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Valuble Objects and their Differentiation in Social Space and Time

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One of the central issues faced by all social research is identifying a limited number of concrete social objects to represent abstract social structures and processes. Yet the rationale for selecting such objects is one of the least studied areas in sociology. A typical assessment of the situation sounds like this: "Existing outcome data—available from public administrative records and household surveys—are limited in terms of what is measured, how well it is measured, the extent to which various measures can be aggregated at the individual and household level, and the possibilities for disaggregating these analyses to policy-relevant geographic areas. [...] Disagreements begin with the question of what to measure" (Meyers and Garfinkel 1999:150). Rather than following the tradition of treating ad hoc survey variables as social indicators, why not take a bird's eye view of social structures and processes with a hope of finding pivotal objects of social measurement there? Our strategy is to look for such valued objects in distinct phases of recurrent macrosocial functioning, or reproduction, where they are embedded and involved in the mechanisms of social exchange and social distribution. This study in the sociology of knowledge explores dimensions of cognitive and objectified social space and time underlying the differentiation of central social values and the measurement of their structures.

It is widely believed that what we buy are goods and services for individual consumption. This is an illusion introduced by classical economics and repeatedly pointed out by critical social scientists, notably by Marx, Veblen, and Baudrillard. In reality, all tangible things that we acquire are important to us not in and of themselves but because of the social meanings that are attached to them or, more exactly, to which they are attached by Western promotional culture and the advertising industry in particular. For Marx, the immediate use-values of commodities were just fronts for certain amounts of (abstract) productive labor power that made highly mediated commodity exchange and, in this sense, the entire system of capitalist (productive) social relations, possible. Once you could see the unfair exchange between working and capitalist classes in these terms, Marx argued, the roots of the enormous disparity in their social conditions would become apparent. Veblen (1959) talked about the leisure class that indulged in conspicuous consumption where consumer goods were acquired not to satisfy material needs but rather to show off their privileged social position. Baudrillard continued this line of thought in our time. Consumer goods, he wrote, "speak to us not so much of the user and technical practices, as of social pretension and resignation, of social mobility and inertia, of acculturation and enculturation, of stratification and of social classification." They are "nothing but the different types of relations and significations [...]" (1981:38, 63).

It is the social meanings attached to goods and services that are subject to social exchange and social distribution. But why should such an analysis be limited to status symbols and social status? Even if status is used today to designate categories of (functional) division of labor as well as stratified social hierarchies, it is not the only valuable object circulating in social exchange and distribution. This line of thought can be broadened to include lifestyles, social orientations or attitudes, and forms of socialization. We can equally maintain that what we exchange on a daily basis is primarily quality lifestyle, good social status, optimistic orientation or attitude, and successful socialization. In the past, the meaning of our daily lives was supplied primarily by religious services and by high culture sponsored by established religions, whether in classic architecture, paintings, or music. Not any more. Today, it is advertising

that gives meanings to the multitude of mundane things surrounding us.[1] Although it may be so in economic theory (Goldman 1992; Jhally 1991), advertising is anything but fetishism of goods and services. Studies show that advertising does not work as advertised. It does not substantially increase sales.[2] Advertising can only be effective in creating strong brand names. But while it takes decades to establish a brand name, the immediate effect of national advertising for consumer goods is to promote higher social status and better lifestyles rather than the desire for goods and services as such.

The marketing of better lifestyles, better social statuses, better orientations, and better forms of socialization is the main effect of advertising. We may differ in the degree to which we accept this symbolic reality, but not in its kind. No one can escape this world of all-pervasive social meanings. "Advertising [...] surrounds us and enters into us so that when we speak we may speak in or with reference to the language of advertising and when we see we may see through schemata that advertising has made salient for us. [Advertising] shows people only as incarnations of larger social categories. [...] It is thoroughly optimistic, providing for any troubles that it identifies a solution in a particular product or style of life " (Schudson 1990:74, 78; see also Wernick 1991). From the adolescent religious spirituality of sacred origins and promises of salvation, we have graduated to a secular spirituality of quality social structure and upward social mobility with all the risks and uncertainties that mature existence brings. If we can show that social life indeed revolves around socialization, orientation, status, and lifestyle, and that these valuable objects can be observed, measured, operationally defined, and presented as the first social reality, then we may be able to demonstrate that perhaps not all that is solid melts into air, and that rational social science still makes sense and has its uses.

Phases of Social Reproduction and Circulating Social Objects

As true objects of mediated, or generalized, social exchange and social distribution, lifestyles, statuses, orientations, and socialization also form the core of major phases of macrosocial change. In this latter capacity, socialization, orientation or attitude formation, status attainment, and lifestyle maintenance have aggregate collective as well as individual forms. Each one of these main phases of social change can also itself be considered as a distinct social process, and its own, second-order phases (or mechanisms) can be identified. Thus, socialization is achieved by virtue of primary care giving, by formation of reflected identities (Cooley's [1925] looking-glass self), by associating with attractive others such as role models, and by constructing our own unique identities proper.[3] Having been socialized to a greater or smaller extent to previous generations' standards of behavior, at a certain point in our growth, usually in youth, we form orientations of our own—beliefs, opinions, expectations, and preferences—that are not only different from those of our parents and other agents of socialization, but are often expressly opposed to them. The conflict between the outcomes of socialization and newly formed orientations or attitudes is the main content of growing pains in macrosocial development as well as in individual personal growth and maturation. In a sense, it is inevitable since the second-order mechanisms of socialization and orientation are not all of equal strength.

While our individual and collective identities and generalized others can be constructed and reconstructed practically at will, the results of early socialization—of primary care giving and looking-glass self—are much more lasting. They rarely disappear. Similarly, while public opinion and preferences are volatile and have a capacity for quick changes, deeply held beliefs and expectations show a remarkable stability spanning generations. The conflicts between early socialization and subsequently formed deep orientations have a potential for running into the extremes of conformism or anarchism. Both carry within themselves the seeds of social upheavals. In developed societies, such conflicts are supplanted and avoided in the later phases of status attainment and lifestyle maintenance. Unlike Weber's early idea of status as external displays of public honor or prestige that may or may not accompany possession of real, or naked, power, whether political or economic, in their actual usage today, status and status attainment refer to acquisition and possession of real social benefits, such as wealth, authority and power, or education. Weber's association of social status with prestige has been replaced by the present focus on achievement as opposed to ascription of prestige and honors more typical of traditional societies based on fixed social positions and titles passed from one generation to another. Moreover, the conceptual opposition of ascription and achievement has transformed the meaning of status ascription itself—from that of titular honor and prestige to mostly extra-social, biologically-based traits of age, sex, color, or kinship.

Status attainment is only a prelude to the acquisition and maintenance of a certain lifestyle into which mature

members of society settle sooner or later. Similar to social status, the concept of lifestyle has also undergone semantic changes since Simmel and Weber. With Veblen's notion of conspicuous consumption, the idea of lifestyle bifurcated into two varieties. On the one hand, lifestyle is seen today as particular ways of satisfying basic needs and pursuing essential interests, both of which can be presumed stable over time and quite possibly coterminous with (equally stable ascriptive) status, as Weber conceived it. On the other hand, however, lifestyle can also be a collection of deliberate practices designed and carried out primarily for others to see, a show, a visibility, a symbolic reality constructed primarily for the purposes of impression management. Critics of the pervasiveness of conspicuous consumption from Veblen to Packard (1950) to Schor (1998, 2000) also show that visible lifestyle maintenance is just as normal an aspect of our social behavior as its basic variety—if not more so. The criticism of consumer society since the 1960's and the 1970's may document rather a runaway inflation of meanings in fashion and other symbolic expressions of visible lifestyle that today drive the production of consumer goods and customers' appetites alike. With semiotic saturation and inflation subtracted, the normality of visible lifestyle is strongly buttressed by the entire corpus of Erving Goffman's work for whom everything we do in public places—be it simple group participation or adoption of distinct interaction practices and forms of talk—is just another act, a performance staged for others to see and approve.[4]

While lifestyle may be related to a particular status, today its maintenance is a phase of social change in its own right rather than an attribute of status, as Weber had it. The reason lifestyle and status are closely associated is that they both carry in themselves properties of socialization and orientation, albeit in different combinations. Status can be seen as social identity guided by preferences. Lifestyle, on the contrary, can be seen as preference for certain social identities. For example, names by which we refer to others as central elements of their (and, indirectly, our) identities can show clear preferences and thus ascribe higher or lower status. Naming can equally signify status achievement, whether directly or euphemistically, as in the case of negative preferences in the environment of political correctness (Valentine 1998). It is this combination of certain properties of socialization and orientation in status and lifestyle that gives them the capacity to overcome the tensions between socialization and orientation.[5]

Thus, truly valuable social objects and the main phases of social change come in pairs: early and later socialization; deep and volatile orientations; ascribed and achieved status; basic and visible lifestyle. To make these abstract notions more concrete, they must be specified for numerous social groups. What kind, whose lifestyle or status is exchanged and socially distributed? The same objects in social circulation may be of vastly different value to members of different social groups. Are we talking about marital or citizenship status? Is it the lifestyle of the rich and famous or that of the homeless and unemployed? To answer questions of this kind, we must have an unambiguous scheme of social classification. From Simmel's web of overlapping social affiliations to Saussure's and Baudrillard's semantic social differences, to Schutz's multiple social realities, to Bourdieu's cultural distinction, to Luhmann's social differentiation, to Walzer's spheres of justice—all points to the need for a system of categories capable of capturing innumerable social differences in a consistent and sufficiently parsimonious way.

Social statuses can be unequal, but so can all other valued social objects-lifestyles, orientations, identities, etc. Conversely, too, there is nothing in social status that is specific to social inequality. In yet another perspective, social status as an ascribed or achieved position can also be horizontally differentiated, for example, by occupations, among several other axes, as can lifestyle, orientation, and socialization. A division into social classes may have been predominant in Marx's time, but today it is an abstraction from a more complex reality of multiple inequalities in numerous and quite separate dimensions of social differentiation, such as occupational, residential, or regional. The idea of social stratification signifies this more complex reality where social inequality in one dimension can be very different from—or inconsistent with—inequality in another. When we use the Marxist concept of social classes as a sharp and sweeping social division to signify social stratification today, we tend to overlook horizontal occupational differentiation of managers, professionals, precision machine operators as well as laborers with quite different stakes in organized mesosocial movements and different ideological claims that, in turn, have different foundations in macrosocial data.[6]

Weber (1978:386-398, 921-937) included occupations and ethnicity in the category of status groups. He characterized ethnic status groups as a "cultural possession of the masses" and constituent of Kulturgemeinschaft, or cultural community, and occupational status groups as "continuous sources of income and earnings for individuals" in the context of competitive market activity. In yet a third sense, Weber spoke about occupations as synonymous with a religious calling or vocation (1978:140-144) which in German is rendered by the same word (Beruf). In fact, The Protestant Ethic opens with a discussion of the predominance of Protestants in leading business occupations in

Germany whereas Catholics belonged as a rule to lower occupational status groups. It is obvious that this typology is not based on consistent and mutually exclusive categories. As a concept coterminous with division of labor, occupation is what has traditionally been called a (synchronic) functional social distinction, yet it was also treated as a (diachronic) institutional one. This caused Parsons (1951, 1954a:Ch.2) who followed Weber's cue to reflect on the difference between businesspeople and professionals. His conflated statements on stratification proved to be highly influential.[7] They were accepted by several generations of sociologists as a normative concept. Its revision is long overdue.

Differentiation in Social Space

To begin with, segmentation—that is sometimes deemed to be an aspect of social differentiation (Luhmann 1982:232-238, 1995:190)—can be restricted to demographic groupings, those based on sex and age. Strictly speaking, these are extra-social, natural biological categories not amenable to artificial social manipulation and change as truly sociological properties of human groups are. Such segmentation, say, into younger women, younger men, older women, and older men with a cut-off age about 45, can be useful in empirical tests of the idea that the causes of sex and age discrimination are social constructs rooted elsewhere. Truly social differentiation is found at the intersection of two abstract sociological notions: social statics and social dynamics, or social structure and process. Pure social process, or history, can only be differentiated into its component trends. However, since historic trends are of different strength and duration, their contemporary view never presents a complete or coherent picture, and their relevance for the present is only revealed in the static, structural view. Lacking any specificity beyond extant social inequality, this purely structural view is likewise but a useful abstraction.

Thus, the most abstract cross-sectional structural dimension of social differentiation is that of (vertical) social classes as pure relations of social inequality, or what Simmel called subordination and superordination. What was once seen as a simple reality of rigid estates of slaves (or serfs) and masters, then somewhat more mobile classes of peasants-landowners-workers-and-bourgeoisie is now a multitude of largely permeable upper, upper-middle, lower-middle, and lower classes of various kinds. Today, we can speak, for example, of economic inequality between the groups of those having low standards of living, making ends meet, the comfortable, and the rich whose cultural or political classification may be quite different. What is more, a further differentiation of all such classes into occupational or employment groups provides a much more accurate picture of social stratification. Although the definitions of all such classes and social strata change over time, multi-dimensional differentiation into unequal social classes and their further social stratification are two indelible characteristics of all modern societies.[8]

Social process and social structure are highly abstract notions, but properties of them both are present in the more concrete ideas of linear social development and cyclical social reproduction. Diachronic social development is nothing other than a linear sequence of distinctive stages, i.e., a structured process, or structure-in-process, whereas synchronic social reproduction is a procedure consisting of recurring phases, i.e., a transforming structure, or process-in-structure. Linear-developmental social change produces social institutions—a multitude of routine practices that are conventionally grouped into four large domains—familial (courtship, marriage, parenting, adoption), cultural (traditions, art, science, education), economic (property, contract, market, firm), and political (party, government, legislation, constitution). Thus we speak of family lifestyle, family status, family orientation, and family socialization as well as cultural, economic, and political. This is the locus of usually slow, secular social change that explodes in wars or civil strife only if it is artificially inhibited or precluded.

In contrast to linear sequences of social development that are responsible for relatively stable but ever changing social institutions, the artifacts of cyclical social differentiation can erode and be obliterated much more quickly unless they are continuously regenerated, reproduced and reconfirmed. The categories of cyclical reproductive social differentiation are revealed in the evolution of social space and social time. Yes, we remember Karl Popper's (1974:150, 158) warning: "Historicism mistakes [...] interpretations for theories. This is one of its cardinal errors. [...] The human factor is the ultimate uncertain and wayward element in social life and in all social institutions. [... Every] attempt at controlling it completely must lead to tyranny; which means, to the omnipotence of the human factor—the whims of a few men, or even of one.." To overcome the historicist confusion between factually concrete situational history having no evolutionary logic of its own and formal reconstructions of social evolution guided by a logic of abstract conceptual schemes, it is necessary to abandon attempts to find social evolution in changes of

stratified social structures that are always accidental byproducts of historic processes.

Instead, reconstructions of social evolution must be confined only to structural processes by which human civilization has been appropriating and improving its material environment—social space and time. If we additionally assume an interplay of multiple institutional avenues in the evolution of human social environment, we can also overcome prevailing skepticism about the possibility of progressive development that originated in the demise of the 19th-century ideas of linear and providential history as conceived by Comte, among others. It is also useful to distinguish in this connection between cognitive and objectified meanings of this evolution. While we speak of sequential evolutionary stages as markers of linear-developmental differentiation of institutional domains in a strictly objectified sense of existing stock of knowledge, the evolution of social space and time responsible for cyclical-reproductive social differentiation must be considered in both its cognitive and objectified senses since it is a less frequently studied topic.

Our planet became social as soon as we began traveling across it. It can be said that the social meaning of this geographic space was created by virtue of human travel and by the way we oriented ourselves in it.[9] Human spatial orientation evolved across the ages from early empirical navigation based on the skipper's personal knowledge and experience, to navigation by stars with compass and astrolabe, to astronomic navigation with marine chronometer and sextant, to the radio location and GPS navigation of today. Geometry, the science of spatial measurement, and the development of numeration itself from fractions to hypercomplex numbers, closely followed this evolution of navigation. Empirical navigation was thought of in terms of elementary Euclidean geometry; navigation with compass and astrolabe, in terms of Cartesian analytical geometry; astronomic navigation with the sextant, in terms of non-Euclidean geometry of Gauss, Bolyai, Lobachevsky, Riemann, and others that also gave rise to differential, projection, and drawing geometries. Finally, modern GPS navigation is reflected in the science of topology. Each one of these evolutionary methods of navigation and each historic period in the advent of new geometric ideas was characterized by its special method of co-measuring distance as extensive and intensive quantities that determined a vessel's location in space. These methods also brought about new concepts of the number itself as resolving the differences between extensive and intensive quantities. Figure 1 gives a graphic representation of all these relationships.

Figure 1. Evolution of cognitive social space

Antiquity - Middle Ages	**Empirical Navigation**	**Elementary Geometry**
Extensive Quantities	Direct distances from cape to cape, from light-house to light-house, etc.	Lines and angles whose magnitudes are given in theorem's conditions
Intensive Quantities	Distances actually traveled by a vessel at various angles to shoreline	Lines and angles whose magnitudes are built in proving theorems
Numbers	Fractions that showed, along with positive whole numbers, a vessel's location on numeric scale relative to destination	

15th - 18th Centuries	**Compass & Astrolabe Navigation**	**Analytical Geometry**
Extensive Quantities	Distances to certain latitudes on a meridian.	Abscissas of points
Intensive Quantities	Distances covered by a vessel between known and achieved latitudes at a certain angle to meridian	Ordinates of points
Numbers	Negative (rational) and irrational numbers that gave a vessel's location relative to destination as solutions of algebraic equations of a certain degree	

18th - 19th Centuries	Astronomic Navigation	Non-Euclidean Geometry
Extensive Quantities	Longitude of point of departure	Curvature radius
Intensive Quantities	Local times of observing celestial bodies at a certain angle to horizon	Internal corners of triangles and their opposite sides
Numbers	Real and imaginary (complex) numbers that gave a vessels' location relative to destination as solutions of differential equations	

20th - 21st Centuries	Radio Navigation with GPS	Topology
Extensive Quantities	Distances and directions to satellites with known locations	Cycles
Intensive Quantities	Position lines	Chains
Numbers	Hypercomplex numbers that can give a space craft its location relative to destination as solutions of homology groups	

But this is only the cognitive aspect of our social space. This space also has a constructive aspect where products of our cognition are registered and objectified, however temporarily. In this constructively objectified sense, social appropriation of geographic space consists, firstly, in an extensive growth, in a continuing territorial expansion of human habitat. All continents, countries, and regions bearing their specific geographic names are but markers of past steps in the evolving process of human territorial expansion. Surviving in the present, these diachronic developmental sequences also become synchronic contemporary distinctions that give an ordered sequence to what at first glance appears as a collection of nominal entities. Thus, the following sequence of five major U.S. regions can be taken as a fair reconstruction of American westward expansion from its first colonies in Massachusetts and Rhode Island: North East - South Atlantic - East Central - West Central - the West. This rough outline that foregoes actual historic details represents the extensive evolution of American social space in its constructively objectified sense. In its intensive dimension, the evolution of objectified social space consists in a progressive development of forms of human settlement—from villages in rural areas to small towns, to medium-sized central cities, to metropolitan centers, to their suburbs. The addition of a vertical Cartesian dimension to horizontal territorial sprawl is but the most obvious aspect of this process of intensification of objectified social space. Its true meaning is in the intensification and concentration of human communication, both in the physical sense of transportation and in the sense of verbal as well as nonverbal sign systems.

Differentiation in Social Time

To be sure, while the two dimensions of social spatial evolution are analytically separate, they have always been intertwined in complex ways as well as with other, non-spatial factors. For our purposes, however, these evolutionary sequences give well-grounded categories for differentiating phases of synchronic social reproduction. We can use the same logic of differentiating phases in the evolution of social time. Social time, too, has its cognitive and constructively objectified meanings, each with its intensive as well as extensive dimension. The extensive dimension of cognitive social time is marked by historiographic periodizations in the development of our civilization. Although there is

evidence that we are only now rediscovering knowledge available to humans many thousands of years ago (Sitchin 1976), Greco-Roman Antiquity is usually considered the beginning of the growth and progressive sophistication of human rationality, and its subsequent stages are taken to be the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Modern Age. In addition to this extensive growth, cognitive social time has also been undergoing a process of intensification marked by the addition of new, ever shorter recurrent temporal cycles of cooperative human activity. Originally, only important annual seasonal events were staged and religiously recreated. Recurrent and routine monthly, weekly, and daily observances were gradually added to these yearly festivals and rituals. While yearly, monthly, and daily cycles of intensive cognitive social time can still be associated with the natural movements of celestial bodies, the week and Sabbath rest were purely artificial social inventions (Zerubavel 1981, 1985).

We find extensive and intensive dimensions in objectified social time, too. Their meanings are revealed in the evolution of employment and occupations. From the early beginnings of running a household and a farm—whether with the help of slaves or by poor freemen themselves—forms of employment evolved extensively first into a system of feudal serfdom where peasants were employed mostly part-time on rented land or on their own land paying rent to their masters, mostly in kind. With the Industrial Revolution came full-time work in the capitalist factory that meant long hours. Attached to the machines that needed no rest, men worked until they couldn't. The welfare state that followed gave some social security to those on sick or maternity leave, to the unemployed, and to retirees. In today's post-industrial society, the evolving organization of employment as the extensive aspect of constructively objectified social time seems to have new qualities, such as independent consulting, telecommuting, job sharing, compressed work schedules, and flextime that are especially rewarding for people with the spirit of entrepreneurship. We can thus differentiate between the following categories of employment: (i) full-time homemakers; (ii) part-timers and those working full-time but less than 40 hours per week; (iii) nine-to-fivers and those working more that 40 hours a week; (iv) retirees and the unemployed; (v) self-employed and those attending school.

It should be obvious that these categories of employment are treated quite separately from their meaning in terms of compensation, such as wages or income. The latter is just an indicator of economic where employment is only one of the axes of its social differentiation. So much for the extensive evolution of social time in its objectified sense. As for its intensive evolution, it is marked by progressive technological and related occupational development since all occupations encapsulate and embody past time spent in education and training for them. Original primitive farming methods were first transformed into industrial work with machine-tools. This, in turn, is being replaced by the evolving information technologies of the present. Given the facts of continuing technological development and a concurrent process of globalization that moves much of production work offshore leading to the shrinking of associated occupations, we cannot simply adopt these distinctions of the past for today's classification of occupations. Thus, in a five-level occupational classification, several formerly differentiated occupational groups of manual work would already be too small to be counted separately. They must be collapsed into a single category of manual occupations. By contrast, several non-manual occupational groups must be differentiated instead, such as trades and services; sales and clerical occupations; administrative and managerial occupations; and professions. Figure 2 shows all these categories of social differentiation in objectified social space and time.

Figure 2. Cyclical-reproductive differentiation in objectified social space and time

	Extensive	**Intensive**
Social space	**Regions**	**Settlements**
	North East	rural areas
	South Atlantic	small towns
	East Central	medium-size central cities
	West Central	metropolitan centers
	the West	suburbs
Social time	**Employment**	**Occupations**
	keep house	manual
	work P/T, F/T<40 hrs/wk	trades & services
	work F/T >=40 hrs/wk	sales & clerical
	retired, unemployed	administrative & managerial
	self-employed, in school	professional

As in the evolution of social space in its cognitive sense, the extensive growth and the intensification of objectified social time was accompanied by the development of temporal standards of co-measurement which made coordination of cooperative human activities possible on an ever-wider scale. Social time was initially purely qualitative and subjective. There were many different—local and historical, culturally distinct—kinds of time. Only relatively recently has time become culturally universal and quantifiable. The first standard in measuring time was an era—BC and AD. The adoption of the monthly, weekly and daily units of Roman and Gregorian calendars were, in turn, further fine-tuned by the use of hours as measured by the hourglass and the solar clock. Finally, modern mean clock time that is also divisible into minutes, seconds, and milliseconds, first introduced in Switzerland, was generally adopted with the expansion of railroad travel in England and its subsequent spread across continents. With its point of origin at the Greenwich observatory, mean time remains our standard way of co-measuring local times. US standard time zones became the foundation of the present system of international time reckoning that does not necessarily follow the original hourly fifteen-degree intervals of geographic latitude. With every new stage in this evolution of constructive social time, humanity progressed from a multitude of isolated local communities to a universally recognized supra-local one that binds us all together and in this sense makes us interdependent (Sorokin 1964; Zerubavel 1979; 1982). This, then, is the overall multidimensional scheme of orthogonal categories of social differentiation (Figure 3):

Figure 3. Orthogonal categories of social differentiation.

	Historic Trends	**Social Inequality**
	civilization	upper class
Abstract	colonization	upper-middle class
	secularization	lower-middle class
	globalization	lower class
	Institutional domains	**Stratified social space and time**
	familial	regions
Concrete	cultural	settlement types
	economic	employment categories
	political	occupations

The orthogonal relationship among all these dimensions of social differentiation means that not only the institutional domains of lifestyle, status, orientation, and socialization are divided into a multitude of unequal social classes, but also that all such classes are further internally stratified by regional, residential, employment, and occupational divisions. Social inequality exists in both of these senses. While class inequality is always present and appears stable, at least within one generation, stratified social inequality, or the inequality of social strata, is much more malleable. In fact, this may be the only area available for incremental social change in the sense of social intervention or control that Karl Popper had in mind.

Social Measurement and Distributive Justice

In principle, social differentiation can be continued even further along these lines, especially by institutions as well as by behavior, to locate any empirical social group of interest. However, as the number of cells in this multidimensional grid expands with all these subdivisions, the number of cases in each cell will diminish. The extensive growth and intensification of social space and social time that are characteristic features of the processes of urbanization-suburbanization and industrialization-computerization, respectively, bring about radical changes in social structures. They present a picture of a virtual race to expand and to make good use of our limited resources of time and space. Culture, technology, and above all, better social organization are human artifacts promising a chance of extending even further natural space and time. But better social organization is contingent upon our ability to

measure and co-measure these social structures themselves. How is such quantitative representation possible?

Social measurement is widely recognized as the bedrock of social science. Despite its apparent schism between reliance either on numbers or on narratives, any social theory can be seen as scaled empirical observations focused and refracted by the prism of conceptual schemes. Lately, a new trend of highlighting relative rather than absolute social measurement has become apparent. The term is co-measurement, or commensuration, and it is seen as a precondition of any novel sociological explanation.[10] Radically inclusive, fundamentally relative, and thus quite within the drive towards a relational sociology (Emirbayer 1997), commensuration is even seen as a source of power. It can make taken-for-granted aspects of social life visible, valued and thus politically relevant. It can also render a hotly debated issue mundane and irrelevant. Commensuration of social phenomena inevitably throws new light on old issues and forces us to review our ideas about them. This is nothing short of a restatement of the original aspirations for social science's power to transform social reality. A further, even greater challenge for the social sciences is to have just a few, and ultimately, even one single supra-measure equally applicable to any and all aspects of social relations. There are numerous social indicators of education, housing, health, and crime, etc. What is lacking is an overarching measure that would co-measure them all and give us a concise picture of the current state of social structure.[11] This ideal emulating natural sciences, particularly classical physics, is meaningful to a substantial body of students of sociology.

Reducing the fragmentation of the social science is indeed an attractive goal, but how do we co-measure wealth, power, fame, and happiness? One clear way to achieve such commensuration is to abandon the practice of measuring social relations in quantities of tangible things, and to see them only as indicators of a broader set of general sociological concepts, preferably limited in number but all-encompassing in scope. We are surrounded by an overwhelming variety of things that noisily command our attention by virtue of incessant advertising. The idea is to see them only as particular representations of social meanings common to all of us rather than as gratification of individual wants. It is the meaning of things, above all else, as standing for structures of human social relations that is important here (Baudrillard 1981, Chikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). We would be even better off if such a limited set of social meanings could be reduced to a single unchanging and reliable social measure. If gold is (or was originally) a good, unchanging standard for economic value, why not a universal measure of the social?

All these considerations point in the direction of high moral values. They are the only stable, immutable objects of social thought and of social science where social structural arrangements continually change to accommodate them (Smikun 2000). If we assume that moral values such as freedom and social justice are at the core of all structural social change across human history, then they may well be taken as the overarching measures for the entire observed diversity of social phenomena, social processes, and social relations. Indicators of such values will always be historically concrete and local. They will have local and time-bound denomination—as Dollars, Pounds, Rupees, and Yens are for monetary units. But they will all represent the same timeless ideals that are synonymous across all cultures and that are responsible for the continuity of human civilization despite radical structural social changes across ages and continents. In fact, one such measure—social equality and inequality—has long been used to compare diverse facets of social structures such as income, race, and gender relations. There is a vast and still growing literature on race and gender inequality describing and quantitatively estimating various forms of patent and latent racial or gender discrimination.

As a technical mathematical social measure, inequality is used more to measure income distribution. The most commonly used such measures are shares of aggregate income and indices of income concentration, e.g., Gini coefficient. The drawbacks of social inequality as a universal social measure are in some of its concrete interpretations as well as general assumptions. All inequality measures are implicitly based on the egalitarian ideal that in statistical terms is expressed by a rectangular sampling distribution. This alone generates a substantial backlash against inequality studies. Criticism amounts to the charge that egalitarianism cannot account for unequal human merit or desert (Letwin 1983). More attenuated positions are those that advocate equality only of opportunity as opposed to outcomes, e.g., as removal of special privileges or unfair advantages, and those that argue for relatively more equality (less inequality) of actual social outcomes rather than absolute egalitarianism of the communist kind. The latter two attenuated positions contain clues to a better universal social measure that is free from the drawbacks of social equality and inequality. Distributive justice, or fair and equitable distribution, incorporates principles of both relative equality and unequal merit or desert in their pure forms as well as forms of their mutual cross-attribution.

Already Aristotle declared that equality is for the equal and inequality for the unequal, and that all virtue is found in the median between two extremes. Besides these maxims, our ideas about distributive justice come from four major

moral philosophies of modern times: libertarian, egalitarian, utilitarian, and liberal. The libertarian principle from Adam Smith to Hayek (1960) and Nozick (1974) champions distribution according to pure merit or desert resulting from an unfettered laissez-faire pursuit of self-interest in free competition. This principle of naturally occurring social distribution was denounced and opposed by the socialists and communists who advanced the egalitarian ideal. The utilitarian-welfare principle of distributive justice historically served to mediate the irreconcilable principles of egalitarian and desert-based distributive justice. From Bentham to Keynes and other proponents of the welfare state, a principle of deserved equality was promoted, whether in the form of maximizing utility, or securing welfare for a maximum possible number of people. Thus, the welfare safety net is provided only to those who cannot provide for themselves a certain minimal level of well-being. For everyone else, it is distribution according to their merit and desert. Finally, liberal distributive justice from Locke's ideas on government to Rawls' principle of difference has advocated various forms of equal desert. This is another form of mediation between deserved and egalitarian distributive justice that is different from, yet complementary to, the utilitarian-welfare form of such mediation. For example, according to Rawls (1995, 1999), distribution is just if it is deserved by occupants of social positions and offices and is at the same time to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society. The latter is guaranteed by equal access to such positions and offices that are patently of unequal merit.

These four major principles of distributive justice can be conveniently modeled with statistical parameters of probability distributions where probability scores would represent elements of social structures. Since the four historic principles of distributive justice continue to operate—to a larger or smaller degree—in regulating human social relations and are responsible, in the final analysis, for secular institutional-structural social development, a statistical model of distributive justice as a measure of the social must integrate these four parameters. Conversely, the properties of such statistical parameters must be appropriate to model the four major principles of distributive justice. We find such parameters in moment skewness, standard deviation, asymmetry, and unbiased sample size correction factor. Moment skewness can model the libertarian principle of pure merit or desert while standard deviation can model the egalitarian principle of pure equality. In a game with a permanent sum - which relational sociology must assume—it is fairly obvious that greater values of standard deviation signify more platykurtic distributions that can, therefore, model more egalitarian social relations. Similarly, more negative (or less positive) values of moment skewness shift the weight of probabilities to opposite distributional tails, i.e. towards either higher or lower pure social merit. Unbiased sample size correction factor (1-1/N) and asymmetry, also known as simple relational skewness statistic [(mean — median) / standard deviation], also model equality and merit, respectively, but with a difference. Unbiased sample size is integral to sample standard deviation, and the use of its correction factor in generalized normal distribution can emulate Student's t-distribution. Asymmetry, too, carries certain properties of both skewness and standard deviation in that the difference between mean and median in units of standard deviation always signifies skewness. Thus, unbiased sample size correction factor is a proper model of deserved equality, and asymmetry, of equal merit.

To estimate these four theoretical parameters from sample data, we need a family of sampling distributions as quantitative standards having characteristics of (current and local) laws, and as a means of comparing unequal social relations with respect to indicators of social change, i.e. as a model of distributive justice. One way to estimate these parameters is with the help of a multinomial ordinal probit analysis based on a generalized normal distribution with the following density function:

$$f(z \mid \alpha, \gamma, \sigma, \omega) = \begin{cases} \frac{\omega}{\sigma\sqrt{2\pi}} e^{-\frac{1}{2}\left(\frac{\gamma + z\omega/\sigma}{1+\alpha}\right)^2} & \text{if} \quad \gamma + z\omega/\sigma \le 0 \\ \frac{\omega}{\sigma\sqrt{2\pi}} e^{-\frac{1}{2}\left(\frac{\gamma + z\omega/\sigma}{1-\alpha}\right)^2} & \text{if} \quad \gamma + z\omega/\sigma > 0 \end{cases}$$

where α is shape estimated by asymmetry ($-1<\alpha<1$), γ is location estimated by moment skewness, σ is scale estimated by standard deviation, and ω is peakedness estimated by unbiased sample size correction factor. This family of variably shaped, variably located, variably scaled, and variably peaked four-parameter generalized normal distributions has very useful properties. It gives an endless variety of continuous unimodal probability curves of monotonously increasing and monotonously diminishing values that includes the standard Gaussian symmetric distribution as a special case produced when shape and location are equal to zero with scale and peakedness equal to unity. If peakedness alone varies, Student's t-distribution is obtained.

Generalized multinomial ordinal probits are found by looking up points on the standardized z-scale just below

cumulative generalized normal probabilities corresponding to sample proportions of their initially ad hoc (grouped) ordinal scores. The probits are the midpoints of the intervals cut off by such points (Agresti 1984, Wickens 1989). This procedure must be iterated with successive generalized normal distribution curves producing increasingly better approximations of probit values and of their four estimated summary statistics. The implicit assumption here is that sample proportions come from generalized normal distributions rather than from the scale of natural numbers. In terms of data theory (Jacoby 1991), there is no rational basis to prefer one to the other. The appropriateness of a family of such specific statistical models will hold to the extent that they are meaningful not only within general logical and mathematical probability theories, but also as representations of normative societal ideals of social distribution. Only in this way can accepted models become specifications for vague, verbally described standards of distributive justice including equality and merit.

Given the plurality of social objects, it is obvious that there is no single correct estimate of distributive justice for the same social group. Walzer saw this as multiple spheres of justice. "When meanings are distinct," he wrote, "distributions must be autonomous. Every social good or set of goods constitutes, as it were, a distributive sphere within which only certain criteria and arrangements are appropriate" (1983:10). But more can be said. Estimates of distributive justice will yield different results in various dimensions of social differentiation even when applied to the same social object. Distributive justice is always multiple in these two senses. Differentiated indicators of social justice are also indicators of differentiated social justice. As various combinations of major, minor, or dissonant chords can produce musical harmony in innumerable ways in different keys, so can distributive justice be different for different social objects and their multiple orthogonal axes of differentiation.

Toward Indicators of Valuable Social Objects

Social science is called upon to reveal deep underlying causes and mechanisms of long-term social processes as well as synchronic phases of cyclical social reproduction that result in large and small structural changes unfolding before our eyes. Is globalization about the outsourcing of manufacturing production or about the spread of American culture? If it is about the spread of the free market economy that proved so successful in the West, why do people protest against it? If the anti-globalization protests have a just cause, can they stop it? And in the reflexive mode, does the process of societal computerization bring about "incredulity towards metanarratives" and the denial of the criterion of truth in favor of efficiency in social science (Lyotard 1983)? The difficulty is that penetrating answers to these questions must be presented within a coherent system of general sociological concepts, and yet make sense in terms of everyday experiences and the existing stock of common-sense knowledge.

The promise given by neatly built conceptual schemes successfully to grasp and interpret empirical social reality never comes without a price. Genuine lived meanings of empirical data are always fuzzy, haphazard, and, ultimately, unfathomable. While the harmony, comprehensiveness, and consistency imposed by an extraneous conceptual scheme on observed lived meanings may obviate the problem of reliability, the extreme rationality of abstract conceptual meanings may easily rob them of their original validity. All social scientists face a hard choice "between surrender [to empirical meanings] and ideal type" (Wagner 1978). Common-sense native meanings cannot be simply substituted with sociological conceptual jargon. The precipice separating them can only be bridged by meanings that are intelligible both in terms of deductively obtained abstract conceptual schemes and in terms of the unique meanings that constitute the language of a local community of natives. Sociologists knowledgeable in both universal and unique meanings must be able to combine them into particular meanings having correspondences in both sets: in abstract sociological categories as well as in the unique local meanings of lived social reality. This mediation between observational data and abstract conceptual schemes is made possible by social indicators.

The idea of social indicators was highlighted in the 1960's out of the immediate need to monitor macrosocial conditions-social problems—in a way that would bring out their broader and more differentiated aspects than those captured by traditional economic indicators. Providing a happy middle ground between raw observational variables and general sociological concepts, social indicators are uniquely qualified to capture latent phases of macrosocial functioning while reducing otherwise exceedingly complex empirical social reality to manageable proportions. Owing to their mediating role between conceptualization and measurement, social indicators carry within themselves these two seemingly irreconcilable aspects of their origin. In their deductive modality, social indicators can produce new domain-specific concepts that have a foundation in general theory and methodology. They can be used as the building

blocks of the social sciences. In their inductive empirical aspect, on the other hand, social indicators supply substantive meanings to the abstract notions of social structure, social change, social reproduction, social development, and social system. Ultimately, only a solid system of social—or what may better be called sociological—indicators built around major categories of social differentiation can give social research comprehensiveness and cumulative discipline. We must have such descriptive indicators before any attempt is made at building middle-range social theories.

If our claim is valid about the ability of basic and visible lifestyle, ascribed and achieved status, deep and volatile orientation, and early and later socialization to embody deep macrosocial structures, they must become the focal points of all empirical social research. When research problems and hypotheses are formulated with an orientation to or in terms of distribution of such social objects , rather than of the endless variety of raw variables produced for a myriad of diverse research projects, all research results will necessarily become mutually relevant, mutually referential, and thus, cumulative. Building a system of indicators of lifestyle, status, orientation, and socialization to organize the collective effort of macrosocial research and maintaining it with regular data collection then will become tasks of paramount importance. Once operational definitions are constructed for indicators of these valuable objects and deployed within a consistent scheme of social differentiation, they can be used to determine quantitative relations among a great variety of social groups. The resulting picture of social relations will form the deep structures in synchronic as well as diachronic macrosocial change.

Endnotes

1. Thus writes Twitchell (1996:11-12), "What is clear is that most things in and of themselves do not mean enough. In fact, what we crave may not be objects at all but their meaning. For whatever else advertising does, one thing is certain: by adding value to material, by adding meaning to objects, by branding things, advertising performs the role historically associated with religion. The Great Chain of Being, which for centuries located value above the horizon in the World Beyond, has been reforged to settle value on the objects here and now."

2. "The idea that advertising creates artificial desires rests on a profound ignorance of human nature, on the hazy feeling that there existed some halcyon era of noble savages with purely natural needs, on romantic claptrap first promulgated by Rousseau and kept alive in institutions well isolated from the marketplace. [...] Aside from comforting purchasers by assuring them they made the right choice, aside from comforting CEOs and employees that their work is important, and aside from certain unpredictable short-term increases in consumption, most advertising does not perform as advertised. Take away the tax deduction that corporations get for advertising, and most expenditures would dry up overnight" (Twitchell 1996:12,109). In support of this latter statement, Twitchell cites studies made over half a century by economists and advertising executives themselves.

3. Mead (1934) expressed these three latter phases of socialization as me, generalized other, and I.

4. In this sense, the problem of lifestyle, and visible lifestyle in particular, is indeed a rather late one. Classical writers Hegel and Marx spoke only of basic needs in this context as satisfied by a system of institutions of civil (burgerlische, i.e., bourgeois) society, or, better still, by a just mode of production of social relations that determines all institutional superstructures, respectively. The latter point of view gave rise to the idea of (class) interests as the focus of diverse and often contradictory needs.

5. This is how Simmel (1950:409) described this capacity from an individual point of view in The Metropolis and Mental Life, "The deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life. [...The] metropolis is the genuine arena of this culture which outgrows all personal life. Here [...] is offered such an overwhelming fullness of crystallized and impersonalized spirit that the personality, so to speak, cannot maintain itself under its impact. On the one hand, life is made infinitely easy for the personality in that stimulations, interests, uses of time and consciousness are offered to it from all sides. They carry the person as if in a stream, and one needs hardly to swim for oneself. On the other hand, however, life is composed more and more of these impersonal contents and offerings which tend to displace the genuine personal colorations and incomparabilities. This results in the individual's summoning the utmost in uniqueness and particularization, in order to preserve his most personal core. He has to exaggerate this personal element in order to remain audible even to himself."

6. While being legitimate and necessary aspects of social analysis, the subject-matters of impersonal

aggregate macrosociology and intentional, action-based microsociology acquire full meanings only in the context of mesosocial realities of nonconformity, voluntary organizations, and social movements in defense of human as well as social rights. This is where institutional social norms are enforced, and where social action confront social institutions. Microsocial action and aggregate macrosocial behavior are but useful analytical abstractions from concrete mesosocial reality.

7. In his first general statement on social stratification, Parsons (1954b) contrasted unequal occupational status and prestige associated with it as mostly achieved rather than ascribed with family characterized by largely egalitarian relationships, especially the conjugal family with dependent children and women removed to non-competitive occupations, if any. He went on to discuss the vagueness of income or standard of living as a common measure of status mediating between occupational and family roles. Here, too, institutional attributes of social groups are unlawfully compared to functional ones.

8. Sorokin (1959:12) put it best: "Any organized social group is always a stratified social body. Unstratified society, with real equality of its members, is a myth which has never been realized in the history of mankind."

9. In Social Mobility, Sorokin (1959:4-6) used the term social space as synonymous with social universe, i.e., in the sense of an array of axes of social differentiation. To distinguish it from our usage, it would be appropriate to call such an array sociological space rather than social.

10. A common yet insufficiently appreciated example of social commensuration is the price of diverse products and services. Other examples are college and faculty rankings, rankings of places to retire, estimates of risks in insurance business, and a host of disparate social statistics in general. It also turns out that commensuration is much more than a technical process of bringing empirical observations of different social phenomena under a single metric. It "transforms qualities into quantities, difference into magnitude. It is a way to reduce and simplify disparate information into numbers that can easily be compared. This transformation allows people to quickly grasp, represent, and compare differences. [...It] condenses and reduces the amount of information people have to process, which is useful for representing value and simplifying decision-making" (Espeland and Stevens 1998:316).

11. Some see this as one of the endemic difficulties of social measurement. "Social measurement presents problems that are not encountered in quite the same form in relation to physical, biological, or economic measurement. [...] Although this difference is perhaps one of degree rather than kind, the absence of formal agreed tools of measurement such as length, weight, distance, or monetary value is a serious problem for many areas of social life" (Bulmer 2001:459).

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