

Network Stories and Institutions from *Identity and Control*¹

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Harrison C. White

Department of Sociology, Columbia University

Frédéric C. Godart

Department of Sociology, Columbia University

Abstract

Identities arise through control efforts to mitigate uncertainty from other identities as well as from the biophysical environment. Meanings—verbalized or not—surface from intermittent switchings across socio-cultural phases known as netdoms (network-domains). A story concatenates meanings within that horizon of possibilities, within a public as socio-cultural space. While stories provide the interpretive, networks supply the social texture for identities.

Further compounds of stories—other discursive formations—can be mobilized for action (narratives) or to frame social time (story-lines and plots). These discursive formations inscribe institutions within larger publics—they inscribe larger socio-cultural patterns that reproduce in practices through habitus.

While structure and culture often are proclaimed dual and co-constitutive dimensions of social life—interdependent yet autonomous—this paper specifies a processual approach taking the dynamic of identity and control as starting point. A further level of dynamic, denoted style, then helps resolve the so-called micro-macro gap.

Keywords: institutions, meaning, netdoms, stories, styles, switching.

¹ This paper compiles and expands ideas developed from *Identity and Control* (White, 1992; White, et. al. Forthcoming), and more specifically from this newer version, to appear in May 2008 from Princeton University Press, and also as translated into French by Michel Grossetti and Frédéric Godart. A very early version of this paper was also published in *Sociologica* (online journal published in Italy by Il Mulino). We thank Corinne Kirchner, Marco Santoro and Matthias Thiemann for their insightful comments and suggestions.

INTRODUCTION

In an influential article, Mustafa Emirbayer and Jeff Goodwin spell out what constitutes for them the limits of any approach based on “social networks”: “Our own position is that a truly synthetic account of social processes and transformations that takes into consideration not only structural but also cultural and discursive factors will necessarily entail a fuller conception of social action than has been provided thus far by network analysts.” (1994, p. 1447). Exploring and conceptualizing the relationship between social structure and culture is certainly a major object of inquiry for social theory (e.g., Swidler 2001). Yet, such a goal requires at the same time considering simultaneously multiple social formations of different scopes, scales, and levels (White 1992; White Forthcoming).

The complexity and dynamics of culture are intertwined with the dynamics and complexity of structure, as reflected in discursive formations. This article does not aim at solving the social structure / culture conundrum, but rather at disentangling some of its subtleties, by specifying an array of discursive formations together with their dynamic relationship with structural entities. Culture and structure are constituted by participants and observers alike and each can provide useful guidance for both action and research. But our lived experience is one of mixture of culture and structure.

An *identity* is triggered only out of efforts at *control* amid contingencies and contentions in interaction. Identities thus emerge from efforts at control in turbulent context. These control efforts need not have anything to do with coercion or domination over other identities, for the root of control is finding footing in both the biophysical and social environments. Such footing is a position that entails a stance, which brings orientation in relation to other identities. The control efforts by one identity become social realities for other identities.

So an identity can be perceived by others as having an unproblematic continuity in social footing, even though it is adding through its contentions with others to the contingencies they face. Thus, social contexts assert normality that is at odds with the improvisations and stumblings in direct experience. News broadcasts then imply that everyday life is not newsworthy. Perceived normality is a gloss on the reality of tumultuous efforts at control by identities as they seek to maintain footings (White 1995).

Identities achieve social footing as both a source and a destination of communications to which identities attribute *meaning*. Consequently, without footing, identities would jump around without meaning in a social space and thus without communication. Niklas Luhmann (1995, chapter 2) lays out a subtle yet precise argument for meaning emerging in co-constitution of communication among identities.

Gaining control supposes a stable standpoint for orientation. Identity becomes a point of reference from which information can be processed and evaluated. Footings thus must be reflexive; they supply an angle for perceptions along with orientation and assessments that guide interaction with other identities, to yield control. So all these processes among identities in their footings can be understood only as an inextricable intermixture of social with cultural spreads, out of which meanings are constructed jointly.

Discursive formations are composed of meanings as basic components, akin to “statements” (“*énoncés*”) (Foucault 1970; 1972) or “utterances” (Bakhtin 1986). *Events*—that is to say, *switchings* in surroundings—guide identities seeking control over uncertainty and thus over fellow identities. In other words, uncertainty and contingency originating from physical and social settings trigger control attempts that lead identities to act across and among network-domains, *netdoms* for short, “dom” from domain of topics and “net” from network of relations. By doing so, identities generate specific meanings, along with discursive formations.

Identities relate to other identities within netdoms. Domains and networks vary in scope, above and below Bourdieu’s “field” (e.g., 1996a), Becker’s “world” (e.g., 1982) or Luhmann’s “system” (e.g., 1995). Identities switch from netdom to netdom, finding footings in different network-and-domain contexts. The fusion of network and domain is essential and it is a radical departure from common sense (Grabher 2006), in that we do not a priori separate social networks—the structure—from domains of topics—the culture—but instead consider them simultaneously.

Networks and domains emerge from out of netdoms that form the fabric of our lived experience in a context of uncertainty, contingency, and ambiguity. This is dual-sided habit, as one finds in Pierre Bourdieu’s construct of *habitus* as matrix for practices and representations (1996a; 1996b). But perception and representations comes only with and from contrast, as a process (Bourdieu 1977; Gibson 1979). In other words, it is the process of switching from

netdom to netdom that generates meanings, perception, and representations, not the netdom itself.

Relying on netdoms as primary elements from which networks and domains are derived takes seriously the invitation formulated by Ann Mische and Harrison White to dig beneath the idea that “network relations and discursive processes (...) are dual and co-constitutive, that networks are constituted by stories, and vice versa.” (1998, p. 695). “Structure” and “culture,” more specifically **“social networks” and “discursive formations,” are second-order processes which need to be accounted for from the dynamics of identity and control among netdoms.**

After tracing the emergence of stories from meanings, as byproducts of switchings among netdoms, we explore larger processes that constitute institutions. We show how narratives can be used to generate fresh action, in a context of story-lines, plots, and rhetorics. This context frames social time and organizes the froth of our lives, most vividly in emergent syncopations that we lay out as “styles.”

THE EMERGENCE OF MEANING

Social life is born from the turpitudes of identities—at any level, of any scope—seeking control. The search for control originates from a need for footing in a context of uncertainty, as defined by Knight (1921). Unlike risk, uncertainty is not a matter of insurance.

Uncertainty—in all its diversity—generates events and efforts by identities to cope with them through switchings. Switchings need not be random. The generation of meanings across identities happens through switchings of netdoms triggered by events, as summarized in figure 1:

—Figure 1 about here—

So meanings come from switchings of identities among netdoms. The contrast between netdoms is what creates perception and sustains meanings. For example, the meanings of “business” and “academia” co-emerge from business practitioners and academics constantly switching between business and academic netdoms, often with consultants as mediators. But this specific switching between two netdoms does not exhaust the meaning of business or academia;

indefinite switchings among other netdoms—such as art or politics—create additional meanings that pertain to the perception of business and academia.

Similarly, perceptions and representations of war, of the battlefield experience, are extremely hard to communicate to whoever has not actually been through it. Movies try to create a meaning of war for all of us through the constant switching between netdoms of peace (family, prewar flashbacks, military trainings etc) and netdoms of fighting. Think about how the horror of war is represented in Clint Eastwood's *Flags of our Fathers* (2006), through the back and forth switchings between violent fighting on Iwo Jima and the peaceful (though highly conflictual) experiences of soldiers back at home, touring the United States to support the war effort. Perceptions and representations of war and peace are coconstituted in movies, and elsewhere. Meaning is construed through contrast and tension.

Stories Link Meanings in Publics

Meanings then cumulate into *stories*, which become a medium for the deployment of identities and control efforts. A story is an accumulation of switchings across netdoms that exhibits a beginning, middle, and end (Tilly, 2002); stories constitute the texture of living culture. An academic switching back and forth between business and academia can tell stories of these switchings in which meanings generated elsewhere—about money and the “ivory tower”—are mobilized. A story is sketched in Figure 2 as a network among meanings:

—*Figure 2 about here*—

A space, a horizon of virtual meanings, of allowable expectations frames such story: call this framing a *public*. A public is the stage for situations arising out of events, where, in the words of linguist John Shotter:

“joint action gives rise to a space that seems both to contain something and to be related to something other than or beyond itself, such that its inhabitants find themselves in a *given* situation, but one that has a *horizon* and is open to their action...those within feel a need to be socially accountable.” (Shotter 1993, p. 161)

Time spent with stories, building and picking them up in gossip for example, suggests that they are crucial in social process. Subtle, real-time interactions have many facets, and these do not necessarily require verbal expression to be a story. Hand-holding is a nonverbal way of expressing a relation: it is simultaneously very personal and yet also manifestly public, visible to anyone around. As in the case of any verbal expression, the meaning of hand-holding depends on larger cultural contexts and can be manipulated or misunderstood.

The point is that there are whole classes of other nonverbal ways, such as glances and grunts, to express relations in stories. Meaning need not be verbalized (Barthes [1967] 1983). And conversely when a person strikes up a pleasant chat with a stranger at a bus stop, this does not necessarily constitute a story because such an encounter does not necessarily constitute a relation. But existing meanings are mobilized and generated through the encounter of netdoms.

And now take an opposite example. Even in present society, although you may not like or seek out your cousin, this person remains known socially as your cousin. Although you do not perceive a relation to this cousin, that person is embraced by cousinhood in social reference (e.g., Boyd 1991; Nadel 1957; White 1963). The only requisites are a domain context and a network context. Stories and relations of cousinhood exist and are mobilizable, simultaneously.

Stories, like meanings, are specific to humans. While some sort of social network may be uncovered for other social species besides humans, netdoms are found only among humans. One finds pecking orders and control struggles for wolves or monkeys for example (e.g., Wilson 1979; Wynne-Edwards 1985). These involve communication, but at a simple level that need not rise above the pheromone level of an ant society (Wilson 1970). This suggests that meaning and stories are what set human social action apart. Without stories, social action would have a monotone quality; there would not be all the “colors” that humans observe and use in social settings. And imbibing a formal story or film is so similar to imbibing “real life” that their authors and directors also, like gossipers in ordinary life, must have found effective shorthands for expressing identities and control in social relationships.

Stories in Sets

A relationship gets interpreted in stories both by its participants and by observers. How does this process come about? Identities perceive and invoke the likelihood of impacts from

other identities, which are seen to do the same. These relations get coded from raw reports into various shorthands of discourse and behavior. Then sets of signals, communications on topics, get transposed from one situation to another. Eventually these sets can settle down into stories along with other conventions.

Any particular story by itself would quickly get so far out of step with the ongoing situation as to be unusable. Rules of thumb, which often appear in packages (Simon 1945), are one form of conventions for a network. Rules of thumb are widely transposable across concrete social contexts and across frames of interpretation. Rules of thumb applied *here* affect the application of rules of thumb *there*, or their application here at other times. They are transmitted and vouched for along strings of interconnection in a network. A language makes them available in idioms and formulae. Rules of thumb can supply the story set for a network.

Everyday life, which is full of contradictions, has trained us and supplies us with convenient *sets of stories* or *storysets* which delimit and are delimited by domains of meaning. Figure 3 represents typical storysets for an arbitrary number of stories:

—*Figure 3 about here*—

At any given time, we have learned to apply just one of the sets, and suppress memories of the switchings and changes that at other times we use and embroider to get along. Much of social science has been an auxiliary to this provision of sets of stories sufficient to account for almost anything we find—but only by suitable ex post selection of one rather than another story.

Stories can and do conceal projects of control: they can work as ideologies, but only via the actual process of explaining away things, if they happen, so that power need not be exerted. Failures too require accompanying stories. Every identity continually seeks control to maintain itself, and in that struggle breaks, as well as establishes, relations with other such identities. Both the tensions and their overcoming induce stories and may require sets of stories to characterize relations within a network.

Social networks are rooted in the reflexive nature of language in talk and as enhanced by the three *g*'s of semiotics: glance, gesture, and grunt. From this base can grow sophisticated realizations of solidarity, from what Doreian and Fararo (1998) formulate as “ideational” and “relational” aspects.

Moreover, the cast of characters should be expanded to include objects. Relations of various youths to a snappy roadster are indispensable to capturing the network dynamics in John Badham's movie, *Saturday Night Fever* (1977). So were the relations of the hero in the same movie (played by John Travolta) to a routine job and to the tailoring of his sparkling new suit. Similarly, science fiction movies illustrate how science and technology form social networks, domains, and their switchings: in Andrew Niccol's *Gattaca* (1997), genetic engineering defines social stratification, in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), non-human identities take human shape. The proponents of Actor-Network Theory have developed the insight about objects in a call for recasting theory of social networks (e.g., Latour 1987).

Yet it may be that a whole set of sets of stories proves necessary to sustain the metabolism of a single general network, such as of acquaintance. Participants may induce and call on a broad array of excuses and disclaimers and allowances that legitimate and keep viable a network of acquaintanceship.

In sum, story-making provides identities with interpretive contexts, publics. These transitory contexts are fuelled by the "sparks" of network switchings, meanings. A set of stories—or storyset—denotes the specific texture of a domain of meaning, but need not be organized in any particular way. A particular set of stories comes to be associated with the network we observers cumulate across intermittent network switchings in specified domain. For example, consider the duet of excuses between husband and wife across late work and tardiness in meeting up with each other.

INSTITUTIONS AND STYLES GUIDE SOCIAL FORMATIONS

Switchings come to follow larger socio-cultural patterns, which need not be attributed to biophysical regularities. We call *institutions* these social regularities and they eventuate in a wide variety of social formations. Institutions thus can be seen as "marblings" across the neutral publics in which stories formed initially; so over time publics get striated by institutions and their accompanying rhetorics. One can distinguish sorts of publics according to the institutions commonly found there, as for example ceremonial assembly versus subway (White 1995, p. 1052).

Going to an appointment is an institution, sustained by a *rhetoric* of promptness. In social science usage, there are several connotations for the term institution: the broad architecture of

functional areas (e.g., education, the arts, health, business as institutions); a special kind of organization infused by values (Selznick 1952; 1955); any social routine of behavior, such as a handshake; and so on. None of these alternatives is hostile to the usage of the concept in this article. Institutions and rhetorics are akin to networks and stories, in that spaces of possibilities for the ordinary in life, of what will be taken for granted, derive from each pair. Rhetorics make institutions explicit just as stories make networks relations explicit. An *institutional system* shepherds social processes by channeling them, by configuring institutions through rhetorics in a way that proves self-sustaining. Within each system, stories become mutually shared accounts when they muster through publics into rhetorics and, simultaneously, rhetorics play out through stories.

Styles

Surely, however, such expositions through cross-section typologies are not sufficient to explain social formations. There must be dynamics, which require self-reproducing forms of socio-cultural energy, require self-sustaining initiatives. Disjunctions and chaos play roles too, after all, and wholly new levels of action and actor emerge. Even our full monograph (White Forthcoming) can only sketch these further reaches, but here we do introduce the central new construct needed.

Meaning horizons need not be limited within netdoms and we now turn to a larger analogue to switching, to another scope of multiplicity and multiplexity in meaning. Meaning establishes itself in consort with horizon, and these changes of horizon can be as much a matter of rhythm as of interdigitation, in which these changes become intertwined spreads in social time and space. Such *syncopated complexity* occurs only through reproducing itself as an integral *sensibility* in first-order observation. For ease of reference, and in deference to their distinction as sensibilities, We refer to syncopated complexities as *styles*. Countless styles can be observed in ongoing social systems, in all sorts of scopes and distributions, over time and space and themes, most memorably in Mardi Gras and Carnival, which are recurrent though brief. A style is in many ways a precursor of identity, not only a follower. And institution can be the carapace left from enactments of styles.

In a style, time is of the essence. An example of style could be for a fashion designer for example to always choose the same colors, fabrics, or patterns, or variations of a given set of

colors, fabrics or patterns. A style is deployed through time, but can be recognized in non-temporal manifestations. A given clothing item may display a certain design or look that can be analyzed as the expression of a style.

On a larger scale, the joint action of women in the United States over many decades came to constitute a style sufficiently potent to change institutions, laws, and organizations (Nelson 2004; Skocpol 1992). Emergence historically of novel style of commercial process has been demonstrated for medieval Genoa by Van Doosselaere (2006) and for the British East India Company by Erikson and Bearman (2006). Indeed social formations are as much a matter of style as of institution.

Forms, Ideal-Types, and Formations

Without *social formations*, social life would literally be “a tale told by an idiot, Full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing” (Shakespeare, *Macbeth*). Social formations organize social life and enable the production, protection, and accumulation of meaning.

The concept of social formation must be distinguished from two similar concepts: “ideal type” defined by Max Weber (1968) and “social form” defined by Georg Simmel (1971). For Max Weber, an ideal type is derived from observation. It is created by the analyst in order to understand the world; it is a second-order construct derived from first-order phenomena. “Capitalism” is an ideal type, it does not exist as a thing but help organize our perceptions .

For Georg Simmel, a social form has an existence of its own, like Plato’s “ideas” that exist in a pure form beyond our material world. For example, “fashion” is such a social form; it exists—mixed in the material world with other social forms—and is invariable in its proprieties through history (Simmel [1904] 1957).

Whereas a social formation in our sense is co-constructed by analysts and participants. It is historically constituted but can be durable. It is the result of a process and also the process itself. It is more than a mere abstraction because it constitutes the stuff of our lives. It appears at one point in history and can vanish. It is also stuff for culture.

Culture

How do various meanings, stories, or storysets constitute culture? High and popular cultures (e.g., Gans, 1974) in the sense of museums, libraries, and soap operas are not central

here, even if they can provide suitable examples for discussion. The focus is living culture, of which high and popular cultures are subsets; living culture is a process recognized in societal institutions and practices as by-products, but also co-constitutors, of social process and formations at all levels.

Culture emerges from all sorts of stories, from the simplest line heard on the playground, through unexpected adverse situations in contemporary urban settings. Stories are invoked, without hesitation, endlessly. Culture is institutionalized as context through the interplay of stories. Culture is constituted by “webs of significance” (Geertz 1973, p. 5) spun by identities. But this web of significances is also a web of relations, not too “wayward” for formalization and experimentation.

Left to play by themselves indoors, young children often take on roles—mommy, doctor, nurse, cowboy, or teacher. Developmental psychology attests to and elaborates this common knowledge. And sociolinguist Keith Sawyer (1992) has specified the discourse pragmatics that he observed over a year of observation. One can conclude that from an early age, kids are made aware of more complex forms and higher levels of social process, over which they try to acquire some mastery. Their play is the beginning of the sophistication in transposition that everyone needs just to participate as a “normal” adult. Sophistication, however, is not the same as analytic awareness—such constant awareness indeed would induce stumbling instead of normality.

Accidents offer a different prism. Unlike children’s play, they are not pretend switchings. In a city, an accident often evokes an emergency team and ambulance. The injured person experiences a sudden switch from netdom to netdom and then a continuing succession of switches. Whether in Paris or New York, though, the situation will unfold according to much the same script from culture, inducing interlocking role behavior along networks.

We can see that culture grows with institutions as they sift stories into sets and relations into networks, and conversely as situations described in story and network reshape, redeposit institutions: now turn to elaborate some of the discursive mechanisms.

COMPLEX DISCURSIVE FORMATIONS

Meanings through switchings among netdoms aggregate into stories in harmony with institutions. Likewise, stories spin out into various discursive formations. Given multiple stories available for ex post explanation, accountings are accepted whether or not the series of events

would seem explicable to an outside observer. But this is possible only because story-lines organize the perceptions.

Story-Lines Order Events

Story-lines are explanation spread over time in time-frames, they gather events and give them a coherent structure. Story-lines come at least in a pair as they offer alternative accounts for change and constitute the fabric of social time. This is an accounting that does not itself lead to further shake-up of the events and actors already generated out of preceding mismatches. The pair (or more) that make up a story-line in some given context cover all possible outcomes, thus expressing the logic of the narrative genre in literature (Scholes and Kellogg 1966).

The time-frames are social times, which are constructed out of the application of story-lines. Hence, these times are multiple and not necessarily consistent. Social time interweaves *ex ante* and *ex post* in ways that may not be available to the awareness of many or any of the conscious persons or other actors continually being regenerated in ongoing social patterns. Social time consists as much in switchbacks and other nonlinearities as it does in any linear sequence. Story-lines accommodate these irregularities of social time (Ricoeur 1988). Story-lines can also be seen as rational expectations, in the modern phrase (Hechter 1987; Muth 1959), but only in a limited sense. Social time is as much a by-product as a shaper of social pattern, just as social space is a self-consistent field. Therefore, social times are by-products of story-lines. But physical aspects of the realities of work also contribute to shape time and to shape population.

A number of contending identities use story-lines which survive in a matrix of contending control projects. There must be some correspondence between stories and the facts in physical space, and also the facts as may be seen by an observer in social space, but stories depend on each other as much as they depend on any other facts. So story-lines end up as a set from which is picked a parsimonious account that is consistent with control projects being pushed. Whatever comes to pass, and thus whatever process can be conceived, must be describable after the fact in terms of the story-lines.

The accounting of process and events is constrained by story-lines. Ambiguity is, then, the slippage between examples that have been articulated into a given story-line. This means that there are multiple descriptions available as plausible descriptions of process. Stories are paths both to the frames for, and to the by-products of, multiple levels of control. Each by-product is

itself a resultant trace from interspersed movements of decoupling, playing off embeddings. Story-lines are devices accounting for this confusion, before and after the fact; they do so as decouplers. Then there can be further slippage between articulations by different story-sets, when two or more are invoked as elements in a larger codification, a framing.

Story-lines intertwine structuralist with individualist viewpoints; they do so as decouplers. Randall Collins's (1987) concept of ritual interaction chains appears to be similar to story-lines. The story-lines approach also seems analogous to an approach taken on a much broader scale by Berman (1983): for him, realities are dealt with in terms of parallel discourses of statute law, natural law, the common law, local customary law, merchant law, Roman law, equity, and so on.

Identities come from mismatches in contingencies and so perceive and try to control turbulence. An identity must have multiple possibilities from a story-line available so as to be able, *ex post*, to give accounts of whatever in fact is happening concretely. The constituent stories from a story-line must be shared.

Positions and Plots

A story-line is analogous to a path in a network; it is in a way an expansion of the path in words. Each *position* generates at least one recurring path in a story-line as part of its continuing reproduction across distinct identities. Sets of stories become partitioned into story-lines able to accommodate whatever occurs with that position, in the reality of a stochastic, fluid context.

Indexing of one role by other coincident roles is what yields position. In a given Greek city-state, for example, the citizen may be a member of the assembly, who is head of a family, who is a soldier. In another, citizen may be a resident of the locality who participates in an economy. Decoupling is presupposed and must be enacted to make possible this identification of several identities as one position with several roles in distinct network populations. Story-lines build up out of such constrained stories.

Location of a particular identity requires tracing how that identity came to embed in and be interlocked where it is. Position, therefore, gets elaborated into a historical statement. Position correlates with story-line, but requires several story-lines because of the reality of fluid, stochastic context.

A *plot* decouples events in one role frame from events in other frames. Dually, events serve to decouple plots. Story-lines are the material for plots and plots are the material for story-lines, as exemplified in figure 4:

—Figure 4 about here—

Plots deal in stock characters and scenes so that they can be transposed from one story-line to another. The combination of stock elements into a plot gives it an inner side that can furnish accoutrements for melding identities into further level as career. A story-line is a résumé, a post-rationalization of a necessarily chaotic social trajectory. A plot is a career track defined by an organization. For example, the plot of US academia is—after the completion of a PhD—the succession of an assistant professor position, followed by tenure and the coveted positions of associate professor and professor. Many story-lines can revolve around this plot, bringing some turpitudes around the perfectness of the ideal career track.

To see persons, or organizations, chatting back and forth in everyday life is to see one primitive sort of plotting in operation. This is the framing of picaresque stories, stories about the concrete particulars of happenstance in a population, such that all actors stay within a stereotyped format. This is also stereotyped content, which would be for us, in today's society, variously dealing with sports or children or discs as actors in the skits.

One speaks of a plot when certain occasions always trigger one story-line from some given set of story-lines. Plot is built from a given set of story-lines. Plot accommodates positions, and yet plot can be transposed across a larger fluid context.

For example, movie-goers know the conventions in cowboy movies, constituting a major part of an “art world” in the sense of Becker (1982). The conventions work by relying on stereotyped positions for actors, call them positions or niches: greedy rancher, corrupt sheriff, heroic knight-errant, beleaguered family, and the like. Plots pertain to a high level of generality. Take for example *The Seven Samurai* (*Shichinin no samurai*) by Akira Kurosawa (1954) and *The Magnificent Seven* by John Sturges (1960). The two films have the same plot, the latter being a remake of the former: an oppressed village hires seven mercenaries to help them fight against bandits. They are very similar, sharing many dialogue lines. However, beyond the differences in cultural and historical contexts, the unfolding of events differs; for example, while in the

American movie, one of the mercenaries stays in the village after winning the battle, this is not the case in the Japanese movie. The two movies have the same plot, and two different storylines.

Stories can be understood by identities who are not themselves active in the convention and are also consumed by them. When mobilized, meanings, stories, or rhetorics form narratives that enable identities to “get action.”

Rhetorics and Narratives

Like identities, stories and rhetorics can be mobilized to achieve some goal (White, Godart and Corona 2007). Sets of stories highlight the universality of stories and enable the deployment of strategies. *Narratives* are used in the process of mobilization, as a tool to convince allies and thwart adverse control attempts. However, even the most strategized narratives depend—for their failure or success—on social time framed by story-lines and plots. For example, in consulting, telling a narrative of success to a client requires an organizational rhetoric of excellence among the consultants in order to load the narrative with credibility (Alvesson and Robertson 2006). This rhetoric of excellence itself would not be sustainable without the plot of a demanding career track and the different actual careers developed around this career track.

Rhetoric for person invokes the biographical sense of identity. This is identity as career, and it is this concept of person as career that channels switchings and thereby also creates person as style. “Practices” intervene in these dynamics.

Practices are usually implicit and capture how humans individually relate to their bodies and biophysical environment. They are also social habits, similar to Bourdieu’s *habitus*, not captured in explicit institution. Observers, whether within the given system or not, have their own practices: they develop pragmatics to construe meaning and action.

Whether an institution is explicit or implicit, practices are the vehicles for enacting and reproducing it. Take an example. The monarch as an institution depends on practices that have become so routinized that they are protocols: bows and other ways of addressing the monarch. Rhetorics such as those associated with etiquette provide guidance for participation in institutions that also helps to build them through persistent switchings. Rules of circulation during promenades at the Versailles court of the French monarchy are an example.

DISCUSSION

Culture as an institutional process thus is enacted by practices and sustained by rhetorics and through styles. Social science is no exception; research practices enact and reproduce professional rhetorics. Narratives of scientific revolutions sustain change. Social sciences are impregnated with existing culture.

Social Science

We can understand how it is that stories have become universal, how they communicate effectively across diverse hearers and audiences—including social science. Charles Tilly writes:

“Effective explanations require the peculiar combination of skepticism about the stories told with close attention to how stories work (...) Most of social life consists of interpersonal transactions whose consequences the participants can neither foresee nor control. Yet, after the fact, participants in complex social transactions seal them with stories (...) Identities are social arrangements reinforced by socially constructed and continuously renegotiated stories (...) we can *contextualize* stories, which means placing crucial stories in their nonstory contexts and seeing what social work they do.” (Tilly 2002, pp. x-xiv).

And from further on:

“Consider the place of standard stories in social construction. For reasons that lie deep in childhood learning, cultural immersion, or perhaps even the structure of human brains, people usually recount, analyze, judge, remember and reorganize social experiences as *standard stories* in which a small number of self-motivated entities interact within a constricted, contiguous time and space (...) Even if the individuals involved harbor other ideas, the embedding of stories in social networks seriously constrains interactions, hence collective actions of which people in those networks are capable (...) They recast events after the fact in standard story form.” (Tilly 2002, pp. 8-9).

Thus, fresh meaning emerges from and for humans only with switching from netdom to netdom. Much the same root idea was found long ago in sociological works by Harold Garfinkel (e.g., 1967), Aaron Cicourel (e.g., 1980; 1987; 1991), or Erving Goffman (e.g., 1963; 1967; 1971; 1974) and in linguistics by Halliday (e.g., 1994; and see also Halliday and Hasan 1976). Recently, it is again being championed by Diane Vaughan (2002) and Ann Mische (2007). An early parallel is *Personal Knowledge* (1958) in which Michael Polanyi argues that all knowing is an essentially tacit integration of subsidiary clues, *from* which we attend, into focal wholes, *to* which we attend.

The approach developed in this article takes netdom—a first order mixture of structure and culture that themselves are second order constructs—as a starting point. Social formations and forms of discourse made up of stories are derived from the dynamics of identity seeking control in and across netdoms. Switching is key because it is the mechanism that creates the “sparks” of interpretive contexts—meanings. We also engage the view of culture and structure as two interdependent yet autonomous systems, summarized by Sharon Hays in a trenchant account:

“I argue that social structure consists of *two* central, interconnected elements: systems of social relations and systems of meaning (...) While not reducible to systems of social relations, culture matches the other central structure of social life in its power, its patterning, its durability, and its collective and transcendent nature. If one wants to understand the resilient patterns that shape the behavior of any individual or group of individuals, *both* the cultural and the relational milieu must be taken into account.” (Hays 1994)

The separation of structure and culture is akin to the double “purification” process described by Bruno Latour ([1991] 1993). According to Latour, the two categories of nature and culture are the result of a first process of purification—in which the two categories as a whole are separated from the hybrid “networks” constituting the world as it is—and of a second process of purification in which culture and nature are seen as polar opposites. Similarly, culture and structure are constituted out of netdoms by observers and analysts:

“Domains and networks are but abstractions, mutual analytic abstractions from the sociocultural goop of human life. Networks catch up especially the cross-sectional patterns of connections and resonance in interaction. Domains catch up especially the meanings and interpretations which are the phenomenology of process as talk.” (White 1995, p. 1038).

Hence, if the lived experience of identities is made of netdoms, the two categories of structure and culture exist and shape interpretive contexts—and in this way belong to culture as categories of perception. In the snakeskin-shedding view of culture, social formation must at any given time have a carapace, which, however, is outgrown and drops off as a new one comes into place. Museums and libraries collect and shelter the snakeskins. But surely a culture should be seen as a continuously interacting population of discursive formations made up of stories articulated within some social formation.

In Swidler’s terms (1986), culture is made up of practices that generate stories. One can view culture as an array of discursive formations that set the interpretive contexts for all social actions so that it can be computed as an envelope from them, as well as shaped by them. Effective practices to that end have evolved that precede, preface, and anticipate social sciences.

Kinship was the first social science. All the paradoxes and difficulties are there, in various peoples’ own native constructions of their kinship edifices, constructions in formats that mix observation with analysis and with proclamation (Spencer and Gillen 1927). Only a few of these formats have proved able to sustain and reproduce themselves. This first science was lost for a while. Its phenomena are too close and too involving to encourage recognition of abstract similarities in cultural content. It may well be the only preexisting and discoverable social science.

Social scientists may see challenges to their authority from ordinary persons, but only with respect to the phenomenology of everyday life, which most social scientists would concede to them anyway. Yet, even this can confound and obfuscate research. “Networks” are the outstanding example today. Managers, movie stars, consultants, social workers, journalists—they all agree on the importance of networks, and the plethora of social networking websites sustains the fad. Since sources that diverse all urge the advantages of “networking” as social process, the

term must confound many interpretations, and thus it confounds much social science fieldwork attempting to use network terms and concepts.

But, one may object, these laypersons use common sense, so their joint endeavors surely cannot confound codified scientific results regarding more recondite aspects of social organization. Since the laypersons are no status threat, surely they cannot be besting scientists! However, the “laity” includes the jurists or the bankers, all sorts of groups and persons preeminent over social scientists within existing social stratification. And sometimes, perhaps, the preeminence exists because their professions’ and professional insights are superior, especially for the aspects in which they specialize, whether or not a parallel specialty science, a political science or an economics, is split off. Whatever the outcome of any such particular argument, the very discussion concedes the basic point, since the discussion is, literally, in lay terms. Getting action from social science or otherwise has culture for basis.

Getting Action

Any changes must originate from countering the inertia endemic in social organization, that is, change comes from fresh action curing blockage. Action is fresh when it overcomes the inherent lethargy of social life; intervention happens in rhetorics which tend to block fresh action. Rhetorics elaborate and sustain meanings through reenactments. Getting action thus has to take account of meanings, and to rely upon them; but the principal task is to stay ahead of and strip away meaning. Hence, getting action becomes a higher-order project.

Actual social orders and cultures are much messier and more interesting than are particular rhetorics, or embeddings of rhetorics into Utopian schematics. But even Utopian schematics do capture aspects of how actors try to perceive their social context, and these schematics do so across a wide range of historical contexts. Berman (1983) has argued an extreme form of this view, in his sweeping canvas of the evolution of legal systems for the whole Western world since the emergence of the papacy. The point is that continual reshaping of meanings to maintain the semblance of coherence in social action requires explicit and reliable interconnections between the framing of sets of stories and the structure of institutions. It is these mappings that make rhetoric possible.

Conscious and proclaimed cultures are sets of rhetorics that encapsulate attempts, often inept, at regularizing social spaces from the perspective of different populations and institutions.

Hegemony (Keohane 1984; Williams 1977) reflects the success of a family of such attempts that exhibits some coordination and expertise in an autochthonous theory. The stochastic mode of perception, analysis, and reality is omnipresent just because of the feebleness of culture's hold on the patchy social realities that erect and re-erect themselves upon continuing biosocial realities. Hegemony nonetheless testifies to the importance of some order being imposed: the transposable order that is supplied by basic sets of story-lines that can account for whatever happens. Social science theories are recent attempts at hegemony.

CONCLUSION

Networks and domains are construed from netdoms which constitute the texture of our lived experience. Identities seeking control generate meanings through their switchings among netdoms. Meanings—verbalized or not—coagulate and form stories, which in turn constitute sets of stories made available for further control efforts and ensuring the universality of narratives as mobilization for action.

Story-lines and plots organize the social time that guides identities in their control efforts. Institutions and rhetorics crystallize culture for all sorts of publics. Culture is made of these discursive formations and of the practices that yield them. This is the basis for social science and the generation of fresh action.

The task of social science is to construe boundaries and environments. All analytical sciences work from boundaries: boundary conditions are preeminent. Social analysis is peculiar only in that it must seek out the generation of its own spaces as part of the environment. Since the spaces are plural—and irregular, temporary, and ill-connected to boot—the boundaries are difficult to find, subtler than in other sciences.

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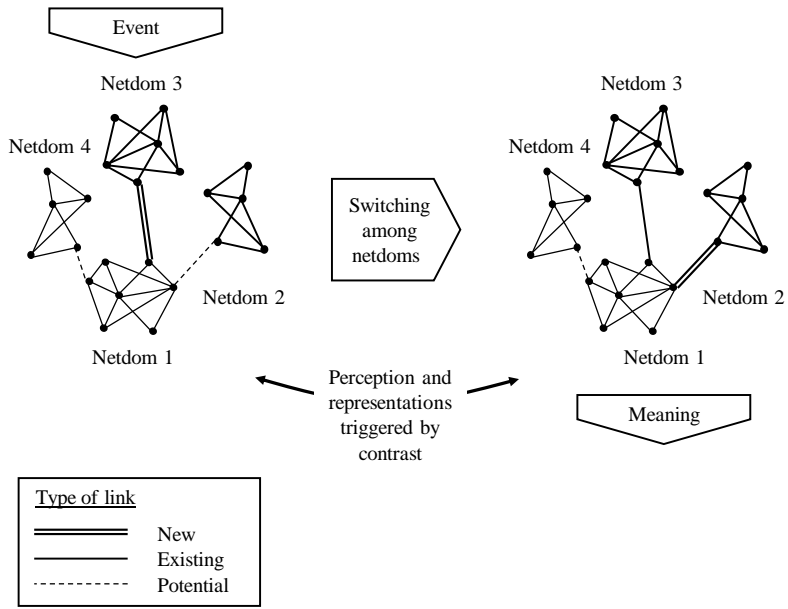


Figure 1: The emergence of meaning through switching of netdoms

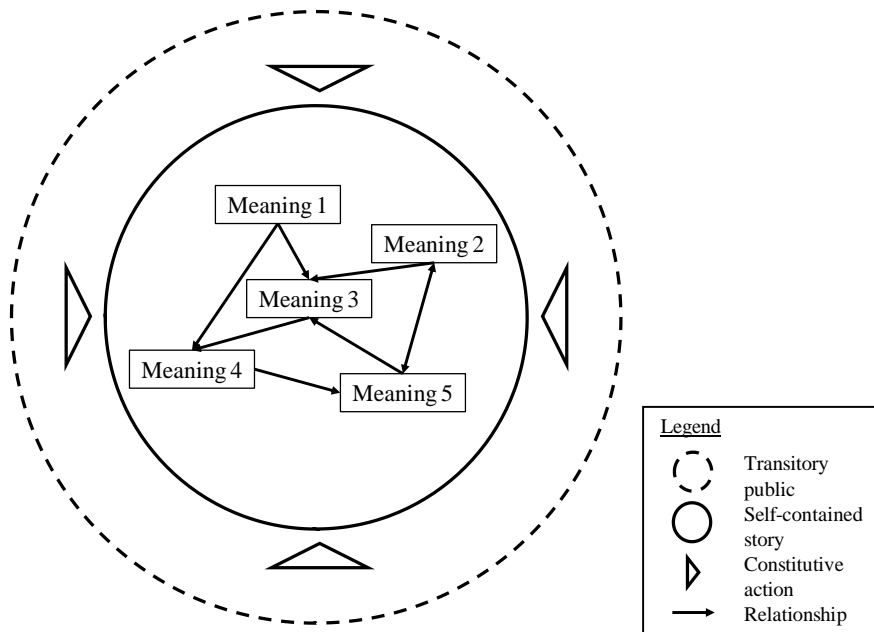


Figure 2: Stories as self-contained networks of meanings constituted by transitory publics

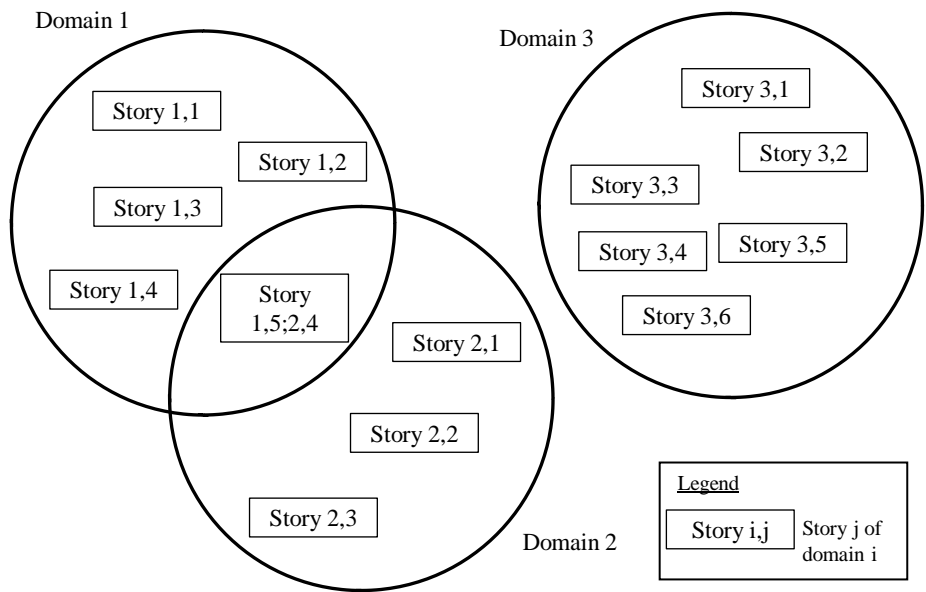


Figure 3: A storyset is an ensemble of stories delimited by a domain of meaning

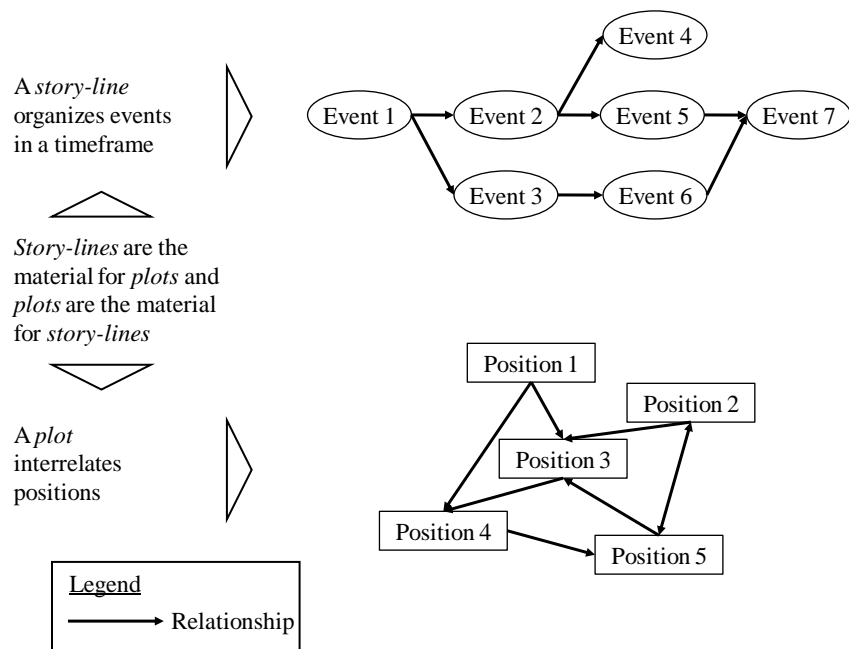


Figure 4: Story-lines and plots