
Theory

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A Tribute to Norbert Wiley and Charles Tilly

Last September, Margaret Archer, the dean of the critical realist movement, invited some of her colleagues into a conversation on the internal conversations people have with themselves. For almost a whole week the participants of the “Reflexivity and Internal Conversation Workshop” brainstormed at the University of Warwick about how to think sociologically about internal speech. It was an exhilarating experience. Like the early pragmatists, the participants had the feeling they had discovered a new continent.

As Norbert Wiley had been pioneering the field for twenty years on his own, we, the editors and the participants of the workshop, wanted to pay him a tribute and asked him for a personal reflection on his

reflections. At the time when this *News-letter* was going to the press, we heard that Charles Tilly passed away and asked for an obituary from two of his former students.

José Maurício Domingues
Frédéric Vandenberghe

Continuing the Internal Conversation

“Reflexivity” is currently a popular term in Social Theory – often in its adjectival form, which is revealing. For example, references are frequently made to such different processes as “reflexive” methodology (Alvesson and Sköldbeg, 2000) and “reflexive” modernization (Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994). When one digs into texts for their precise meanings, it is very common to discover two things.

Firstly, that the preface “reflexive” refers to “external conversation”. This is how Bourdieu’s used the adjective in “reflexive sociology”. Its primary concern was to lay bare “the *social and intellectual unconscious* embedded in analytical tools” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:36) of sociology through collective, external discussion resulting in the detection and correction of forms of heteronomy previously opaque to the researchers. My only concern here is to note that to construe reflexivity as “external conversation” points to a complete break with its conceptualization by the early American pragmatists – especially Peirce and Mead – as “internal conversation”. To them, this “self-talk” was the means by which subjects considered themselves in relation to their (problematic) circumstances and vice versa, in order to design their courses of action. In social theory, with the exception of Norbert Wiley’s works, consideration of the “internal conversation”, let alone its exploration, seems to have come to a dead end. That is a loss – and to more than contemporary pragmatists.

Secondly, this loss becomes very clear if we examine the use of the adjective

“reflexive” in relation to large topics such as modernization. Leaving aside the fact that Beck did clarify that the authors were not talking about reflexivity at all, its reception has boiled down to an acceptance that there is now more reflexivity practised than used to be the case – now known as ‘the extended reflexivity thesis’. One of the interesting things about this thesis is how little interest has been taken in the nature of the very reflexivity that is held to be becoming more “extended”. Usually, there is simply an un-investigated presumption that we are all doing more of “it”, but in much the same way as one another. This is a direct reflection of folk theorising. When I first began interviewing diverse subjects on their “internal conversations”, what was remarkable was not only how forthcoming they were, but how frequently they kept reiterating the phrase, “I guess like everybody else”. In general, folk theorising always repays examination, but in this case the subjects were simply wrong – people’s “internal conversations” are not at all like those of everybody else.

There are very different modes through which reflexivity is practised internally¹: some engage in “thought and talk”, eventually externalising their inner deliberations for confirmation and completion by trusted interlocutors; others complete their inner dialogues autonomously and act upon them; still others subject their self-talk and its provisional conclusions to meta-reflexive critique before acting; and finally some hold internal discussions that go round in circles, augmenting their disorientation and distress until they are incapable of purposeful action. Although we all use these different modalities in different circumstances, nearly all of us have a predominant mode – Communicative, Autonomous, Meta-reflexive or Fractured – which is not psychologically reducible. It is not, because the first three modes appear closely associated with background contexts of “continuity”, “discontinuity” and “incongruity” respec-

¹ What follows has been the subject of my recent works (Archer, 2003; 2007).

tively, whilst the Fractured mode is related to contingent adversities (such as involuntary redundancy or unexpected marital breakdown).

If such contextual characteristics are indeed responsible for practising different modes of reflexive inner dialogue, then, as Vygotsky surmised in the 1930ties, reflexivity has a history. It is not the same process for all time everywhere, but will systematically vary with the continuity of the quotidian in pre-modern societies and the discontinuities differentially introduced by modernity. It will also have a very different future as contextual change speeds up through intensified morphogenesis, because the opportunities available to more and more people will be incongruous with the expectations of their natal backgrounds. It may also be anticipated to claim more victims as (*pro tem*) Fractured reflexives.

This is the subject of my current research but, fortunately, an international group of theorists recently constituted the informal Reflexivity Forum: we meet, we are publishing and we will hold sessions at the IIS in Budapest and, of course, in Gothenberg. Anyone interested in further information about these activities should e-mail M.S.Archer@warwick.ac.uk.

Margaret Archer

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An Ethnography of the Mind

Ever since the work of the Chicago School, it has been an emphasis of sociology that people reflect on their own selves. Do we, however, all reflect on ourselves in the same way? Not only has this question long gone unanswered, it has not even been concertedly asked.

Many of us, therefore, find very provocative the suggestion coming out of Margaret Archer's recent work (e.g., 2003) that there may be several distinctly different styles of self-reflection. Not all people, Archer's research suggests, self-reflect best by conducting internal conversations with themselves. On the contrary, those Archer calls *communicative reflexives* prefer to think through their beliefs and actions by carrying out actual, external conversations with others in their social circle.

It is in the two categories Archer calls *autonomous reflexives* and *meta-reflexives* that we find people self-reflecting most decisively through internal conversation. The difference between the two categories is in the content of reflection. Autonomous reflexives reflect internally on instrumental or strategic matters, including the kind of impression management identified by Goffman. Meta-reflexives also reflect internally on instrumental concerns. In addition, however, meta-reflexives are also given to long, internal reflection on morals and ideals, life-projects and emotions. As the humanities and social sciences tend both to attract meta-reflexives and to help foster meta-reflexive thinking, many of us in these fields tend to be meta-reflexives.

If autonomous and meta-reflexives reflect on themselves most decisively through internal conversation, what is the nature of the internal conversation they have with themselves? Is it continuous? Is the language employed the same as in actual, external conversations or is it more abbreviated? In a paper presented at a meeting of the *American Sociological Association*, Norbert Wiley (2004) re-

viewed what is known about inner speech – not much. There are suggestions such as Vygotsky’s that inner speech is more abbreviated, that, for example, the subject of a sentence is often omitted as we already know who is doing the acting.

Wiley’s paper ends with a call for more research on the subject of inner speech, a call to which I was inspired to respond. For the upcoming workshop on reflexivity Margaret Archer was organizing, I decided to undertake what I conceptualized as an ethnography of the mind. For several weeks, I would attempt to observe the landscape of my own inner world. What was the nature of my inner speech? What were the speech acts – e.g., reporting, arguing, calculating – in which I was engaged? Was anything else going on inside me besides inner speech? These were the questions I pursued.

The undertaking was actually rather difficult. The social – in the form of speech – so impresses itself upon us that in the beginning, when you look at yourself, speech is all you can see. With a kind of Heisenberg effect, the very act of self-examination tends to turn what you are examining into speech. Like a dream, non-linguistic thought easily evaporates when you try to catch it.

Yet, just as with practice we can remember our dreams, so too with practice can we begin to catch ourselves in the kind of non-linguistic absorption by the world that Buddhists call “suchness”, apprehension without linguistic labeling.

My most important findings concerned the nature of my own inner speech. I found that my inner speech was seldom abbreviated in the manner suggested by Vygotsky. Except when uttering expletives, I generally employed full sentences. Even expletives often were embedded in well-formed locutions, such as those beginning, “What the...?”

If my inner speech tended toward complete sentences, the surprising reason was that I actually spent little time talking specifically to myself – or even to Mead’s

generalized other. Instead, I found my head peopled with a great many “guest interlocutors” – actual people or potential audiences, to whom I internally addressed myself. Much of what I was doing was imagining what I would say or write to some party or replaying what I should have said or written. My autonomous or meta-reflection thus seems a form of internalized communicative reflection.

How idiosyncratic are these findings? It is unclear. We need others to begin doing such ethnography of the mind.

Douglas Porpora

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The Sentient “I”: Emotions and Inner Conversation*

Recently Norbert Wiley (1994; 2006) and Margaret Archer (2003) have posited a self engaged in internal/inner conversation. While Wiley grants a central role to the “I” that invites its imagined future “you” and its remembered/past “me” to a shared seminar, Archer turns the past into a memory bank, represented by “me”. In her model, the “I” and the “you” (that stands for the future) engage in a conversation about what the future (commitments) should look like, drawing on the “me” – the memory bank – for support of their respective arguments/future scenarios. In Wiley’s model the “you” is the

* I would like to thank Jochen Kleres for his excellent queries, Sebastian Schoenemann for Mead and Falk Eckert for his comments.

bearer of the present, while the “me” is the treasurer of the past moral standards of the society. In Archer the “you” and the “I” are both aware of the present standards and in their dialogue they want to find out how much they wish to follow these.

Both Wiley and Archer remain indebted to the idea of the “free, spontaneous, impulsive” “acting” “I” that is well-known to us from much post-World War II theorizing about the self. Neither explains how the “I” can remain “free”, “spontaneous”, that is, un-pre-meditated, given the engaged discussions preceding its actions.

(I) In part with Mead (1967:210-211; 213; 255) I would like to posit instead the “I” that seeks self-expression/self-assertion, mostly relying on the acceptable social means, but sometimes moving beyond the limits they set. In Mead’s words the “I” is sometimes completely “impulsive” or “free” from being “censored” by the “me”, but more often than not it is under its control. Mead sees a parallel between his “me” and Freud’s “censor”: his “me” “determines the sort of expression which can take place, sets the stage, and gives the cue” (Mead, 1967:210), but its capacity to exercise its censorship is context-dependent.

While for Wiley (1994) emotions remain marginal, in Archer’s model the “you” and the “I” not only think and imagine, but also *feel*. They exchange pros and contras (arguments!) about specific weighty decisions, but simultaneously, when submitting various future scenarios to their own critical inspection, they explicate in their inner conversation whether positive or negative emotions would accompany each considered scenario, at times drawing on their memories of emotions that emerged in similar situations in the past.

Left unclear in Archer’s model is where the emotions come from, and where they nest in the self. Instead of modelling them in, Archer refers critically to philosophers (Taylor and Nussbaum) who moralize emotions and let them guide moral action. I could not agree more with her criticism. In her examples, however, she often refers

to shame and guilt – moralized emotions – and thus falls into the same trap. And, even more important, she does not tell us why our emotions can play a compelling role in the inner conversations. In which part of the self are emotions located? And, if they are not necessarily intertwined with morality, why can they or should they help us make important decisions?

(II) Cooley’s (1970) conception of the self, at least initially, is all about the (self)-feeling that differentiates it from the world, a sense of – naïve, joyful – pride in one’s self – its body/mind, its skills and possessions. It offers an excellent point of departure for a model of the self which (i) from the beginning defines emotions as the intrinsic part of the self (ii) attributes these emotions to the “I” (iii) casts the “I” as an unevenly socialized self-centered emotional part of the self that via its emotions (iv) becomes *connected* – positively or negatively – to the others (Flam, 1990) among whom it (v) seeks self-assertion and social recognition (vi) by routine *comparisons*.

(III) When social recognition is not forthcoming, the “I” – as Cooley’s “looking glass self” concept implies – is in danger of (a) negating parts or its entire self, (b) losing its capacity to produce *voice* and with it its ability to engage in an inner conversation on its own terms (Flam, 2007). The silenced type of “I” offers only diffuse images and sensations in decision-making situations. It has no words for what it feels, offers no or unfinished or contradictory sounds, words or sentences – even when something moves it strongly. This type of the “I” is unaware of/denies the sensed shame or humiliation (Scheff, 1994; Bourdieu, 1984) and so provides little clear guidance to thought or action. The other inner conversation partners have to name and frame these emotions for it or with it. The therapist, group, organisation or societal discourses may hinder or help this naming and framing process (see, for example, Patric, 1998:73-122). The silenced “I”, however, constitutes only one possibility.

Its opposite is a type of the “I” that can verbalize its emotions. Socialization taught it to name an entire array of emotions, even though not necessarily the “feeling rules” pertaining to these emotions (Hochschild, 1979). This makes it possible for the “I” to connect to others and/or express its quest for self-assertion and social recognition in words, arguments, choice of action repertoires and action, although these do not necessarily fit into the realm of the socially approved or expected (see Kemper, 1978; 1981; Merton, 1967; social movement literature).

The third possibility is that the “I” feels ambivalent, pulling the inner conversation in many different, even contradictory, directions. It cannot provide any guidance. What it feels has to be disentangled, interpreted, deconstructed. In fact, emotions often come in *contradictory pairs* (love & hate) or *sequences* (hate-love-hate) (Simmel in Flam, 1990; Flam, 2002:16-43) or *mixtures* of the “really felt”, prescribed and/or proscribed (compare to Hochschild, 1979; Shott 1979), so that the answer to the question “What do I *really* feel?” has to be answered, before or as part of any inner conversation about the future.

This insert has argued that emotions are now given a responsibility for human and/or moral action that they are – more often than not – in no position to shoulder. Neither thinking nor judgement (see Arendt, 1978) nor emotion alone can accomplish this task. Our inner conversations involve an intricate inter-play of emotion(s) with value – and cost-judgements – an interplay which we – following many thinkers before us and many yet to come – are just beginning to unravel.

Helena Flam

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The Internal Conversations of an Impartial Spectator

A Theory of Justice by John Rawls (1972) is, without doubt, one of the most important books of the second twentieth century. In spite of the fact that every page and footnote of the book has been submitted over and again to analysis and commentary, the book is mostly read as a liberal version of rational choice. Consequently, its connections with Adam Smith's theory of sympathy have been overseen (though his daughter, Anne Rawls (1988), who is a microsociologist working with Garfinkel, introduced the notion of sympathy into Goffman's interaction order and Sacks's conversation analysis). Rawls's theory of justice is indeed a generalized theory of moral sentiments. Following the moralists of the Scottish enlightenment, the American philosopher has resurrected Smith's "sympathetic observer" and introduced the "impartial, but benevolent judge" as a protagonist of a well ordered liberal society. The guiding idea of the theory of justice is simple: A society would be just if it redistributed the rights and the duties in such a way that every one of its members would subscribe to the principle of fairness without reserve, because it would guarantee the rights and liberties of all, while accepting the social inequalities only to the extent that it compensates the least advantaged.

The theory of justice is a strong theory of the social contract. The main device of this contract theory is the so-called "original position" in which each would be invited to adopt the perspective of a reasonable, yet sympathetic spectator before signing the contract that seals the alliance between the members. Thus, each would imagine him or herself in the position of the other and when each would have adopted the perspective of all the others *seriatim*, each in turn, s/he would hypothetically arrive at the principles of justice for the basic structure of well ordered society. Of course, this mechanism of serial identification of all with each and every one can only function on the condition that everyone makes abstraction of their own personal and social situation to only retain what is common to all human beings without distinction. In other words, in imagining oneself in the situation of the other to ascend to the superior and encompassing position of the impartial spectator, each is placed under a "veil of ignorance". As one would not know if the other is rich or poor, black or white, male or female, we can assume that the principles the members would hypothetically adopt to order their society would be just, not in spite of the anonymous character of the other, but rather because of it.

So far so good, but what has this to do with "internal conversations"? Well, in Rawls, the justification and validation of the principles of the social contract are the result of the simulated internal conversations the impartial spectator has with his fellow citizens. Everything happens as if the sympathetic spectator, comfortably seated on his couch after a long day of work, had called before his mind any person of his acquaintance and invited him or her into his internal conversation in the evening (see Goethe's thought experiment in Wiley, 1994:54). In his mind, he entreated his friends and acquaintances to sit next to him, discoursing with them the principles that would be the object of the original agreement. Having left his dear friends, while enclosing them in the depths of his heart, he continued the

imaginary conversation by inviting the friends of his friends to the dialogue. Eventually, through an eidetic variation of the friends of his friends, he arrived at a generic and faceless, but well informed, concerned and caring citizen who would “look at the system from the standpoint of the least advantaged representative man [and woman]” (Rawls, 1972, p. 151).

Through the clever device of representation of the original position, Rawls has thus created a public space in his innermost heart (*in foro interno*, as Kant would say). Habermas objected to the privacy of the internal conversations of his friend. Inviting his American colleague for a public debate (cf. *Journal of Philosophy*, 1995, 93, 3), the German philosopher had gently convinced his colleague *in actu* of the necessity of continuing the internal conversation with an external communication among equals that takes place in the public sphere. It is by public communication, not just by internal conversation, that speakers progressively arrive at the common and impartial view of the ‘generalized other’ (Mead). By inviting not only their friends who share their views, but also the neighbours who don’t share them to *voice* their opinions in public, the citizens persuade one another, by means of the force of the better argument, of what is just or wrong.

According to Habermas, moral and political principles become objective and universal through the public use of speech and reason. Indeed, thanks to communication, the citizens can have mutual knowledge of the positions of the others and, thereby, arrive, through overlap of the common content that is publicly communicated and commonly shared, at a consensus on the very principles that order a just society. By transforming the internal conversations that the sympathetic observer has with himself and all the others into a real communication among participants of an external conversation, we move at the same time from the private (Rawls) to the public (Habermas) use of speech. I therefore conclude that there’s an ongoing dialectic – or a ‘double morphogenesis’,

as Archer would say – between internal and external conversations. When the communication is over, the participants can continue the debate internally, and after mature reflection, they can then join again the external conversation.

Frédéric Vandenberghe

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My Inner Speech Research. The Long View

The genesis of my inner speech research involves my personality, biography and even my childhood.

I was the third child, and my older brother and sister, though reasonably nice to me, were quite close to each other. I was alone a lot, and I liked being alone. I think my mind raced when I was an infant, and I also think I began inner speech, in various crude, semiotic forms, quite early.

I discovered my “self” when I was about twelve months old. My Mom would close the doors to the kitchen to keep me in there. But one day she forgot the dining room door and I roamed into a forbidden part of the house. I could not quite walk yet and I recall moving by holding onto walls.

When I got to the full length mirror in the coat closet I thought I saw a little boy with a friendly look on his face, so I attempted to touch him. He continued to smile, but his hand was hard and would not yield to mine. Still he kept smiling. Then I touched some more, attempting to stroke his face.

This exploration continued until I realized that the child in the mirror was me. There were several stages to this realization, but I will skip over them.

I do not think self discovery in the mirror (or in some other social process that acts like a mirror) is unusual. What is unusual though is that I understood what was happening at the time, and that I have remembered the experience to this day.

Much later, when I was a professor engaged in reading French philosophy, I realised that Jacques Lacan was wrong in saying the infant identifies with the glassy image in the mirror. The infant (or at least me) is not that stupid. The child realizes that the mirror is a device that reflects things, including his body, as they are. The child's image is not "imaginary" in Lacan's sense. It is an ordinary image – like the kind we see at other people. It just detours through the mirror.

How it makes this detour is complex, and the child needs to make the same cognitive twist that his image makes as it gets reflected in the mirror. But Merleau Ponty explained quite clearly, in the *Primacy of Perception* (pp. 126-141), how this realization works. Lacan got it wrong but Merleau got it right. And my research on inner speech was off to an early start. In other words I was aware of my interior conversation, both the I and me poles, from an early age, and this made for a continued awareness of my inner world.

Although born a Roman Catholic, much later I became intensely religious for a period of time. This peaked in college when I began to engage in about an hour of meditation, more or less following Ignatius's Spiritual Exercises, every day.

Part of this program was to monitor your consciousness to find any wrong doing. This required you to pay attention to the intentions or purposes of your actions, including watching the inner speech that preceded and accompanied your actions.

A related inward-turning task was in making sure you did not sin in your thoughts. The most flagrant way of doing

this was in sexual fantasies, but you could also engage in other sinful fantasies, such as those of anger or pride.

But the central relation to inner speech in this program was simply in talking to God. Whether there is a God or not, if you think you are talking to God, you are engaging in a sort of inner speech. God is a "visitor" to your mind, and this person occupies the niche of Peirce's "you".

After I got married, got my Ph.D. and had six children my life started getting complicated from the big family. I was basically a guy who lived in his mind, but my long-suffering wife of the time and my six highly energetic children had their own ideas about this.

My main intellectual interest was in Marx, Weber and the future of capitalism – all classic macro questions. But in the meantime my real life was proceeding at the extremely micro level of the six kids. So at some point I decided to shift gears and start thinking about micro issues – about things that might help me understand the problems of my kids and how to be a better father.

For me this was a turn to child development, to how the mind works and to possible emotional problems. Being a sociologist, I initially turned to George Herbert Mead. But I also started reading the classics of psychiatry. This brought me to the psychological apparatus within which inner speech proceeds. When I was doing this in the 1970s there was a lot of comparing of Mead on the one hand and ethnomethodology on the other. So I began reading Cicourel, Garfinkel and the ethnomethodological texts.

At some point I interviewed Garfinkel about where he got his ideas, and it was clear that some form of phenomenology was in his background. This turned me to Husserl and the phenomenological method, which seems to me to be a specialized variety of introspection or self observation.

I wrote a paper on Mead and child development ("From Me to We to I") in

1979. Then, in the eighties I began putting together these intellectual streams: Mead, the ethnomethodologists, phenomenology and, as the decade wore on, Charles Saunders Peirce. Eugene Halton was starting to compare Mead's and Peirce's theories of the self. At about the same time, the mid-eighties, James Hoopes was also doing this. And again at about the same time, Vincent Colapietro was clarifying Peirce's theory of the self, including his version of inner speech.

Previously in sociology only Mead's I-me scheme was available for a theory of inner speech. When Hoopes, Halton and Colapietro started putting together Mead and Peirce, the theory of inner speech began to grow. This was before Vygotsky and Bakhtin were added to the mix, but at the time the Peirce-Mead combination was big news.

I gave my first paper on inner speech at a conference in 1989. It leaned heavily on the three scholars I just mentioned, though I think it included some original points about Mead and Peirce on inner speech.

I should add that an important personal influence on my scholarship has been a highly successful, 25 year marriage with my second wife, Christine Chambers. Before this there was a 15 year relationship, so we've been in love for 40 years. A close relationship like this gives you a second consciousness, including inner speech, to explore.

Finally there are the tricks of the trade. I am constantly watching my thought processes, both as thinker and as observer. It's a double vision.

When I see something unusual I whip out my pen and 3x5 white cards and start taking notes. Sometimes I have to back-trail laboriously to find out how a particular insight originated. The precipitating and the fructifying mental experiences are sometimes different (and several minutes apart). I think emotion is the clue. If I feel a lot of emotion about something that enters my mind, I get into high gear and try to figure out what is happening. This often pays off with an insight.

So this story is one of bouncing back and forth from everyday life to the intellectual life. A kind of dialectic. As I get older (76 now) I keep inventing new tricks to exploit my situation.

Norbert Wiley

Obituary: Charles Tilly (1929-2008)

Charles Tilly, the "founding father of 21st Century sociology"¹ died on April 29, 2008 at the age of 78 after a long bout with lymphoma. Tilly was the author of 51 books – including a dozen in the last five years of his life – and more than 600 articles. Along with the large legacy of written work, Tilly leaves behind hundreds of former students and thousands of colleagues who have benefited from his incisive, and always timely, criticism, reconstructions, and ideas for further research. At Columbia University, where he ended his career, he was on 101 dissertation defense committees in just eleven years. He also taught at many other universities in the USA, was visiting professor in many European institutions, and fellow of many research institutes. For forty years, he led workshops on political and historical sociology, which were renowned as a proving ground for new research projects among graduate students and established faculty members, alike. In all these institutional arenas, Tilly implemented an ethos of broad participation, multiple substantive topics, theoretical and methodological openness, and, above all, rigorous critique.

Tilly's contributions to the social sciences were impressive. He was one of the principal founders of the field of historical sociology, with his landmark inaugural book, *The Vendée*, about the counter-revolution in France, and among the main progenitors of contemporary studies of

¹ Adam Ashforth, quoted in "Charles Tilly Remembered" www.iserp.columbia.edu/publications/press_releases/charles_tilly_remembered.html.

“state formation”, and of what he called “contentious politics”, or those political practices that span social movements to revolutions, that occur outside of – but intersect with – the sanctioned political processes of established states. He also did substantial work on sociological methodology and comparative social history, urban sociology, social inequality, the sociology of work, social epistemology, democracy, identity, and narrative. Tying these together was a developing “relational” perspective on social life that was firmly grounded in empirical research, and in learning from the research of others.

During the first portion of his career, Tilly was mainly a structuralist – he sought to find the ways in which large scale social processes such as urbanization, class formation, and administrative and military centralization affected the ways in which ordinary people lived and organized their political lives. By the late 1970s, he began what would become a deepening turn toward relationalism. Relational sociology is rooted in a network approach to social structure, one that focuses on the dynamics of social connections instead of the putative essences of social beings, individual or collective. Although this relational approach led Tilly to argue against both the undersocialized actors of rational choice theory, and the oversocialized explanations of macro-structuralisms (such as modernization theory, system theory, or “classical Marxism”), he also would recognize the partial validity of these approaches when they were creatively used to advance useful explanations of social processes.

While arguing against these forms of explanation and theorizing, Tilly was a champion for “getting the context right,” and showing the ways in which particular kinds of social interactions gained

significance and power in and among social settings of different scales. As a historian, Tilly was always able to understand the particularities and contingencies determining the diversity of ways by which human beings were able to create social life. As a social scientist, he advanced generalizations and observed similarities in forms of social life in diverse settings. In a single seminar session, he was capable of drawing together problems in papers – and suggesting further reading – on topics as different as sixteenth-century Dutch maritime policy and late-nineteenth-century reforms in the Brazilian criminal code. Tilly’s vast store of historical knowledge meant that he could compare relentlessly and find links among such phenomena, but also make more provocative links between, for example, state-formation and organized crime.

This focus on explanation and generalization did not prevent Tilly from recognizing that our accounts are always rudimentary forms of putting into words more complex, and maybe incommensurable, aspects of social life. In the end, explanations and generalizations are only narratives about social life. He argued, for example, that stories were one strategy for giving accounts of social phenomena, and that they worked in particular ways that set them apart from conventions, codes, and technical accounts. Like Goffman, Tilly saw explanation as an inherently *social* process, one in which relations impinge on, but are also constituted by the claims people make *to each other, about the world*. That people most often do not meet on equal terms, and that their relations are structured by histories of hierarchy, norms of domination and deference, and a host of other inequalities, makes the selection and mutual intelligibility of stories, conventions, codes, and technical explanations subject to the kind of genre conventions or “repertoires” Tilly

had long ago studied in the context of social protest.

What Tilly's relationalism offers, then, is a materialist answer to the kind of contingency and indeterminacy that marks post-structuralism. He saw contingency and indeterminacy everywhere, but for Tilly, this was never due to the infinite possibilities of the human imagination, but issued instead from the combination of the fairly limited ways in which people in a given time and place, given a set of established, institutionalized routines, relate to each other. For example, in his work on politics and on inequality, Tilly became convinced that changing relations among people and among groups could be described by a limited – if still broad – set of “mechanisms”, or regular patterns of interaction that spanned contexts and concatenated into various larger “processes” such as durable inequalities among groups, identity formation, or shifting the scale of political activity. In the end, Tilly's perspective on theory – much as his perspective on politics – emphasized the relations of people acting in the world. Theory ought to respond to the world, and not just to other theorists' theories; good theory is not the product of a great mind, but of engagement with the world. Tilly would likely have credited his sociological contributions not to his cleverness or natural insight, but rather to his indefatigable work habits, and the generosity that led him to engage every student's work, and every colleague's work seriously. Thus, he showed by his example, not just how to teach, but how to learn.

*John Krinsky
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Message from the Chairs

We are now just a few short weeks away from our RC16 interim conference in Pusan, South Korea. The local organizing committee headed by Seung-Kuk Kim has done a superb job of organizing accommodation, locating venues and providing some recreational activities. The three day event has a very full schedule with participants from around the globe. There will be three plenary sessions:

1. ‘Multiple Modernities’. This evaluates the validity and scope of this increasingly popular concept, looking at its relationship to both development theory and to post-colonial theory.
2. ‘Global Civil Society’. Here we are concerned with the possibilities for transnational solidarity, for nationally specific varieties of civil society, and for exploring the overlap of any global civil society with diasporas and cosmopolitanisms.
3. ‘Technology and the Information Society’. The theme here is technologically mediated communication at a distance and its political and cultural implications.

Other sessions are concerned with democracy, social order, collective memory, narrative, interpersonal ties and classical sociology. In the next edition of *Theory* there will be a comprehensive report on the debates we will be holding and issues that arise from these.

We wish you all a good summer if you are in the northern hemisphere and a happy winter if you are in the south.

Philip Smith and Fuyuki Kurasawa