Structure, Agency and the Sociology of Education: Rescuing analytical dualism

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ABSTRACT *Theorising the interplay of structure and agency is the quintessential focus of sociological endeavour. This paper aims to be part of that continuing endeavour, arguing for a stratified social ontology, where structure and agency are held to be irreducible to each other and causally efficacious, yet necessarily interdependent. It thus aims not to be part of that on-going journey in search of the 'ontological holy grail'. Instead, it offers a way of linking structure and agency which enables the practical education researcher concretely to examine their relative interplay over time. The methodological key to teasing out their relative interplay is held to be analytical dualism. It will be argued that such a methodological device is precluded by Giddens' structuration theory.*

Introduction

At one level, it is a boring truism that sociologists of education are fundamentally engaged in the task of theorising, analysing and documenting objective social reality. Presumably there are not many who would wish to deny that education sociologists are in the job of dealing with matters social—working-class levels of attainment, the impact of race ideas upon curriculum content and delivery, issues surrounding teachers' professionalism—yet, at another level, what precisely constitutes the social is a hotly contested matter. Indeed, for some commentators the 'problem of structure and agency' remains firmly on the sociological agenda. As McFadden (1995, p. 295) recently observed, '… questions about agency and structure, particularly in education, are obviously not going away'. And for Abraham (1994, p. 239), at present there exists no practical resolution to the 'problem of structure and agency'. The purpose of this paper, however, is to argue that (a) attempts to overcome the structure/agency 'divide' have generically been misled by a laudable yet over-hasty concern to avoid charges of reification and of philosophical (Cartesian) dualism [1], which in turn has led to (b) a denial of social structure as possessing *sui generis* properties, i.e. emergent properties that are irreducible and causally efficacious vis-à-vis agency. Consequently, (c) methodological analysis of social reality is precluded, for social reality is unhelpfully held to be a mélange of individuals and their daily doings—structure is necessarily drawn upon but necessarily

has to be agentially 'instantiated', as Giddens puts it, enabling more than constraining, and ultimately inherently transformable at any point in time.

Concepts of 'instantiation', 'duality of structure' and 'discursive penetration' have an immediate and compelling attraction. Indeed, the attraction of structuration theory undoubtedly lies in its emphasis upon *human* agency—upon real flesh-and-blood human beings and their actions and accomplishments—rather than Durkheimian social facts or Marxist superstructural forces that determine, in puppet-like fashion, working-class kids to 'fail' and ever remain 'failures'. Instead of the dualism of mind and body transposed to structure and agency, we have the 'duality of structure'—namely one indissoluble amalgam. Structure and agency are not separate, disconnected entities like mind and body, nor indeed is structure akin to the powers and properties of a magnetic field, for how can the forces of nature reasonably be held to be operative in the social realm? Giddens is quite right to reject naturalistic analogies: the education system can hardly be thought of as a magnetic field, with children and teachers conceived as iron filings pushed and shoved by some over-bearing magnetic force (the government, local authority …) or as part of a living system, rather like the body's lungs which provide the body (e.g. the over-arching capitalist state) with its life-sustaining prerequisites. Such naturalistic or biologistic thinking would now be laughed out of sociological court. However, the rejection of naturalistic theorising led Giddens to enter the wrong theoretical door. In the sections that follow, it will be argued that another door existed, not simply as a convenient fire exit, but one whose key remained in the debilitating grip of the Cartesian legacy.

Structure and Agency: establishing the basis for analytical dualism

The Cartesian Legacy

Giddens writes that in structuration theory 'a range of dualisms or oppositions fundamental to other schools of social thought are reconceptualised as dualities. In particular, the dualism of the "individual" and "society" is reconceptualised as the duality of agency and structure' (1984, p. 162). Indeed, a few years later he remains tenacious in arguing that '(s)tructure and action *cannot* form a dualism, save from the point of view of situated actors, because each is constituted by and in a single "realm"—human activity' (1990, p. 299). There is one word here that has caused so much conceptual in-fighting and disarray, not only among social theorists but indeed among philosophers themselves. That word, of course, is dualism. Descartes' dualism of mind and body—of two completely separate entities that causally interact—has profoundly influenced work on the philosophy of mind. In fact, considerable time has been expended on eschewing his absolute division between the two. Yet the concomitant problem is precisely *how* to avoid a complete separation of mind and body without losing their ontological distinctiveness. In other words, clearly the two interact and are mutually influential yet are not free-floating nor so intertwined that examination of their respective powers and properties becomes *a priori* impossible. It is thus unsurprising that to Shilling:

> Probably the largest obstacle to the integration of macro- and micro-perspectives … is the dominant conceptions of structure and agency in educational research. Not only are the respective conceptions of structure and agency found in macro- and micro-level work deficient in their own right, they also contribute to an *unresolved dualism which has characterised the sociology of education*. (1992, p. 70; my emphasis)

There are two doors available to those who rightly wish to avoid the Cartesian legacy. The first door is structuration theory; the other door is analytical dualism (see Archer, 1982, 1995, 1996; Layder, 1985, 1997; Bhaskar 1993; Archer, 1997). If one were to measure the percentage of those sociologists who have entered the first door, one would readily find that the percentage would exceed three-quarters. The problem that has bedevilled attempts to link structure and agency/micro and macro/individual and society has been the enduring legacy of Cartesian dualism. Thus Giddens rightly berates, *inter alia*, structural Marxism for its conception of structure as wholly independent of agency. Here, we witness the Cartesian influence—namely the two separate entities of structure and agency. Structure, Giddens rightly argues, is never beyond agential grasp—'out there', ever-ready to swallow up agency like a giant societal vacuum cleaner. However, as many critics (Archer, 1982, 1995; Thompson, 1989; Layder, 1997; Archer, 1997) have pointed out, his 'duality of structure' provides no methodological springboard from which to theorise the relative weightings of structure and agency. This is because the only way out of the Cartesian impasse for Giddens was to squash together structure and agency into one tightly-constituted amalgam. The problem with this strategy is that it leaves the ontological referents of structure and agency (as with mind and body) indistinguishable. Ultimately, we are left with an unfortunate but ineluctable conflation of structure and agency (Archer, 1995).

   Such conflation is ineluctable since Giddens refuses to take on board an emergentist social ontology, where structure is held to be ever dependent upon agency but emergent from it, possessing irreducible causal powers and liabilities which differentially condition agential courses of action. One needs to return briefly to Descartes to show how one can employ analytical dualism to examine the relative interplay of body/agency and mind/structure. For Descartes, the mind and body are two separate substances. Logically, then, we can never come to an understanding of the genesis of the mind and of how the mind and body interact and modify the causal powers and liabilities of each other. An emergentist (or stratified) ontology, on the other hand, argues that the Cartesian dualism can be resolved by conceptualising the mind as emergent from the body—dependent upon, but irreducible to, that from which it emerged. Thus, conceptualising human agency as a causally and taxonomically irreducible mode of matter is not to posit a distinct substance 'mind' endowed with reasons for acting apart from the causal network, 'but to credit intentional embodied agency with distinct (emergent) causal powers *from the biological matter out of which agents were formed, on which they are capable of reacting back* …' (Bhaskar, 1993, p. 51). Thus, to Bhaskar, it is only

> on such a synchronic emergent causal powers materialism [that] … we can say [*contra* Cartesian dualism] that it is in virtue of our complex biological constitution that human agents have the power they do; while denying, against reductionism, that a power can be reduced to its material basis or condition of possibility any more than the acceleration of a car is the same as its engine. (ibid)

Contrary to Descartes, then, we are not dealing with an absolute division between mind and body—between two distinct substances—but with irreducible strata or levels of reality. One of the enduring fallacies to bedevil social theory has been the misconstrual of social structure as a level that is completely divorced from agency—hence the charge of reification, for structure *is* then held to be above-and-beyond agency, something that determines us, rather than something which we mould and are moulded by. But it is precisely that 'something' which remains frustratingly elusive in Giddens' structuration

theory. Such elusiveness is readily attributable to the malign ghost of Descartes and the laudable desire to eschew charges of reification. A further, related problem that accounts for Giddens' dismissal of any notion of structure as being more than 'rules and resources' is the notion of emergence itself. For Giddens, the examples proffered by realists to explicate structural emergent properties are untenable, precisely because of their anchorage in the natural sciences. Thus, while he would (presumably) not deny that water is irreducible to its constituents of hydrogen and oxygen, he would maintain that social structure is peopled and therefore cannot be theorised via chemical analogues. Yet the water analogue is invoked simply to show the similarity between the two in terms of their causal irreducibility, which exists solely in virtue of internal relations. The intention in invoking such entities as water is fundamentally not to anchor social structure in any form of natural analogue since, logically, the nature of any analogue precludes exact correspondence with its referent. The manifest difference here consists of the human constitution of social structure.

Structure: an emergent stratum of reality

For Shilling, the very mention of structure *qua* emergent stratum of social reality would no doubt send an immediate frisson down his theoretical back. He maintains that

> (e)ducational research is typically constructed as addressing either large-scale structural processes … or small-scale individual interaction patterns; the assumption being that social life itself exists on different levels. As well as being a false assumption, since individuals do not occupy different 'levels' of existence … splitting social life into hierarchical levels makes it difficult to conceptualise change as a dynamic process involving both structures and human agents. (1992, p. 70)

Shilling is right to insist upon the unhelpfulness of conceptualising social life in terms of *hierarchical* levels, since it necessarily implies the explanatory primacy of structure at the expense of human agency: it denies the very possibility of analysing the degrees of freedom that differentially-placed agents have within a concrete structural situation. However, given the indubitable fact that structure places limits on what teachers can do, surely structure has an ontological status apart from that of agency and can thus be properly conceptualised as an emergent level or stratum? The problem with Shilling's (and indeed Giddens') denial of emergence is that structure is effectively conflated with agency (Giddens, 1984); or reduced to agency, granted an epiphenomenal status at best (Shilling, 1992). We thus end up with agency being accorded an inordinate degree of interpretative freedom and the capacity to effect structural change as and when such change is desired. Thus to Shilling, '(c)hange is an ever-present possibility; a view which takes us away from deterministic views of the history of education and the education–society relationship' (1992, p. 80). Moreover, social positions are held to embody a number of expected practices 'which, *if* carried out by their incumbents, can help reproduce the structural principles which characterise a social system' (p. 81).

   Shilling's rejection of determinism has regrettably led to the other, equally untenable extreme of voluntarism. If change were an ever-present possibility, then explicating why the majority of teachers teach, why the majority of pupils turn up everyday and learn, and why the Conservative government was able to steamroller through the National Curriculum remains an impossibility. Here we reach Giddens' impasse: on the one hand, structure is by its very nature not some separate, naturalistic force propelling agents in

their day-to-day social activities; but on the other hand, how do we account for the routinised, patterned behaviour that so characterises the education system? The educational system contextually limits what can be done, by whom, where and when. One particular problem is that Shilling, like Giddens, wants to reconceptualise agency as quintessentially being able to 'do otherwise'. But if one accepts, for instance, the obdurate reality of those capitalist economies currently afflicted by crisis, then those job-seekers who are unable to find a position within the employment structure cannot 'do otherwise' (at least within the law, which carries its own constraints). In reconceptualising agency as being able to do otherwise, Giddens is effectively making the concept redundant, since practical sociology is no longer oriented towards pinpointing possibilities for structural change. Again, this is part and parcel of entering the wrong theoretical door, for stringent structural conditioning is fundamentally not deterministic, for pupils, like teachers, resist. Such resistance, however, carries a structured penalty—for teachers, in the form of disciplinary hearings and possible dismissal, and for pupils, the possibility of formal expulsion. Such structured penalties inhere within, and are only possible on the basis of, social relations (teacher–pupil/headteacher–teacher)—they do not inhere within the properties of the individuals concerned.

Hence, one can talk about the agential 'mediation' of structure because emergent structural properties only work through people, not in spite of people (the error of reification). For instance, last year I conducted a 5-month period of ethnographic work in a junior school that was held to have 'serious deficiencies' by an Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) inspection team (OFSTED, 1996, p. 4). Following the inspection, the local education authority (LEA), in conjunction with senior staff, devised an Action Plan that was designed to remedy such deficiencies, focusing on pupil differentiation and ways of improving relatively poor Standard Assessment Task (SAT) scores. The LEA advisors completed what was described by staff as an OFSTED-style inspection approximately 10 months subsequent to the OFSTED inspection. The OFSTED-style inspection was not anticipated by all staff. When I asked the deputy headteacher why she did not ask for clarification concerning inaccuracies in the advisors' report presented to the school's governing body, she replied that

> We don't actually receive the report. So you can't clarify anything … [The head] and I were given a report to read half an hour before the Governors got it … and we went through it and picked up about 6 different things I disagreed with and so did [the head]. And we then said well we want this changed and we want this changed. Then they read it to the Governors. The Governors then had to give their copies back in, so that these amendments could be made umm any that they agreed with so that we could disagree with the facts if they were wrong; *but we couldn't disagree with any judgements that were made* … (my emphasis).

The reply that neither herself nor the head could disagree with any of the LEA advisors' judgements constitutes a stringent constraint. In order to theorise the stringent constraint that the head and his deputy came up against, the notion of the ability to do otherwise has no explanatory purchase. Of course, the head and his deputy could walk away, but this would invoke a structured penalty. To maintain that agents can ever do otherwise entails a somewhat dubious psychological assumption, namely that agents will always be prepared to incur quite hefty costs, and that structure has no determinate influence—in this case, the impediment to challenging advisors' judgements of teaching ability. Analytical dualism does not, however, entail an implicit determinism, for both the head

and the deputy could exit the concrete structural situation at any point in time were they willing to pay the (career) price. But again, this would entail a rather dubious psychology, namely that structure does not have the determinacy to supply agents with reasons for maintaining, challenging or transforming the *status quo*.

Shilling's rejoinder here would be what precisely are the properties that so characterise such structured penalties if not 'rules and resources'? He might also be tempted to add that 'ontological security' provides the answer to the routinisation of social practices (1992, p. 83). This merely begs the question of how one then accounts for the distribution of resources in both the education system and society as a whole at any given point in time. Indeed, arriving at the workplace everyday because of an in-built need for 'ontological security' does not account for the prior existence of such structured work arrangements! (See Craib (1992) for a critique of Giddens' notion of 'ontological security'.) None the less, the principal deficiency with Giddens' equation of structure equals 'rules and resources' is the simple fact that such 'rules and resources' are only part of the story: they necessarily presuppose social structure. Shilling is too cavalier in his dismissal of the oft-repeated criticism that structuration theory is unable to account for how certain sets of rules and resources are more enduring than others and why some rules are easier to change than others. What is missing from the equation is the fact that such rules and resources are intimately implicated in emergent relational properties. The 'rule' (or obligation) that certain individual actors fulfil the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum only makes sense relationally, i.e. such a rule presupposes a teacher, a group of pupils, central Government, etc. The requirements and obligations that pertain to a particular role necessarily have autonomy from role-incumbents. It is this autonomy that validates the notion of structure as irreducible and causally efficacious, since it remains despite a turnover of occupants. However, before fleshing out the notion of emergence, Giddens' rejection of emergent properties needs to be discussed in order to highlight the fact that a stratified social ontology does not entail that emergent, causally-efficacious social strata be equated with disconnected Cartesian 'substances'.

As already mentioned, Giddens' exposition of structuration theory can be a frustrating read. There is much in structuration theory with which many sociologists would agree, such as the need to avoid reifying structure, reducing subjects to objects of structural 'forces', denying the agential capacity for 'discursive penetration' of social reality. Indeed, Giddens rightly draws upon Durkheim in claiming that societies both pre-exist and post-date the lives of the individuals who reproduce them in their activities. Many would not dispute that, to paraphrase Marx, we are all born into a socio-cultural context which is not of our making. But it is precisely that irreducible enduring something into which we are all born that provides us with the warrant to accord structure an ontological status, apart from the human agency that created it. The 'duality of structure', however, unhelpfully compacts structure and agency into one indistinguishable entity. This is, of course, the age-old conundrum that Giddens quite rightly has difficulty in coming to terms with; and such difficulty is exacerbated by the lurking ghost of Descartes. Giddens is deeply resistant to the notion of 'emergent properties' held to be constitutive of social structure. He quotes Durkheim, who remarked that:

> The hardness of bronze lies neither in the copper, nor in the tin, nor in the lead which have been used to form it, which are all soft and malleable bodies. The hardness arises from the mixing of them. The liquidity of water, its sustaining and other properties, are not in the two gases of which it is composed, but in the complex substance which they form by coming together.

> Let us apply this principle to sociology. If, as is granted to us, this synthesis *sui generis*, which constitutes every society, gives rise to new phenomena, different from those which occur in consciousness in isolation, one is forced to admit that these specific facts reside in the society itself that produced them and not in its parts—namely its members. (Giddens, 1984, p. 171)

Arguably, the key word here, that Giddens would have immediately baulked at, is 'substance'. In other words, the notion is that social structure is some sort of Cartesian 'substance', divorced from human agency like tin is from copper. Giddens argues that the above quotation has been particularly persuasive but is none the less fundamentally flawed, for

> … human actors, as recognizable 'competent agents', do not exist in separation from one another as copper, tin and lead do. They do not come together *ex nihilo* to form a new entity by their fusion or association. Durkheim here confuses a hypothetical conception of individuals in a state of nature … and real processes of social reproduction. (1984, pp. 171–172)

It is worth pausing to examine closely Durkheim's quotation, for the notion of emergent properties still confuses some of those who remain committed to Giddens' ontological propositions vis-à-vis social reality (see, for example, Manicas, 1997, p. 210). One of the initial problems encountered by those predisposed towards Giddens' structuration theory is the misplaced assumption that social reality *is* like natural reality, i.e. self-subsistent, or indeed, 'hard' like tin or copper. But this merely brings us back to the age-old conundrum of sociology—how to link structure and agency. It is a tempting *non sequitur* to assume that a stratified social ontology entails that structure is somehow self-subsistent, ready and waiting 'out there' for us to do as we like with it, but this is not so. Giddens' selective focus on copper and tin is instructive; water has powers and properties distinct from its constituents, but none the less would not exist without them, despite having irreducible properties. This is exactly what an emergentist social ontology entails: the necessary interdependence and irreducibility of strata—from the level of agency to the level of the school and, ultimately, to the level of the educational system as a whole. Each level possesses relative autonomy, whose relative causal efficacy cannot be decided *a priori*.

A stratified social ontology is readily discernible in the approach of Pollard (1982) to classroom coping strategies. Shilling takes Pollard to task for not adhering to the conflationary premises of structuration theory (1992, p. 84). Although Pollard writes that he aims to produce a model in terms of Giddens' 'duality of structure' (1982, p. 22), his opening remark that his intention in focusing on the genesis of classroom coping strategies is to link, rather than conflate, macro and micro factors is sufficient to dispel any long-lasting attachment to structuration theory. Indeed, Pollard nicely extends Hargreaves' (1978) analysis which, Pollard argues, over-accentuates macro factors and constraints on teacher action. Instead of viewing structure as above-and-beyond teachers' generic control, he sees structure as something which is processually mediated by teachers 'on the ground' and thus considers the situationally-specific perspectives, goals and interests of actors within schools. His extension of Hargreaves consists of his recognition of the school itself as ontologically distinct from the actors who fill its positions. Essentially, Pollard provides a more stratified approach, since Hargreaves only deals with two irreducible levels of reality—the macro context and what teachers and pupils do—whereas Pollard more clearly distinguishes between the macro context (education system, Government policy), the school (internal and necessary relations

between roles) and the actors who fill the latter positions. Indeed, it is precisely in virtue of his adoption of a relational social ontology that Pollard can talk of the vested interests of teachers and pupils alike:

> Largely because of their differences in structural position the power resources and interests of teachers and children are different in many ways and in a great many respects they must be seen as being in conflict. However, a problem which they share is that they both have to 'cope with' and accomplish their daily classroom lives. (1982, p. 22)

Pollard's paper on 'coping strategies' highlights the non-puppet-like manner in which teachers and children mediate the structural context in which they work. As Pollard rightly notes, both have objective interests in carrying out the historically-specific requirements of their respective roles. The objective nature of such interests is, to reiterate, only possible in virtue of a relational social ontology. A teacher has interests in making sure that pupils succeed at SAT examinations, behave well in class, complete homework, etc. Such interests not only presuppose pupils but are irreducible to the properties of teachers *qua* individuals. Indubitably individual properties can, and indeed do, affect the ways in which teachers personalise their roles—why some teachers are fair-minded, funny or downright ogre-like. But role-requirements must none the less be met and thus have a relative independence of role-incumbents. The latter would be taken by Shilling as redolent of an incipient determinism—that requirements must be met. But as I have already indicated, analytical dualism does not entail determinism. The structural position of teacher has to be mediated by its incumbent; and the reasons for mediating such role-requirements are grounded in both intra- and extra-school inter-dependent social relations. In other words, not fulfilling the role-requirements may result in dismissal. This, in turn, would render the dismissed teacher ineligible for unemployment benefit for a specified period of time. Moreover, the dismissed teacher may be unaware of the structured ineligibility of dismissed employees to claim unemployment benefit [2]. Thus the nature of, *inter alia*, the benefits system constitutes a good reason for executing one's duties as a teacher.

Similarly, the analysis by Gillborn (1994) of micro-political struggle evinces the necessity of analytical dualism. In this ethnographic case study, Gillborn emphasises the utility of ethnography in documenting power: '(e)thnography has a key role to play if we are to understand the processes of change and resistance more fully' (1994, p. 162). Gillborn does not venture down the Foucauldian 'power-is-everywhere' path and, instead, rightly recognises that power is not solely a property of agency but is also a property of structure. His account of the way in which a previously 'progressive' comprehensive deals with national policy reform explicitly focuses on agential mediation of levels of social reality and, indeed, highlights the stringent macro constraints embodied in the 1988 Education Reform Act, which played a major role in deciding the fate of the establishment of an integrated teaching and planning structure.

However, the structurationist's rejoinder here would be: how, then, does one account for emergent structures being they way they are? This serves only to confuse matters, for while it is necessarily contingent that certain social structures exist, such structures are grounded in relations of internal necessity. The defining feature of an emergent structural property is its internal relationality. This is what Durkheim meant when he compared the liquidity of water to society, for the properties and powers of society cannot be reduced to individuals; this applies equally to water. We would not explain the power of water to extinguish fire by deriving it from the powers of its constituents, for oxygen and

hydrogen are highly inflammable (Sayer, 1992, p. 119). Furthermore, the fact that structures are the way they are at any given time must not tempt us into futile regression. Since structure is relatively enduring and ontologically distinct from agency, it *can* be synchronically dissected. However, for those who accept the indubitable reality of structure via the causal criterion but remain uneasy about the notion of ontological emergence, of structure as possessing *sui generis* causal efficacy, it is necessary to exorcise, once and for all, the ghost of Descartes. There is no sinister 'substance' pertaining to internal social relations. Human agency ever remains the sole efficient cause, but it does not follow that structure cannot have relative autonomy and causal efficacy. As Bhaskar remarked, the bread and butter of sociology is precisely

> the persistent relations between individuals (and groups), and with the relations between these relations (and between such relations and nature and the products of such relations). In the simplest case its subject-matter may be exemplified by such relations as between capitalist and worker, MP and constituent, student and teacher, husband and wife. Such relations are general and relatively enduring, but they do not involve collective or mass behaviour as such in the way in which a strike or a demonstration does ... (1989, pp. 28–29)

Thus, the individuals who teach, study, clean, repair, etc. in a university reproduce the university in their daily actions, yet are causally affected by that which they reproduce. Such causality resides in the relations of teacher/pupil, student/lecturer, cleaner/cleaning supervisor. These social relations are irreducible, for the powers and properties that pertain to individuals *qua* individuals are modified in fundamental ways. This modification arises from the combination of internally necessary relations, i.e. teacher presupposes pupil, lecturer presupposes student, governing body presupposes staff and students. The day-to-day behaviour of the individuals who fill the latter positions is structured in specific ways. A lecturer cannot give himself/herself an honours degree just as a student cannot revoke the decision of a degree classification board. Such powers do not reside in the properties of individuals *qua* individuals but in the social relations that simultaneously presuppose such individuals for their enduring efficacy. However, this is not to suggest that causal modification cannot arise from contingent or external relations. The teacher/pupil relation is an internal one precisely because a teacher would not be a teacher without the existence of a pupil. Relations may be symmetrically internal (bourgeoisie–proletariat); or asymmetrically internal (traffic warden–state); or external (passing motorist–police officer) (Bhaskar, 1989, p. 43).

The existence of equal opportunities officers in both the old and new universities is exemplary of an asymmetrical internal relation, for the position of equal opportunities officer necessarily presupposes the university—personnel, decision-making executive—but not vice versa. However much emergent structural power is 'devolved' to that particular role, it does not change the fact that the university's existence *qua* emergent structural entity does not depend upon the latter. This applies equally to the varying degrees of power that school governing bodies exercise. It is perfectly possible that schools could function effectively without a governing body; but a governing body could not function without a school. The analytical rigour that is inherent within an emergentist ontology is precisely the capacity to pinpoint possibilities for change. Rather truistically, there are contextual limits to change, but change is possible depending upon, *inter alia*, the mutability of the extant structure concerned. To take the university equal opportunities officer as an example. Hypothetically, a particular university may grant its

officer the power to investigate, in CID-like fashion, all complaints of sexual harassment. The officer in question may be asked to investigate a complaint against a lecturer who happens to be the person with whom he/she is having a relationship. Given that our hypothetical officer has near-untrammelled powers of investigation, it may be that the officer decides at the outset to deem the complaint has having no *prima facie* grounds for investigation. Here, we can talk about certain powers being exercised or unexercised, or exercised but unperceived. At one level, then, the officer exercised his/her power not to investigate, but other powers—such as the power to suspend—remained unexercised.

Structures continue to exist while their constituents undergo changes in attributes which are not relevant to their reproduction. As Sayer points out, 'the landlord–tenant structure can survive a continual turnover of members during which their age, race, religion, politics, occupations, etc. may change' (1992, p. 94). Here, Sayer is getting at the important point that structures can be said to be invariant under certain transformations. What he is also getting at is the autonomy of culture (see also Archer, 1995; Archer, 1997). Marriage *qua* structure is such by virtue of internally-related roles, namely those of husband and wife, and is not, *contra* Juckes & Barresi (1993, p. 204), constituted by the marriage certificate! Certainly, other emergent structural entities, such as the state and the Church, can combine to confront married couples with objectives penalties/inducements in times of considered (or actual) divorce (e.g. 2-year cooling-off period before divorce is legally granted). But certificates, ceremonies and 'stag nights' are cultural phenomena which serve to buttress marriage: they are contingent and thus external (Archer, 1997, p. 105). The continuing salience of gender within schools exemplifies the contingency of culture. Schools, for their existence, do not presuppose that boys and girls be treated differently or be held to possess differential levels of 'intelligence' and subsequently taught on that basis. The fact that pupils and teachers alike discriminate in varying and subtle ways enjoins an examination of ontologically-distinct levels of reality—namely structure, culture and agency. Teachers, in exercising their structural powers to 'push' boys towards certain subjects, often justify their actions ideologically. However, the manipulation of ideas is not mere structural window-dressing, for the agential take-up of ideas itself predisposes its takers towards specific courses of action [3]. As Bates & Peacock (1989) succinctly put it, '(w)e recognise that people who occupy positions in the structure of society have personal characteristics such as gender and race … This does not mean that social structure consists of gender or racial categories *as parts*' (p. 575; my emphasis).

Giddens and Structure: now you see it, now you don't

The distinctive properties and powers of structure warrants the employment of analytical dualism, not Cartesian dualism, for structure presupposes agency for its causal efficacy and mediation. Structure and agency do not exist as separate Cartesian 'substances' or self-subsistent strata. Quintessentially, therefore, we are dealing with separable, rather than separate, levels of social reality. Such separability gets irretrievably lost in Giddens' 'duality of structure'. At the end of the day, Giddens effectively denies structure an ontological status apart from agency. Hence Archer's (1995) ontological arraignment of Giddens on the charge of 'central conflation' for the two are held to be inseparable. Contrary to Shilling, structuration theory does not 'provide a new way of looking at the relationship between social interaction in schools and the reproduction of the major structural principles which characterise society' (1992, p. 84). However, in fairness to Shilling and others, Giddens' exposition of structuration is riven by contradiction.

Occasionally, a sense of ontological depth to social reality is discernible; but ultimately, the underlying thread in his texts on structuration theory is the denial of a stratified social ontology, thereby precluding the analytical separation of structure and agency.

To Giddens, '(t)he constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism but represent a duality … Structure is not 'external' to individuals: as memory traces, and as instantiated in social practices' … Structure is not to be equated with constraint but is always both constraining and enabling' (1984, p. 25). This is congruent with an emergentist ontology. However, the notion of structure as always enabling and constraining should start the sociological alarm bells ringing, for the emphasis upon the simultaneity of constraint and enablement really amounts to an unhelpful and misleading truism. Of course, all structures constrain and enable their occupants, but they do so *differentially*. Some are more enabled than constrained and vice versa. Structuration theory is conspicuously silent on this issue. Yet Giddens' whole-hearted acceptance of Durkheim's emphasis upon the pre-existence of social forms signals the 'externality' of society and, hence, distinctive ontological status of structure. Indeed, he writes that '… the constraining elements themselves have to be seen as expressing the "givenness" of the social environment of actors to particular agents' (1989, p. 258).

To accede 'givenness' is immediately to embroil oneself in the ontology of emergence, because here we have an explicit acknowledgement of pre-existence and relative durability: actors confront and reproduce social structure, which continues to exist even when such actors have died. This is in contradiction of his famous dictum that 'structure is both the medium and the outcome of interaction', since the latter denies pre-existence, entailing a vicious circularity for structure is ever the medium and the outcome, never a pre-existent given with which agency starts at T ^{1} and either elaborates upon or reproduces at T ^{3} (Archer, 1997, p. 102). The other, equally untenable, way in which Giddens effectively disclaims an ontological status for structure is to render it 'virtual' until instantiated by agency, but his acknowledgement of the prior existence of social forms necessarily entails that structure is real—not 'virtual'—by virtue of its causal efficacy, its 'givenness', which we confront either as enablement or constraint but are not determined by. Giddens cannot avoid the non-Cartesian dualism of structure and agency. This is precisely his problem. He cannot but avoid ontologically distinguishing between the two, but wrongly believes that to do so is to be culpable of invoking Cartesian dualism; hence his attribution of a 'virtual' status to structure.

The problem with the concept of instantiation is that it implicitly suspends time. Despite his insistence that he is not a methodological individualist, Giddens none the less commits the classic error of methodological individualism, i.e. temporal suspension. Logically, this should come of no surprise given his tenacious commitment to a depthless social ontology. Yet the whole edifice of analytical dualism is due to time; to the fact that it is

> because structure and agency are phased over different tracts of time [that we are able] to formulate practical social theories in terms of the former being prior to the latter, having autonomy from it and exerting a causal influence upon it. (Archer, 1996, p. 694)

It is only by suspending time that Giddens can talk of structure as inherently transform-able—never something bequeathed to agency—but always amenable to those present here and now. Yet to take on the board the full implications of this would be to deny the very possibility of social theory. Pupils, lecturers, teachers, students enter complex

educational systems which are anterior; they are the results of complex past interaction. Layder has nicely teased out the full implications of 'instantiation':

> In stating that social systems (reproduced relations) only exist in so far as they are continually created and recreated in every encounter, Giddens seems to be flirting with something of a contradiction; in essence what he is saying is that reproduced relations only exist if they are being produced (as well as reproduced) at a particular (present) instant, and yet the very notion of reproduction implies that a 'product' already exists, such that this product can be *reproduced* in the same form … An instantiation criterion drains the concept of 'reproduction' of meaning. (1985, pp. 143–144)

The suspension of time is a classic ploy used by methodological individualists. In suspending time, one is effectively precluding social thought *per se*. This may be construed as conceited nonsense by those sympathetic to structuration theory, but to suspend time is to deny the reality of embodied, living human beings who develop cognitively, work creatively and even destroy that which secures survival. The real sin of methodological individualism is not, as Manicas (1993, p. 223) maintains, its failure to 'see that the materials with which people work enable and constrain them in profoundly different ways', but its denial of pre-existence. Such an *a priori* denial necessarily entails excessive voluntarism: agency ever creates anew and never has to confront or contend with pre-existent relations. Yet surely this is logically impossible, since what is being created anew? Agents must have reasons for pursuing maintenance or change and such reasons must be grounded in something anterior, some antecedently existing state of affairs.

An ineluctable concomitant is Giddens' emphasis upon the intrinsic knowledgeability of agency; the fact that agents are not structural 'dopes', that they have the capacity for what he terms 'discursive penetration' of social forms. His notion of 'discursive penetration' is an important corrective to the extremes of structural Marxism and normative functionalism, for actors are knowledgeable in their day-to-day activities. But they are not as knowledgeable as Giddens would have us believe. The aim of sociology is to provide objective accounts of social reality that can and indeed do conflict with actors' accounts—some working-class adults still maintain that they had the same opportunities as their middle-class counterparts. Similarly, there still remain sections of the working and middle classes that maintain the poverty stricken are so because of their putative indolent or scrounging nature. Both accounts are objectively false. Yet even if all of the unemployed had full discursive penetration of the capitalist social relations that are responsible for their inability to find work, such knowledgeability may be of little import, for collective action may not issue in the sorts of structural change that is required to provide full employment. Thus the reasons for a lack of structural change enjoins examination of the conjunctural factors involved. As Lockwood (1964) found, endemic social conflict may not issue in structural change if *inter alia* high systemic integration obtains [4].

Marxist Educational Theory: maintaining the renaissance

Analytical dualism both complements and buttresses what Rikowski has termed a 'mini-renaissance' in Marxist educational theory (1996, p. 435). Rikowski's sophisticated attempt to supersede the deterministic formalism of past Marxist approaches to education is explicitly anchored in a relational social ontology. The 'Open Marxism' which

he delineates is rooted within 'the methodological approach of form analysis' (p. 441). Form-analysis, *contra* structuration theory, recognises the untenability of conceiving of capitalist social relations in terms of 'rules and resources'. Indeed, the irreducibility of capitalist social relations, i.e. generative causal tendencies that underlie events, enabled Marx to uncover their true nature: to show how capitalist social relations are not natural entities beyond human control (the process of reification). Giddens' emphasis upon knowledgeability is, clearly, somewhat difficult to reconcile with Marx's analysis of capitalist social relations. As Thompson neatly puts it:

> … it seems unhelpful and misleading to interpret Marx's account of the structural relations involved in the capitalist system of production in terms of 'sets of rules and resources'. The constitution of labour power as a commodity, the determination of its value as the labour time socially necessary for its production, its exchange on the market under conditions which guarantee that it exchanges as its value and yet simultaneously produces a surplus value and profit: these features of the capitalist system cannot be treated as so many 'rules' that workers follow when they turn up at the factory gates, as if every worker who accepted a job had an implicit (albeit partial) knowledge of Marx's *Capital.* (1989, pp. 68–69)

However, Rikowski writes that academic Marxism 'has rejuvenated old debilitating dualisms: … agency/structure' (1996, p. 427). One can assume that the need to eschew 'debilitating dualisms' stems from its Cartesian association. He argues that '(s)ocial phenomena appear to be separate. However, when their internal relations are theorised within a conception of the totality then this necessarily involves a critique of their apparent separateness' (p. 446). Yet here, Rikowski is arguing for the interdependence of levels of analysis, of irreducible social forms, that agency wrongly holds to be independent, rather than carefully eschewing charges of philosophical dualism. Analytical dualism equally takes as its fundamental premise the irreducibility of social forms that are grounded in internal relations. Rikowski argues that form-analysis 'undercuts and dissolves the apparent separations (within bourgeois social theory) of "politics" and "economics" … subject and object, agency and structure and so on' (p. 446). This does not undermine analytical dualism, for Rikowski is talking about separateness; analytical dualism, on the other hand, is quintessentially concerned with separability. Such separability is derived from the distinctive powers and properties that pertain to structure and agency, respectively; powers that exist only through the activities of human agency. Instead of conflating or dissolving structure and agency, analytical dualism links the two by teasing out their respective influences over time. The powers and properties that pertain to structure are such in virtue of the internal and necessary relations that constitute it. Thus, to Rikowski:

> To speak of money as a form of value, to speak of value as a form of the product of labour, to speak of value and money as forms of social relations, is to emphasise the *internal* nature of the relation between value, money, labour, social relations. The apparently separate 'things' of society (state, money, capital and so on) are social phenomena, forms of social relations, the interconnections between which should be understood not as external (causal relations, for example), but as internal, as processes of *transformation or metamorphosis.* (ibid)

Clearly the state, capital, etc. are not 'things' in the Lukácsian sense, i.e. immutable features of the natural world, but on the other hand, they are not reducible to agency

and, moreover, do have causal efficacy. To maintain that the state is external to individuals is neither to accord it Cartesian status nor to reify it. Rikowski is in danger of treading the path of conflation, whereby the distinctive properties of the state become indistinguishable from those of agency. Externality simply signals its *sui generis* nature; that the state is an historically-changing social form that causally affects those who work within and those who work/do not work outside it. Rikowski's (correct) emphasis upon the internal relations between labour/capital, etc. is not simply a convenient heuristic device. Such relations constitute an irreducible level of social reality whose irreducible distinctiveness, as Marx found, provided the very basis for its *mis*identification.

Concepts such as the state, labour-power and capital are real abstractions, not taxonomic categories, and thus there is no need for Rikowski to place inverted commas around the notion of real abstractions (see 1996, p. 445). Marx's theory of value concerns generative mechanisms, which are possessed necessarily by capital in virtue of its irreducible structure. What Marxist educational theory needs to acknowledge explicitly is the importance of contingently-related factors. The historical problem for Marxist theory in general has been its reluctance to incorporate contingency; the fact that society is an open system. Thus, to take the now-defunct correspondence theory as a case in point, the tendencies of capitalist social relations were taken instead to be law-like, thereby permitting *inter alia* determinism to enter via the back-door. Indeed, capitalism, as Rikowski argues, requires labour-power, the education of which is not a teleological given.

Concluding Remarks: the need for analytical dualism

Giddens' structuration theory exemplifies the continuing stranglehold of Cartesian dualism on social theory. The attraction of Giddens' 'duality of structure' lies in its rejection of structure and agency as Cartesian entities—i.e. entities totally divorced from each other—and in its repositioning of human agency at the forefront of sociological analysis. 'Au revoir' determined puppets of reified structural forces; 'bonjour' knowledge-able and creative agency. Giddens' work is clearly much more sophisticated than this—yet, of course, this paper can hardly do justice to the complexity and erudition of his multiplicitous oeuvres. However, as the foregoing indicates, there are some intractable problems and contradictions that vitiate his overall enterprise. Despite talk of the system as possessing 'structural properties', Giddens still refuses to countenance the latter as possessing *sui generis* properties and powers. This is attributable to both the enduring legacy of Descartes and the understandable worry that 'emergent properties' are only applicable in the natural world, not the social one.

Yet ontological emergence is not solely applicable to the natural world. What has confused the issue is exactly the notion that the social world is like the natural world, that society is somehow like a magnetic field. Society is simply society. Thus, to Manicas:

> Still, since the reality of structure is activity-dependent, social structures have no causal power—unlike a magnetic field, e.g. which does. Put in other terms, social structures have effects only insofar as they are incarnate in the activities of persons, for example, insofar as Charlie *behaves* like our theoretical bureaucrat. (1997, p. 199)

There is a contradiction here: Manicas rightly argues that social structure is not like a magnetic field, yet he argues that social structure has effects, effects which are only possible through agential activity, but denies structure any causal efficacy. Without the

notion of structure as pre-existent, irreducible and causally efficacious, one cannot explain why Charlie behaves like a bureaucrat. At the beginning of the article from which this quotation is taken, Manicas writes that he hopes that he does not fall into the methodological individualist trap (1997, p. 194). Unfortunately this is the only option left to him. This applies equally to Giddens: both Manicas and Giddens, on the one hand, accept the effects of social structure (thereby establishing its reality), yet renege because of the misassumption that structure *qua* emergent stratum entails the error of reification. Hence Manicas's emphasis upon structure's effects being incarnate only in the activities of people. Analytical dualism does not deny that structure exists only through the activities of people: it simply accords structure-relative autonomy in order to explain such activities. Bureaucracies, schools and universities are emergent relational entities and therefore exist at a different level from that of human agency. Shilling is right to argue that individuals do not occupy different levels of existence, for this implies that human agency is like a compact disc, i.e. slotted into one 'level' of the hi-fi system, unable to affect that which controls it—simply there to be played. A stratified approach to structure and agency, however, does not entail this, for each mutually influences the other and presupposes the other. Hence the possibility of analytical dualism to examine their relative efficacy over time.

Indeed, Giddens' reformulation of structure *qua* 'rules and resources' is inadequate for the very fact that it refuses to incorporate that which it effectively defines out of existence, namely the anterior irreducibility and causal efficacy of social forms. Thus, if one were to accept Shilling's claim that structuration theory provides a useful way out of the Cartesian impasse, then practical sociology would be somewhat hard pressed to find any propositions to aid methodological analysis of structure at any given point in time. Structuration theory does not accord structural power relatively independent causal properties. The fact that structural power depends on agency for its causal efficacy, that it necessarily has to be mediated by agency, does not negate this. At best, we are enjoined to examine the multiplicity of 'rules and resources' without asking questions of provenance, how things change, why they stay the same. Analytical dualism, in contradistinction, recognises the stratified nature of social reality, permitting analysis of socio-cultural change at any level.

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NOTES

[1] As Hacker notes:

The thought that a human being is a composite creature consisting of body and soul (or mind, or spirit) is an ancient one ... This conception ... was articulated in the religious and philosophical thought of antiquity and the Middle Ages. It was given its most powerful philosophical expression in our era by Descartes. According to Descartes, a human being is composed of two distinct substances, the mind and the body. A person's innermost self, that in which his (*sic*) essential identity consists, and that to which he refers when he uses the first-person pronoun 'I', is his mind or soul, the *res cogitans*. The essence of the mind is thought,

the essence of the body extension. A person is an embodied anima, for while the body is destructible, the mind or soul is not. (1997, p. 14)

Thus, those theorists who openly adopt a 'dualist' approach to social reality are understandably held to be culpable of reifying society, since society is taken to be like Descartes' body, disconnected from agency and unnecessary for its existence. This paper, however, maintains that an analytically-dualist approach does not entail reification, for it is recognised that structure, unlike mind, *is* dependent upon agency but none the less has relatively autonomous powers and properties. Furthermore, it is therefore unsurprising that the notion of society or structure as possessing *sui generis* properties was (wrongly) assumed to entail reification, that such properties are disconnected supra-human 'substances'. However, as Archer points out:

Literally, the phrase [*sui generis*] means nothing more than 'of its own kind' … The confusion arises etymologically because the same word *genus* (of which *generis* is the genitive) means 'birth', deriving from the older Sanskrit verb 'jan', meaning 'to be begat'. Hence the source of the Holistic error that (reified) Society begets or generates is own (equally reified) properties. However, when referring to things, such as 'society', it denotes merely 'sort' or 'kind'. (1995, pp. 48–49)

[2] As Abraham argues, '… actors *may* miscalculate, or be oblivious of, the workings of certain aspects of society, including their own interests' (1994, p. 237). Indeed, to establish real vested interests does not entail that beneficiaries automatically become aware of the need for continued maintenance and of their ideological import. However, reality often plays a helping hand in reminding beneficiaries of their rewarding situation!

[3] Culture itself has emergent relational properties that predispose agency towards specific courses of action. See Archer (1995, chapter 7), 'Structural and cultural conditioning', for an account of the four 'situational logics' that actors embroil themselves in when they uphold certain propositions.

[4] As Archer (1995) has pointed out, Lockwood's principal concern was to reject the methodological individualism intrinsic to conflict theory and to explain why low social integration *per se* is not a sufficient basis on which to account for change: it had to be complemented by an analysis of system integration. Thus, to Lockwood, '… conflict may be both endemic and intense in a social system without causing any basic structural change … Conflict theory would have to answer that this is decided by the variable factors affecting the power balance between groups … What is missing is the system integration focus …' (1964, p. 249). Essentially, social integration refers to the orderly or conflictual relations between actors; system integration refers to the orderly or conflictual relations between the parts (emergent relational properties) of society. The practical social theorist can theorise about the various conjunctions between the social and the systemic (between 'the people' and 'the parts') on a multi-level basis. For instance, at the level of roles, i.e. with the difference between roles and their occupants.

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