

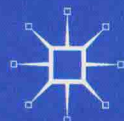
Edited by FRANÇOIS DÉPELTEAU
& CHRISTOPHER POWELL



APPLYING RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY

RELATIONS, NETWORKS, & SOCIETY

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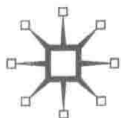


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Edited by François Dépelteau and
Christopher Powell



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APPLYING RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

FIGURES

1.1	The basic assumptions of modern, postmodern, and trans-modern sociologies	13
1.2	The basic scheme of the constitution of an actor's (A) social identity in trans-modern society (e = ego; a = alter)	13
1.3	The forms of social differentiation	18
2.1	Public signs of impossible love and hate: Failed attempts to draw a swastika	27
2.2	Public signs of impossible love and hate: A declaration of love—"Fuad Love OSNAT"	28
2.3	Relational spatiality: The socio-spatial configuration of Jewish-Arab mixed towns	32
2.4	Population movements in Jaffa (1948 to date)	35
2.5	Jewish attempts to reclaim the mixed city	40
5.1	Bourdieu's model of field space (After P. Bourdieu, <i>Distinction</i> , figures 5 and 6, pp. 128 and 129.)	108
5.2	Lewin's conception of hodological space (After K. Lewin, <i>Field Theory</i> , figures 43 and 44, pp. 256 and 257.) (a) Positive central force-field; (b) Negative central force-field	114
5.3	Mohr and Guerra-Pearson's model of field space. (After Mohr and Guerra-Pearson, "The duality of Niche and form," figures 1 and 2, pp. 332 and 338.)	123
6.1	Overview of the three disciplines: processes, valuation orders, and forms of uncertainty	143
6.2	The interplay between ambage, ambiguity, and contingency	149
8.1	Talcott Parsons's general system of action	189
9.1	Configurations of cliques by number of members and path length	221

TABLES

Appendix A.	Summary statistics	211
9.1	Correlation matrix of interpersonal relationship measures	214
9.2	Twelve independent OLS regression models of professional and social interactions at work	215
9.3	OLS regression models of professional and social interactions at work using all 12 interpersonal network characteristics in each model	216
9.4	Eigenvalues from the principal components factor analysis	217
9.5	Factor loadings of the dyadic network characteristics	218
9.6	OLS regression models of professional and social interactions at work using all three latent constructs of interpersonal network characteristics in each model	222

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Osmo Kivinen has done his PhD in sociology and is a professor of sociology of education at the University of Turku, Finland. He is also director of the Research Unit for the Sociology of Education (RUSE) and of the Research Laboratory of Strategic Action (RoSA). His list of publications contains more than 300 titles. His research areas not only cover sociology and the entire field of education, but also extend to working life and to the field of high technology. A philosophical and methodological focus is American classical pragmatism and its further developments, for instance, methodological relationalism; also productivity analyses of research belongs to his recent interests.

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John W. Mohr (PhD, Yale University) is a professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the director of the UCSB Social Science Survey Research Center. He has been applying relational sociology to the study of institutional discourse systems for a long while. An important focus of Mohr's work has been the study of institutional articulations as duality structures (e.g., with Vincent Duquenne in "The Duality of Culture and Practice," with Francesca Guerra-Pearson in "The Duality of Niche and Form," and with Ronald Breiger in "Institutional Logics from the Aggregation of Organizational Networks"). Another focus has been theorizing the measurement of meaning (e.g., in "Measuring Meaning Structures," with Harrison White in "How to Model an

institution,” with Craig Rawlings in “Four Ways to Measure Culture,” and with Robin Wagner-Pacifici, Ronald Breiger, and Petko Bogdanov in “Graphing the Grammar of Motives in U.S. National Security Strategies”). Finally, in a new paper with Roger Friedland, Henk Roose, and Paolo Gardinali, “An Institutional Logic for Love,” Mohr and his colleagues are using MCA methods to measure how institutional logics operate in intimate life.

Daniel Monterescu is an assistant professor of urban anthropology and director of the PhD Program at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at the Central European University in Budapest. He received his PhD in anthropology at the University of Chicago and is a recipient of the Marie Curie Fellowship at the European University Institute, Florence. His main research projects analyze the Jewish revival movement in Central European cities as well as ethnic relations in binational (mixed) towns in Israel/Palestine as part of a larger project on identity, sociality, and gender relations in Mediterranean Cities. He currently also studies wine cultures in Hungary, Italy, and Israel through the concepts of terroir and territory. His previous projects include the construction of Arab masculinity and the narration of life stories in Jaffa. His publications feature articles in *Public Culture*, *Constellations*, *Identities*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, and *World Development* and contributions to numerous edited volumes in English, Arabic, and Hebrew. He is the author of *Twilight Nationalism: Tales of Traitorous Identities*—a study of autobiographical narratives of elderly Palestinians and Jews in Jaffa (with Haim Hazan, Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 2011) and editor (with Dan Rabinowitz) of *Mixed Cities, Trapped Communities: Historical Narratives, Spatial Dynamics and Gender Relations in Jewish-Arab Mixed Towns in Israel/Palestine* (Ashgate Publishing, 2007). His monograph *Gentrifying the Bride of Palestine* on Jewish-Arab relations in Jaffa is forthcoming with Indiana University Press.

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Harrison C. White, who holds a PhD in Theoretical Physics from the MIT and a PhD in Sociology from Princeton University, is the Giddings Professor of Sociology at Columbia University, New York. He is well known for his work on social network analysis and the structure of production markets (*Markets from Networks*, Princeton University Press, 2002). He has recently published (in 2008) a massive rewrite and extension of his book *Identity and Control* (first published 1992).

INTRODUCTION

François Dépelteau and Christopher Powell

Many individuals are attracted by two social worldviews when they see themselves as social animals. The voluntaristic thinkers see human beings as autonomous individuals who are basically driven by their own personal properties and forces. The deterministic ones perceive individuals as being surrounded by external, constraining, or enabling social entities ("the society," "the system," social structures, etc.) that determine their opportunities throughout their life. These two worldviews have also been the background ontological assumptions of many important theories in sociology.

The basic goal of relational sociology is to challenge these background assumptions. Sociologically speaking, it means that most relational sociologists reject the ideas that individuals are isolated and driven only or even mostly by internal properties, or that social phenomena are "social things," meaning external and constraining or enabling forces that impose themselves on individual and collective actors. With the exception of deterministic relational sociology, texts in relational sociology usually start with a condemnation of objectivism and subjectivism or determinism and voluntarism.¹ Relational sociology is an invitation to challenge social phenomena, to think in terms of fluid social processes rather than isolated individuals or external and solid social structures. Relational sociology tends to affirm or show that so-called social structures, societies, or institutions are relations between social actors. Like the former prime minister of Great Britain but for very different reasons, some relational sociologists even claim that "there is no such a thing as a society" (which would exist outside the individuals).

These ontological assumptions have epistemological consequences. Overall, sooner or later, in one way or another, relational sociology leads to observation of concrete and specific relations between

social actors, more than observations of relations between variables for instance. For relational sociologists, “figurations,” “fields,” “networks,” or “social worlds” are made and reconstructed by relations between actors. And these dynamic processes take various forms. The universe of observation of relational sociologists is limited only by the imagination of human beings as co-producers of social processes. In other words, this universe is quasi-unlimited. Relational sociologists can study small and ephemeral networks like marijuana smokers, “meso” processes such as social movements, or vast processes such as the economic globalization. Furthermore, the approaches or theories used by relational sociologists are diversified and more or less similar or even compatible. Actor-network-theory, the figurational approach of Elias, social network analysis, the late Bourdieu’s work, the formalism of G. Simmel, some texts of Marx or Durkheim, (neo)Weberian approaches, critical realism, symbolic interactionism, and many other social scientists, theories, or approaches have been associated with relational sociology. Relational sociology also draws on varied influences from philosophy and the natural scientists: Cassirer, Dewey, Einstein, Merleau-Ponthy, and Whitehead, among others.

For now, relational sociology is something like a patchwork of knowledge about social relations that are seen as dynamic, fluid processes. But as this book shows, these dispersed relational studies reveal some basic and interesting characteristics of our social universe. Relational analysis might not necessarily or always lead to surprising discoveries, but it can help to highlight some key features of our social life with more efficiency than other approaches in social sciences. Relational sociology does not reveal new continents, but it does oblige us to rethink our background assumptions about the social worlds in which we live. In this sense, relational analysis is always “conceptual” since it involves a re-casting of the basic terms of our perception, and always “applied” since it invites us to use different modes of perception and orientation in this world. Some relational texts are just a little bit more “applied” than others in that they focus on specific fields of transaction (such as family, social movements, or globalization), or because they put emphasis on specific conceptual and methodological issues. It is these kinds of papers, comparatively applied but still also rigorously and innovatively theoretical, that make up the contents of this volume.

The first chapter is written by one of the first sociologists to use the label relational sociology in the 1980s. Donati follows the principle that it is all about relations. In short, by using some of the basic concepts of M. Archer and relying on his own work, P. Donati

presents the processes of globalization as being made by “the morphostasis/morphogenesis of social relations.” The “morphogenesis of relations,” for instance, “is not seen as the result of the morphogenesis of its individual components, but depends on the possibility of differentiation of social relations in their own right—that is as emergent phenomena with their own distinctive generative mechanisms.”² In this relational logic, globalization cannot be seen as the cause of social changes: it is an effect of the “generative mechanisms” that produce “a relational order of reality.”

By focusing on “smaller”—but still complex—relations, relational sociology can also be a powerful destroyer of simple myths or ideologies. In the second chapter, D. Monterescu proposes an ethnographic and historical research centered in Jaffa, where he posits mixed towns as a political and theoretical challenge to the hegemonic ethno-nationalist guiding principles of the Israeli state, which fails to maintain homogeneous, segregated, and ethnically stable spaces. This failure, Monterescu argues, results in the parallel existence of heteronomous spaces in these towns, which operate through multiple and often contradictory logics of space, class, and nation. Analyzed relationally, these spaces produce peculiar forms of quotidian social relations between Palestinians and Israelis, enacting circumstantial coalitions and local identities that challenge both Palestinian and Jewish nationalisms. Overcoming the limitations of methodological nationalism, which can only describe such spaces as historical anomalies, this chapter outlines the contours of a dialectic theory of socio-spatial relations in contested cities.

In Chapter 3, Kaspersen and Gabriel start with the opposition made by Emirbayer between substantialism and relational sociology, and then identify some problems of relational sociology, such as the identification of the limits of the figurations we study. The authors defend the thesis that the works of N. Elias can help us resolve some of these problems, but not all of them. Kaspersen and Gabriel insist on the importance of the Eliasian concept of “survival unit.” Again, Elias is not presented as a perfect solution. In fact, the authors argue that “by introducing other German thinkers such as G. W. F. Hegel and C. von Clausewitz and incorporating some of their concepts into Elias’s perspective a step toward a stronger relational sociology can be developed.”

In Chapter 4, Kivinen and Piironen develop arguments for the combination of their own “methodological relationalism” “with a pragmatist (Deweyan) theory of action and a (Darwinian) concept of evolutionary niches, aiming to promote the understanding of human

transaction mechanisms in their context." Kivinen and Piironen take their distance from Emirbayer and other relational sociologists who establish the need for relational sociology on ontological challenges. Their "methodological relationism" rejects any need for one social ontology. They see relational research as being "problem driven": "There is no reason why the commencement of any empirical inquiry should require one first to formulate a metaphysical conception of the ultimate nature of its objects." Following Dewey, they also propose one form of pragmatism based on "organism—environment transactions," which reject any form of dualism one can find in other relational theories. They advocate as well for the adoption of a Darwinian conception of niches in order to discover social mechanisms.

In Chapter 5, John Mohr deals with one of the most important contemporary sociologists one can transact with: P. Bourdieu. As Mohr reminds us, in his late work Bourdieu associated his theory with relational sociology. This association makes sense since Bourdieu rejected "substantialism," which he identified with positivism. As Mohr wrote in an unpublished abstract of his chapter, Bourdieu's "theorization of relationism is both sophisticated and far-reaching and it provides the foundation for many of his theoretical constructs." However, "Bourdieu's actual research practice tends to come up short, often reflecting the same sort of linear methodological presuppositions which he has otherwise so eloquently dismissed." The critique of Mohr is inspired from the American network analytic tradition, and he insists on "two different elements of Bourdieu's work, his research on cultural capital and his work on the analysis of institutional fields."

By seeing social phenomena as fluid social processes rather than solid "social things," relational sociologists present the social universe as being particularly dynamic rather than being static. The next chapter by White, Godart, and Thiemann offers a good example of this type of perspective. "Identities," they say, seek control in uncertain environments. Relying on an analytical distinction between "networks of relations" and "networks of meanings," the authors argue that "turning points" happen when the "space of possibles" change for each identities—"i.e. when at least one of the different forms of uncertainty increases or decreases, giving the opportunity to identities to modify their strategies or gamings." In fact, White, Godart, and Thiemann distinguish three forms of uncertainties: "Ambage is the uncertainty referring to social relations and ambiguity the uncertainty referring to meanings. Both relate to stochastic environments through contingency, the third type of uncertainty."

Typically, in Chapter 7, Fontdevila and White place relational sociology in between individualism and holism. They also see relations as being fluid and dynamic. Citing White's landmark work *Identity and Control*, they reassert that the world is made of "complex striations, long strings repeating as in a polymer goo, or in a mineral before it hardens." In this chapter, they argue that reflexivity and language are crucial dimensions of relations in the contemporary world. But these relations are not always consensual. The "language's reflexive and indexical dimensions" are fueled by inequalities and lead to "various types of control and power mechanisms." Once again, the authors insist on the complexity of relations and how actors try to deal with contingencies in reflexive and dynamic ways.

Then, in Chapter 8, J. Fuhse insists on the "interweaving of network relations and culture." For him, this should be the main concern of relational sociology. In this sense, we should keep in mind in our relational analysis that "social structures are always symbolic constructions of expectations and thus filled with 'culture.'" Fuhse provides some basic theoretical principles leading to the methodological integration of qualitative and quantitative methods for research in social relationships. He discusses "alternative conceptions of the basic building blocks of networks like actors, relations, and connections." Then, he "sketches a communication theoretical account of how social structures (like social relationships) emerge in the process of communication." He also "offers a theoretical account of social relationships as bundles of expectation between two actors, or as relational definitions of the situation." The notion of relational frame is also "introduced to denote the cultural models used in relationships to establish interpersonal expectations." Finally, "the relation between relational frames, the construction of identity, and network structure is discussed."

In the final chapter, the most methodological one of the book, Heather Price raises some methodological issues related to the measurement of social relationships. This text on "How to Parsimoniously Use Dyadic Measures as Independent Variables" reflects the undeniable progress made by network analysts, especially the structural analysts, in terms of developing techniques allowing the mapping of social relations between individuals and groups. It also identifies some methodological limits for this type of analysis. Indeed, after noticing that most of the efficient methods measure the popularity of actors in networks, Price mobilizes network survey data collected from Indianapolis charter school staff members, and discusses methodological issues such as "multicollinearity, the PCF findings, and the

resulting latent measures that surface from the PCF procedure,” “identifying persons in an organization who seek out information,” “who others go to for help,” and “who involve themselves with diverse others.”

This volume has a companion, titled *Conceptualizing Relational Sociology: Ontological and Theoretical Issues*. The distinction between *Conceptualizing Relational Sociology* and the current volume, *Applying Relational Sociology*, is one of emphasis and nuance rather than topic, as the chapters in both volumes address conceptual issues, and both are oriented to applicability in sociological research and in our everyday perceptions. Nevertheless, the chapters in *Conceptualizing Relational Sociology* have a slightly different flavor than those in this volume. Contributions by S. Redshaw, K. Fish, C. McFarlane, D. Kasper, C. Tsekeris, and C. Thorpe all address the intersections or interconnections between relational sociology and one or another body of sociological theory or social critique. These contributions connect relational sociology with feminist thought, Marxism, animal rights, Elias, and Bourdieu. Contributions by N. Crossley, M. Archer, F. Dépelteau, and C. Powell speak directly to question of how, precisely, we conceptualize social relations. If relational sociology is centered on social relations, then the question “what are social relations?” has far-reaching implications. This volume concludes with a brief essay by M. Emirbayer on the historical importance of relational sociology “as fighting words”; this essay is both a reflection on the past and a call to arms for the future. We hope that readers who find the contributions in this volume exciting will be drawn to seek out its companion.

NOTES

1. See Dépelteau, F. “What Is the Direction of the ‘Relational Turn?’” in *Conceptualizing Relational Sociology: Ontological and Theoretical Issues*, (eds.) C. Powell and F. Dépelteau (New York: Palgrave) (2013).
2. The citations in this introduction come from the chapters published in this book, except for the presentation of the chapter of J. Mohr.