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Doorway to the dharma of duality

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ABSTRACT

One of the most exciting formal approaches in the sociology of culture involves the exploration of duality–that the meaning of any of one set of elements (for example, choices of cultural consumption) is the subset of persons to which it is linked (for example, the occupations of the persons who make this choice). We here generalize this notion of duality, which we call "Breiger classic," to the case in which similarities between persons are constructed not on the basis of which cultural elements they choose or deploy, but how these cultural elements are themselves connected, which we call "Mega-Breiger." We then consider how to look at the duality between cultural and social units *within* cultural formations, treating each cultural formation as a virtual social structure among cultural elements, which we call "Mondo Breiger." We finally discuss the "Full Breiger" duality as the complete use of a person-to-person and person-to-cultural element data set to arrange relations among one set of cultural elements. We illustrate with an analysis of all the texts of the members of the first generation of the Frankfurt School of critical theory.

1. Duality

1.1. Spinoza and duality

> "Then, the Licchavi Vimilakīrti asked those bodhisattvas, 'Good sires, please explain how the bodhisattvas enter the Dharma-door of duality!"[1]
>
> Vimilakīrti-Sutra, "The Dharma-Door of Non-Duality"

What does it mean to explain a phenomenon? In conventional sociology, this is sometimes taken to mean to exhaust all its explicable variance by linking this to other variances; in other cases, if is taken to mean to determine a cause that is necessary, or sufficient (rarely both), of the phenomenon. It is, however, well understood that such explanations may be formally adequate while failing on what Weber would call a "human" level, in that they do not give us a sense of the *meaning* of the phenomenon, at least, not the sort that only a human, and not a computer, could grasp.

But there is a problem with the attempt to give such meaning: it tends to lead to infinite regress. What is the meaning of some *A*? According to Peirce, the things that bear meanings are signs, and "the meaning of a sign is the sign it has to be translated into" (1965; *CP* 4.132). But what, then, is the meaning of this second sign? Clearly, it must be a third, and so on and so forth. The quest for meaning is a pointless, never-ending exercise in futility.

But there is another approach to meaning that allows a formal and finite analysis of culture. This is one that is based on the

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[1] Given that the sutra demonstrates that to say "this is dualistic and that is nondualistic" is itself dualistic, we feel justified in reversing his meaning entirely. Our source is the translation by Thurman (1976: 73–77).

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conception of Spinoza (1998 [1663]; 1930 [1677]). The great debate of the seventeenth century had to do with the relation between body and soul. There was a widespread acceptance that mechanical materialism was on the rise, and that it would soon claim that all was materially determined, including human action. But if that were so, how could one maintain that humans had free will—that is, that the soul affected the body—and that the world of mind has primacy over the world of sensation? Spinoza strode into this debate and in a stroke dissolved the antinomy; he argued that these supposed two worlds were simply two sides of the same coin. The same thing that might comport itself to mind as thought comports itself to sense as experience. Thus while Spinoza is known as a "monist" in contrast to Cartesian "dualism," what he puts forward is quite different from the classic monisms of Idealism and Materialism: it is, as Breiger (2011) has emphasized, a vision of duality, not dualism.

Dualism is when we bifurcate: for example, we decide to double our bait supply by decapitating our worms: heads in this pile, tails in that. Duality is when we realize that every coin has both a head and a tail and that they cannot be separated; tails is what is on the other side of heads, and vice versa. Even more important, if you have a coin in your hand and you look down and see heads, you can be sure you also have tails. To get to tails from heads, you simply look on the other side. So, too, in duality-based approaches to meaning, we do something similar: rather than wander off in a web of mental associations, we look at what is on the other side. On the other side of meaning, of culture, of heaven, we find earth, the social, we find people. It is this core vision of duality that constitutes the basis of our approach.

1.2. Meaningful relations and relations on meanings

When we say "our" approach, however, we are a bit misleading; this approach is one that has been initiated and developed by Ronald Breiger, beginning with his seminal (1974) paper on the duality of persons and groups. This notion was emphasized as crucial for sociological theory by Mohr (2000) and Mohr and Friedland (2008) used to good effect by Mohr and Duquenne (1997), Mische and Pattison (2000), Yeung (2005), and others. Our interpretation is greatly influenced not only by Breiger, but by Mohr, Mische, and Pattison. It has also been shown to be theoretically and methodologically central to the approach taken by Pierre Bourdieu by Breiger (2000). Because of the familiarity of Bourdieu's work, we begin with this for illustrative purposes.

Bourdieu (e.g., 1984 [1979]) often collected data in which individuals are asked what activities they enjoy. The resulting data are then subject to an analysis that attempts to put activities "close together" in an analytic space if they tend to be done by the same people or, perhaps, the same *kinds* of people (whatever this means). From looking at these charts, we get a new sense of what these activities (say) *mean*. For what tastes "mean" is precisely what social relationships they reference. And we may use these social relationships to interpret the content of these references. Thus mountain climbing "means" teachers as against CEOs (on the one hand) and shopkeepers (on the other) not because teachers may experience a fellow feeling when encountering each other on a mountain (they may hate running into others), but more because the mountain expresses the social distance between the teachers and these other groups.

Why do we consider this "meaning"? The answer is simply that we believe that, as humans, there is a basal form of understanding that we reach when abstractions are returned to the world *of* humans (also Marx and Engels, 1976 [1845-6]). Humans are different from everything else for if they do have "meanings"—if they are signs—then what they signify, as Peirce argued, is nothing other than their own souls (1984 [1866]: 504). In the infinite directed graph of signification, they are termini, or sinks.

Mische and Pattison (2000) use this same logic when it comes to the beliefs and programs held by political actors: given that the core to political action is the formation of alliances, to "hold" a belief that another group rejects is inasmuch as to break an alliance with them. Thus what the beliefs "mean" can be said to be the sets of alliances that they facilitate or imply. In the terms of analytic philosophy (see Martin and Lee, this issue), meaning in this sense is equivalent to *extension*. Specifically, we will call this sort of meaning a *sociocultural* one: the meaning of cultural elements is resolved into social relations. In contrast, we can speak of the *culturosocial* organization as the dual (also see Basov and Brennecke (2017) for the same idea), namely, the implied relations between persons established by their pattern of holding or not holding certain cultural elements.

We wish to focus on one aspect of this vision of duality, one which has, we believe, rich theoretical implications. This aspect is that of reconceptualization of matrices as storing information about paths that our minds can take. Considering Andre Weil's attempt to mathematize the rules of descent studied by Lévi-Strauss ([1949] 1969), White (1963) realized that one could treat deterministic rules of descent as permutation matrices, and complex relations could be expressed via matrix multiplication. Just like the famous exchange of women in a system of preferential marriage with father's sister's daughter is "there and back"—a man takes a wife from the lineage which received a wife from his lineage in the previous generation—so, too, Breiger duality is a "there and back." We go from persons to cultural elements, and then back from cultural elements to persons, for example, to arrange persons in terms of cultural similarity.

Kovács (2010) and Lizardo (this issue) show that we can improve our estimates of similarity and centrality (respectively) by an iterated process of going there-and-back-and-there-and-back-and-… Here we focus on expanding the walks we can take, and developing parsimonious notation that can allow us to specify three theoretically reasonable classes of questions to ask about the meaning in a dataset. We begin by introducing notation, and then working through examples of increasing depth. We note that we here do not consider issues of inference and refer the reader to the discussion in Martin and Lee (this issue) for our reasoning. Although our core ideas are simple, for purposes of housekeeping, we find it more parsimonious to use a consistent, if awkward, terminology, and provide a glossary as an Appendix A.