and are only ever performances. Key to the ethnomethodological method is the tautological use of indexicality and reflexivity in everyday interaction. Indexicality refers to pointing at things to illustrate what you mean. Reflexivity refers to the explanation for particular things in terms of general classifications. If examples are made sense of by means of classifications and classifications are justified by giving examples, this circularity creates a self-sustaining outlook. What Garfinkel calls the documentary method is the attempt to explain how events go together over time and in kind, and is the practice of reflexivity (combined with indexicality) in both everyday common-sense and mainstream sociology. Garfinkel suggests that such tautological sense making should be studied by sociologists, not copied.

Garfinkeling is a term used to describe ethnomethodological quasi-experiments designed to elucidate members' methods by means of disrupting them. Garfinkel's (1967) 'Studies in Ethnomethodology' contained many such studies, many of which are described in the articles in this collection. What Garfinkel does in these experiments is to highlight just how much work goes

into the maintenance of social order at the level of individual interpretation and interpersonal interaction. If social order existed as some kind of architecture external to actors, they could 'fall back' on it in the face of disruptions, but they cannot, and have to engage in ongoing patchwork during disruptive interactions. Garfinkel uses these experiments, rather as Schutz does his hypothetical stranger, to probe how people practice and manage common sense, but he also uses such experiments to highlight the non-passive character of members. Garfinkel is particularly keen to debunk what he sees as the cultural dupe model of the actor, someone blindly shaped by external sociological forces.

Despite such a strong rejection of any suggestion of external forces outside interaction, the ethnomethodology of Aaron Cicourel, in its attention to the processes by which bureaucratic systems generate official and criminal statistics does highlight how power can be illuminated by ethnomethodological means, and how power can be maintained through the ongoing application of particular forms of reflexivity and indexicality. The way working class and middle class young people are differentially classified within the criminal justice system is only Cicourel's most famous example (1968). When sociologists compare rates within official statistics they are following common sense documentary methods, when they should be studying how they were achieved. Cicourel went on to develop his version of ethnomethodology with particular attention to language use, close to but not identical with Harvey Sacks' (1995) conversation analytical offshoot from ethnomethodology. Cicourel provides an interesting parallel between ethnomethodology's attention to reflexivity and indexicality and the John Rawls' pragmatist 'distinction between justifying a practice and justifying a particular action falling under it' (Rawls 1955: 3). This link draws ethnomethodology closer to the symbolic interactionist tradition, something Normal Denzin argues for here. Denzin notes the theoretical difference of emphasis between SI's 'social shaping' and ethnomethodology's 'shaping the social,' but also notes that practitioners like Goffman and Cicourel were always closer to each other than theoretical summaries might have suggested.

Interpretive Anthropologists

Rather as interpretive sociology saw new generations (Dilthey, Weber, Schutz and Garfinkel) claiming to have overcome the limits of earlier writers, so in cultural anthropology, the interpretive approach of Clifford Geertz was established in opposition to the structural and functional versions of ethnography that had become the establishment by the middle of the twentieth century, and so it was then that Geertz's apparently effortless style of translation became part of what later interpretive anthropologists came to

see as a naïve belief in the accessibility of the other's way of life. Where Geertz (1973, 1983) drew upon Dilthey, Weber and Schutz in the establishment of his version of interpretive method, Peter Winch (1958), at much the same time, was launching a parallel critique in anthropology against causal and functional accounts in social science generally, but basing his critique upon the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953), and in particular Wittgenstein's attention to meaningful action, rule following and rationality within particular forms of life. The parallels between Schutz's and Wittgenstein's ideas, and their lives, whilst relatively under explored can be clearly seen when comparing the articles of Geertz and Winch presented here.

For Geertz, as for Weber, it was impossible to see what the native sees, to get inside their heads, but rather it is possible to get inside their concepts, to see what they see with. Ethnography is the art of 'searching out and analyzing the symbolic forms' which operate within culture and a system of meaning. His discussion of culture and rationality in relation to betting on cockfights in Bali intertwines status concern, kinship obligations, masculine identification with their cocks and yet also a supremely astute ability to calculate the odds when making side bets. This article's account of how the ethnographic strangers gained access to the lifeworld of the natives is another interesting parallel with Schutz. Geertz's discussions of common sense as a cultural system, of the similarities and differences between such cultural systems, and in particular between large scale industrial and small scale 'pre-modern' ways of seeing, distinguishes universal features of mind and the particular characteristics of culture, drawing directly on Dilthey in this.

Critics have attacked Geertz from two sides. Those (like Sewell here), who, like Weber and Rickert, question Dilthey's account of culture purely in its own terms, assert that Geertz's treatment of culture as a text ignores history and social structures, whilst those who assert a more radical version of textual analysis argue that Geertz is too glib in his assertions to have understood the native. These latter critics, such as George Marcus (here and with James Clifford, 1986) and James Clifford (here and 1988) seek to question the authoritative voice of the interpreter, as much as they want to understand the native.

Contemporary Interpretations, Extensions, Fusions and Applications

The definition of contemporary is not particularly strict, and this last section contains work that offer 'new' directions in a number of different ways. Some apply interpretive methods to new fields of research, such as socio-legal studies, organizational research, and social-psychology (where such methods have been seen as new only to the extent that experimental psychology was

so successful at driving it out in previous generations). Others reformulate certain key assumptions about the history of the approach (such as in Denzin's two articles and Hayes' work). Jules-Rosette suggests an interesting comparison between the import into English language sociology of German interpretivism and more recent French cultural sociology. Nielsen's attempt to combine Winch, *verstehen* and Marxism is interesting both for its novelty and also for its attempt to do with Winch what earlier critical theorists sought to do with Weber; to use attention to interpretations as a means of grasping ideology. Malcolm William's (2000) article represents a good piece on which to end, as much for its attempt to balance interpretation and causal analysis and the evocation of Weber's founding authority in so doing, as for its millennial optimism in the possibility of such a reconciliation. In spite of the diversity of traditions and perspectives presented in this collection and outlined in this introduction, it is this editor's belief that the clarification that can be gained from such a coming together offers the potential for a greater understanding of what social scientists have in common.

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