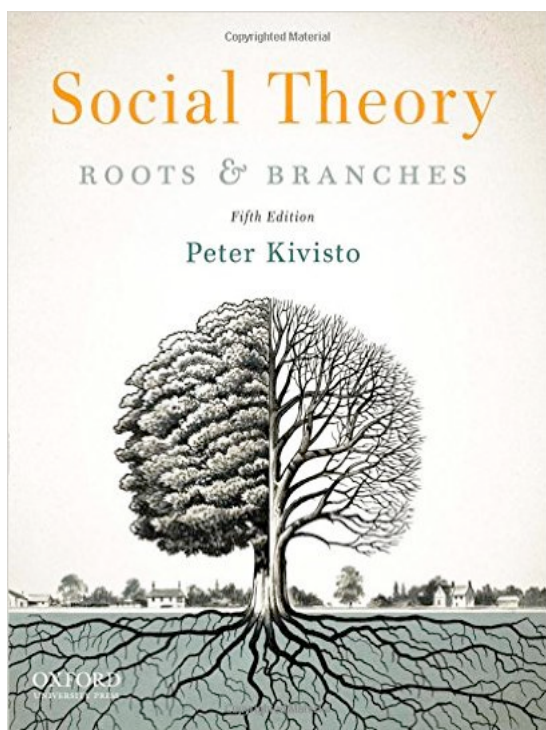


# Contemporary Social Theory:

## An introductory overview



Simone Pulver

Associate Professor, Environmental Studies

UC Santa Barbara

SESYNC Sociology Immersion

January 11, 2016

MICRO

**Exchange theory; Rational choice theory**

(Homans, Blau, Coleman, etc.)

**Phenomenology; Ethnomethodology**

(Schutz, Berger, Luckmann, Garfinkel, etc.)

**Symbolic interactionism; Dramaturgy**

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MACRO

**Structural functionalism; Systems theory**

(Parsons, Merton, Coser, Luhmann, etc.)

**Critical theory/Frankfurt School**

(Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Habermas, etc.)

**Conflict, Power, Dependency**

(Dahrendorf, Mills, Frank, Cardoso, etc.)

**Feminism and Gender**

(Gillman, DeBauvoir, Smith, Fraser, Hill Collins, etc.)

**Race; Ethnicity; Nationalism**

(DuBois, Fanon, Gilroy, Hall, etc.)

**Post-structuralism; Postmodernism**

(Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Baudrillard, Lyotard, etc.)

**Globalization**

(Polanyi, Wallerstein, Chase-Dunn, Appadurai, etc.)

**Integrative Theorists**

(Habermas; Bourdieu; Giddens; Castells, etc.)

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# Theoretical directions to watch

- **Queer Theory; Critical Race and Racism Theory**
- **Actor-Network Theory; Practice Theory**
- Theorizing **inequality**
- Theorizing **society and environment**



# Symbolic Interactionism

Lori Peek

Department of Sociology &  
Center for Disaster and Risk  
Analysis

Colorado State University

# Micro-Level Theory

- Close-up study of social interaction and human behavior based on individuals' interpretation of a situation and the meaning they give it.



# Symbolic Interactionism

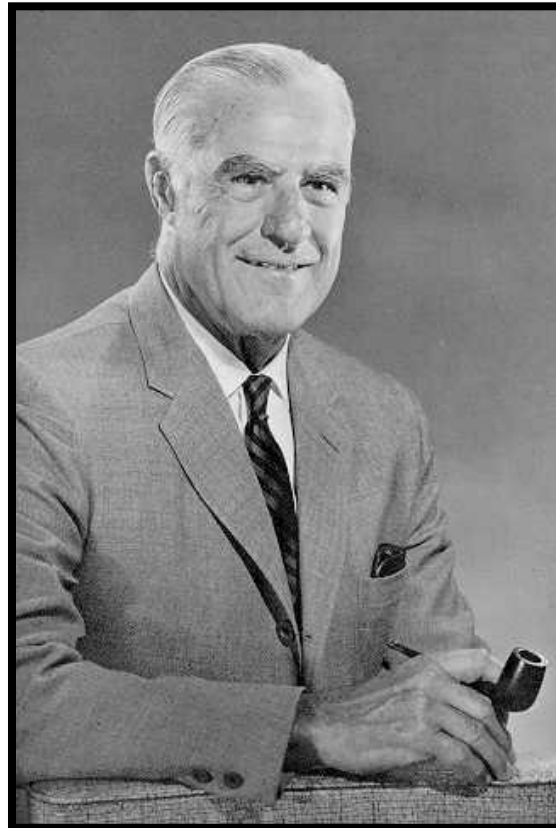
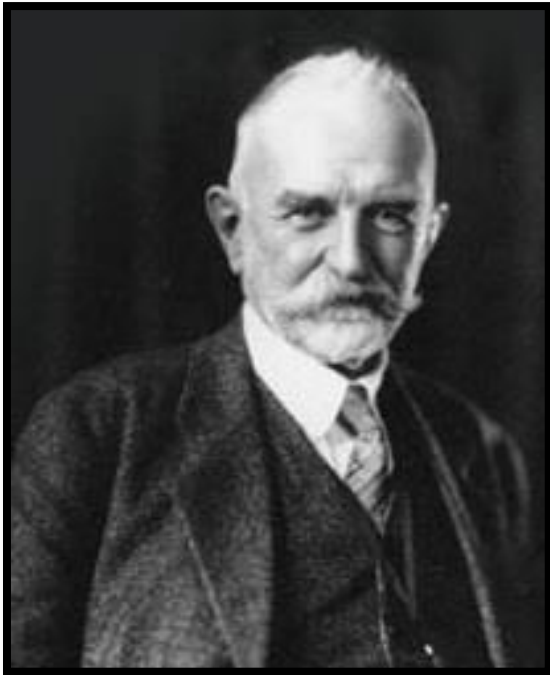
Charles Horton Cooley  
(1864-1929)

Robert E. Park  
(1864-1898)

George Herbert  
Mead (1863-1931)

Herbert Blumer  
(1900-1987)

Erving Goffman  
(1933-1982)



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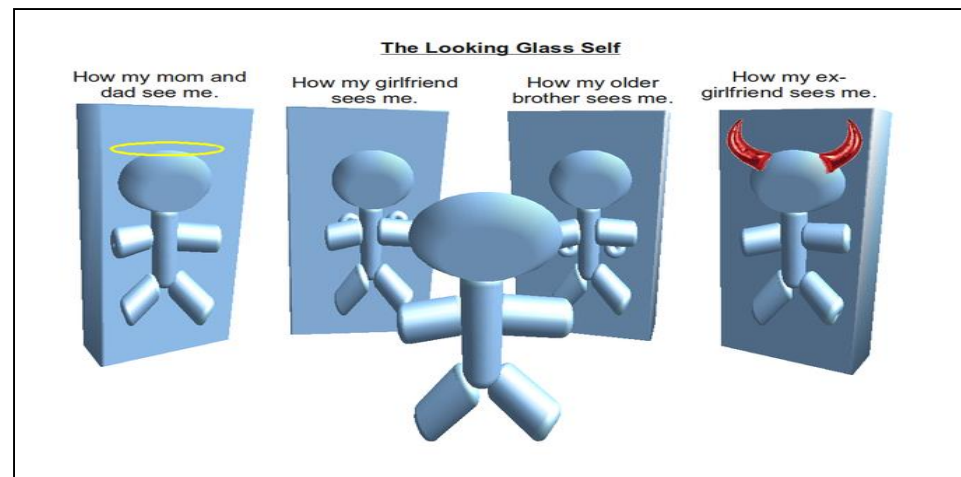
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# Central Premises of Symbolic Interactionism

1. People act toward symbols (ideas, objects, etc.), but they do so on the basis those things have for them.
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5. People become human through social interaction.
6. People are conscious, capable of reflecting on themselves and what they do, and therefore capable of shaping their actions and interactions.
7. People define situations, give them meaning, and then act toward them. Reality is socially constructed.
8. People produce society; society is the joint action of people.

# Ways of Looking at the World





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**Unit of Analysis:**  
-individuals and small  
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# Ways of Looking at the World

## Implications?



### **Unit of Analysis:**

-individuals and small groups

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-qualitative, participatory

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-identities, interactions, behaviors,  
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# WORLD-SYSTEMS THEORY

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## The Chase-Dunn Approach

*Andrew Jorgenson*

*Professor of Sociology and Environmental Studies*

*Boston College*

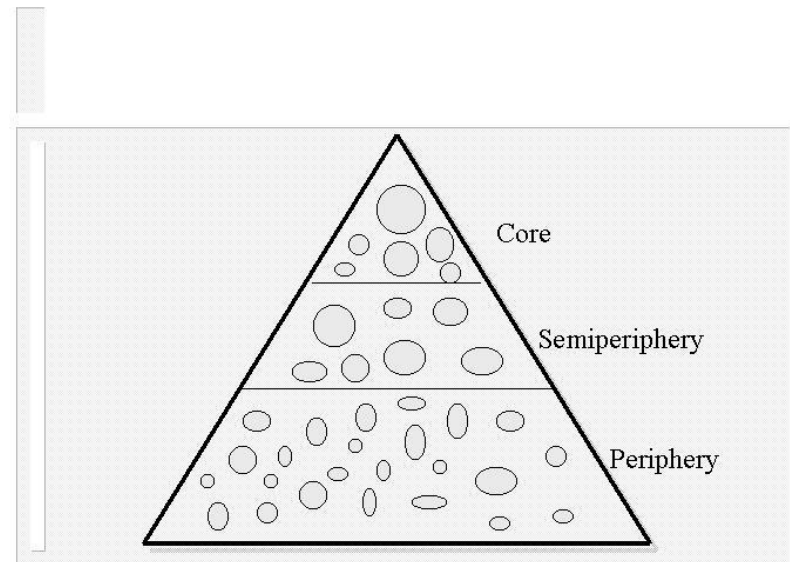
# Definition of a World-System

A system of societies, an intersocietal system

often multicultural: people with different cultures are linked together by trade, communications, conflict and alliances

Only the most recent world-system is global – the modern world-system of national societies

**Core / Periphery Hierarchy:**  
a stratification system  
composed of economically  
and politically dominant  
core societies and  
dependent peripheral and  
semiperipheral regions



# Modeling the Modern System

Chase-Dunn's *Global Formation* (1998) is an effort to make a single model of the constants, cycles and trends of the modern world-system

This model attempts to specify basic and normal operations of the system

# The Structural Constants

## 1. Capitalism(s)

the accumulation of resources by means of the production and sale of commodities for profit

## 2. The interstate system

a system of unequally powerful sovereign national states that compete for resources by supporting profitable commodity production and by engaging in geopolitical and military competition

## 3. The core/periphery hierarchy

core regions have strong states and specialize in high-technology, high-wage production while peripheral regions have weak states and specialize in labor-intensive and low-wage production



# Systemic Cycles

## 1. The Kondratieff Wave (K-wave)

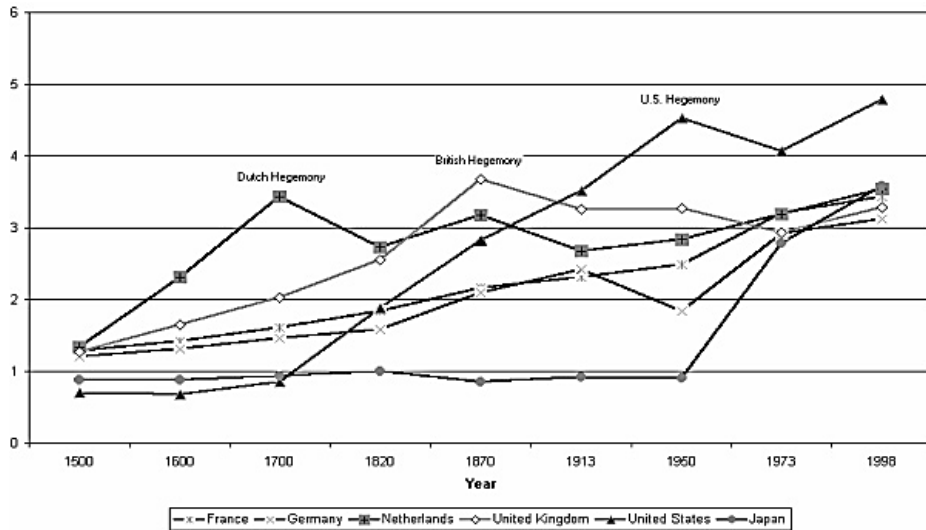
a worldwide economic cycle with a period of from forty to sixty years in which the relative rate of economic activity increases (during "A-phase" upswings) and then decreases (during "B-phase" periods of slower growth or stagnation)

## 2. The hegemonic sequence

the rise and fall of hegemonic core powers in which military power and economic comparative advantage are concentrated into a single hegemonic core

# Systemic Trends

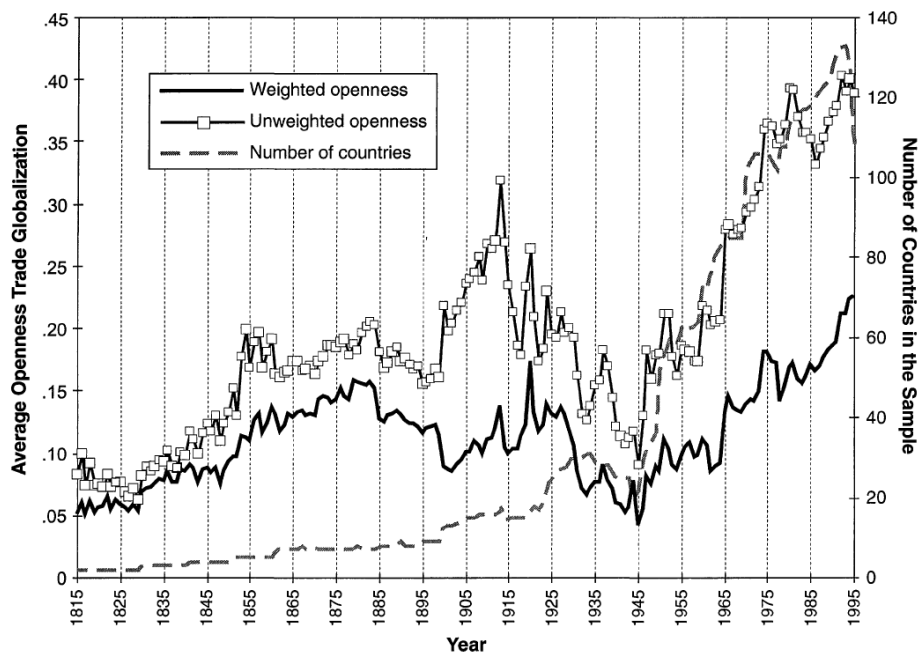
1. Expansion and deepening of commodity relations  
land, labor and wealth have been increasingly mediated by market-like institutions in both the core and the periphery
2. State-formation  
the power of states over their populations has generally increased, though this trend is sometimes slowed down by efforts to deregulate
3. Increased size of economic enterprises
4. International economic integration
5. The growing gap  
the relative gap in incomes between core and peripheral regions has continued to increase
6. International political integration and increasing global governance  
the emergence of stronger international institutions for regulating economic and political interactions (League of Nations, the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund)



Country GDP per Capita as a Ratio to Average World GDP per Capita, 1500 – 1998

Chase-Dunn et al., 2005, *Sociological Perspectives*

TRADE GLOBALIZATION SINCE 1795



Chase-Dunn et al., 2000, *American Sociological Review*

Figure 3. Weighted and Unweighted Trade Globalization, 1815 to 1990

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Chase-Dunn, Christopher, Andrew K Jorgenson, Thomas Reifer, and Shoon Lio. 2005. "The Trajectory of the United States in the World-System: A Quantitative Reflection." *Sociological Perspectives* 48:233-254.

# Karl Polanyi (1886-1964)

*The Great Transformation*

Political economy of WWI and WWII

## **Double movement**

“The concept of the self-regulating market was utopian, and its progress was stopped by the realistic self-protection of society.”

Self-regulating markets must be embedded in law, politics, and morality

# Karl Polanyi (1886-1964)

*Trade and Markets in the Early Empires*

Economic sociology and anthropology

## **Substantive economics**

Economy is an “instituted process of interaction between man and his environment.”

Social and natural environment generate distinct organizing principles of economy

# Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002)

*Distinction: A Sociological Critique of the Judgement of Taste*

Social stratification, preferences and power

**Social, cultural and symbolic capital**

“It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces **capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory...**”

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**“By reducing the universe of exchanges to mercantile exchange, which is objectively and subjectively oriented toward the maximization of profit, i.e., (economically) self-interested, it has implicitly defined the other forms of exchange as noneconomic, and therefore disinterested.”**



# Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002)

## *Outline of a Theory of Practice*

Dialectic of objective (external) field and subjective (experiential) agency

## **Habitus**

**“Systems of durable, transposable dispositions...as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without in any way being the product of obedience to rules.”**

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## **Habitus**

Habitus is “the objective relationship between two objectivities [individual and system]...”  
therefore, **“the social world is present in its entirety in every ‘economic’ action.”**