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An interview about emotions, violence, attention space and sociology

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Sociologizing with Randall Collins: An interview about emotions, violence, attention space and sociology

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Abstract

In the interview in this article, Randall Collins discusses various aspects of his oeuvre. First, he considers why interaction rituals (IRs) in religion are special emotional trans-formers. This is followed by a discussion of IRs in the digital age and the symbolic and economic power that is required to orchestrate IRs in politics and revolutions. Then comes a discussion of social scientific research into violence, in the past and more recently. The interview continues with a reflection on the notion of attention space, a concept which Collins has applied in analyses of violent interactions and the intellectual struggles between philosophers. Finally, the article considers the state of the art of sociology and its future prospects, evaluating its potential for rapid discovery and its position on the abstraction-reflexivity continuum. As the interview demonstrates Collins's insightful sociological craftsmanship, it provides social scientists with a strong and optimistic lead in how to do social theory.

Keywords

Collins, interaction rituals, IR theory, micro-sociology, sociology of violence

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In May 2016, Randall Collins visited the Department of Sociology at the University of Amsterdam. On this occasion, we, eight students and staff members, had a conversation with him about his work.[1] This article is based on a transcription of that interview. Randall Collins is one of the most influential sociologists today. He has published on a broad range of topics: education (*The Credential Society*, 1979), historical sociology, including his prediction of the fall of the Soviet empire (in *Weberian Sociological Theory*, 1986), an extensive program for an empirically rigorous conflict sociology (*Conflict Sociology*, 2009 [1975]), the dynamics of group emotions and solidarity (*Interaction Ritual Chains*, 2004), charismatic leadership (*Napoleon Never Slept*, 2015) and sociological theory (*Sociological Insight*, 1982, and *Four Sociological Traditions*, 1994). He received the American Sociological Association's distinguished scholarly book award for both his *Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (1998) and *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory* (2008). In addition, he has published numerous articles in, among others, *American Sociological Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, *British Journal of Sociology*, and *Sociological Theory*. Besides his prolific academic writing, he shares his sociological imagination and creativity in two blogs: sociological-eye.blogspot.com and, more recently, creativity-via-sociology.blogspot.com.

Collins has rejuvenated the work of Max Weber and Émile Durkheim by combining their theories with contemporary sociological insights (see, for example, *Weberian Sociological Theory* and *Interaction Ritual Chains*). The intellectual heritage of Weber and Durkheim is noteworthy throughout the interview. The conversation starts with a discussion of interaction rituals (IRs). Building on Durkheim and Goffman, Collins's IR theory was first outlined in *The Sociology of Philosophies* and further developed in *Interaction Rituals Chains*. In both works, Collins argues for a radical microsociology in which situations are the ground zero of social life, and he also elaborates links between micro-dynamics and phenomena which are more extensive in time and space, such as social stratification. More specifically, we consider interaction rituals in religion and as emotional transformers. This is followed by a discussion of how IR theory can be put to use in the digital age – as bodily co-presence and face-to-face contacts play an important role in the theory. The interview continues with a question about the political economy of interaction rituals, more specifically, the symbolic and economic power that is required to orchestrate political movements.

In the second part of the interview, we consider the 'new sociology of violence', a field of study in which Collins's *Violence* (2008) forms a cornerstone. We start this theme by returning to Durkheim and Weber, who wrote surprisingly little about violence in a period of war, and then continue with a discussion of the most important analytical distinctions between physical violence against humans versus structural and symbolic violence. The discussion about violence leads to a reflection on the notion of attention space, a concept which Collins has applied in both his analyses of violent interactions and the intellectual struggles between philosophers. Finally, we consider the state of the art of sociology and its future prospects. The discipline is discussed along the lines of *The*

Sociology of Philosophies, evaluating its potential for rapid discovery and its position on the abstraction-reflexivity continuum.

In his extensive answers to our questions, Randall Collins demonstrates insightful sociological craftsmanship. Therefore, in our view, the interview provides social scientists with a strong and optimistic lead in how to do social theory.

Interaction rituals, religion and the transformation of emotions

DW: You have used the term emotional energy to describe the emotional states of individuals who feel confident and enthusiastic and who feel they want to and can take the initiative. The source of emotional energy is successful interaction rituals. Thus, to some extent, agency in the form of emotional energy is generated in group assemblies. You also state that interaction rituals are emotional transformers. Does it matter for the outcome of the ritual – in terms of emotional energy – what the main emotion is at the start of it? Does the resultant emotional energy differ when the shared mood is mourning, guilt, anger, or happiness?

RC: An interaction ritual always starts with some emotion. The important feature is how strongly it is shared. If the ritual is successful, the starting emotion can turn into a different one. A good example is a funeral. Strong negative experiences can bring people together and turn those emotions into feelings of solidarity. So, is it irrelevant what emotion it starts out from?

I think it does matter which emotions are used in an interaction ritual. Part of my thinking comes from religious rituals, from which Durkheim invented the concept. Other situations are similar to religious rituals, like sporting events and concerts. These have magical moments of collective effervescence; the feeling of being absorbed in a group. Then what does this say about religion in particular? I came to the conclusion that there are two things that are specific to religion.

One is a sense of time. Religions almost entirely point back into the past. This is overwhelmingly strong in Judaism, a religion that is almost completely about remembering historical events of 3,000 years ago. The historical focus is slightly less strong in Buddhism but Christianity certainly has it. Religions point to the past and imply they will continue to do so until the end of time or the end of the world. So, religious rituals distinctively give a very strong sense of ourselves as a group of believers embedded in time.

The other thing specific to religious IRs is the kind of emotions involved. A key emotion is a feeling of awe, that there is something more important and bigger than us. It is not just the common emotion of joy. Winning a football game is not at the same level as a religious experience. Winning a football game is something you get over pretty quickly, within a few days or so. So, yes, there are distinctively religious emotions. Christianity is a wonderful example of transforming emotions because it starts out with an emotion of extreme sorrow: the crucifixion. Then this is transformed into feelings of joyously rising together again. Other religions use different versions of transforming emotions.

Buddhists use different emotions, diffuse moods rather than strong emotions. Zen meditation is a technique for getting into a mood of tranquility. This also is a shared

mood. Unless you are a very advanced meditator, you cannot do Zen by yourself. This is disguised by famous stories about the lonely Zen meditator. But those were the great masters at the peak of their careers. When you learn to meditate, you start out meditating with other people in the same room. That is when you get some of the feeling of what it is about, even if you are not very good at it. If you leave the group, you find that you are not good at it at all. It is much more social than I thought at first. It appears that no one ever starts meditating alone. It is only once you have reached certain levels that you are allowed to go off and meditate by yourself. According to the ethnography of Michal Pagis (2015), while you are meditating, you are not supposed to talk but you are very aware of each other. You have non-verbal micro-interactions with each other, that support the mood of tranquility. The social context around Buddhist meditation is very important. That is how I came to the conclusion that enlightenment is only possible in a society where the majority of the people believe that some people experience enlightenment and give them great respect for it. In traditional China or Japan, becoming an enlightened master meant that you had the right to found your own monastery or to inherit a monastery from another enlightened Zen master. In western societies, meditation is an individual practice that is not connected to anything else in society. For that reason, I do not think that people in western societies can have enlightenment in the same way they could in the past.

Interaction rituals in a digital age

AZ: In some cases, it seems like interaction rituals thrive in digitalized forms. For example, in hacking communities, in online dating, or in e-sports. In these instances, interaction rituals are specifically designed for use via a digital medium. Some people are so accustomed to these kind of mediated interaction rituals that they actually feel less confident or even experience discomfort if these interaction rituals were to take place with people in actual close proximity to each other. In these cases, the mediated forms of these interaction rituals would generate more emotional energy than their face-to-face counterparts. What would this mean for future studies in IR theory?

RC: In the book *Interaction Ritual Chains*, a diagram in the second chapter shows the variables that make rituals stronger or weaker or even fail. This was my argument against the functionalist period of ritual analysis before 1970. At that time, the theory was: 'when things go well, the rituals are working, when things go badly, then people use rituals to make things go better'. If that were true, then the analysis would be tautological. We have to look at the variables that make an IR succeed or not, and see in each case what the different outcomes are. Some areas are genuine challenges to the theory, especially in the era of electronic media. Do you actually have to meet face-to-face to experience intense solidarity? This is examined in Rich Ling's (2010) book about mobile phones. He concludes that you can have interaction rituals over the phone but they are not very strong and therefore the people who have them over the phone also want to see their interaction partners face-to-face.

What would we expect to find about people who prefer interactions via digital media? Think of it as an interactional market where people have different things to offer to each

other in terms of emotions or cultural capital, and different opportunities of access to other people. Some people have very good positions in interactional markets and some people have not, a continuum between people who have great interactional capital and those who have moderate or little interactional capital. A hypothesis is that those people who prefer online interactions are the ones who do not have very much cultural or other sorts of capital. Digital media are pretty recent and their use is very age-graded. Most of the people who use the social media heavily are quite young and probably do not have very high social positions. Some of them have very low positions, such as teenagers, in contrast to adults.

People in important economic and political positions almost always meet face-to-face for important business. Their success depends on being able to exert emotional influence over somebody and to pick up clues of what they are dealing with. Steve Jobs had a tremendous influence on making digital media possible, but he never liked to use email; he always wanted to meet face-to-face. On the other hand, people who do research on digital media say that it can free you from having to make an immediate response. It gives you more time to strategize or control the emotional element. Timing is important in face-to-face rituals, because if you have a slow timing, the other could notice alienation or hesitation; if you have a good interactional rhythm, it indicates solidarity. Again, this suggests to me that connecting primarily by online media is associated with weaker social positions.

In the strongest forms of social solidarity, the body is a necessary ingredient. This is particularly true in sexual attraction. But will this change in the future? We could design a device to directly stimulate the part of your brain involved in sexual arousal. You would not actually have to meet your lover, but just turn on a part of your brain. I have not thought about all the possibilities but this might become an electronic version of heroin addiction. Why would you need another person when all you need to do is turn on a device that gives you pseudo-sexual feelings? The difference might be that heroin, and other such substances, cause you to develop tolerance and side effects that make you sick. It might be that an electronic addiction would have less side effects. Still, people who are very strongly addicted are not very good at doing anything else. My prediction is that the people without an electronic addiction would control the people with an electronic addiction. When digital media are developed to artificially provide the kind of things that are generated in interaction rituals, then more people become encapsulated in digital media and stop doing anything else. The powerful people would be the ones who could use the media to just the extent that they need them, but also meet face-to-face to create alliances and gain dominance.

Stratification is an aspect that media enthusiasts generally ignore. It is not to say that we should throw away either interaction ritual theory or throw away the significance of digital media. The findings of Durkheim and Goffman and their followers give some strong mechanisms that work throughout history with different strengths of their variables. In a future in which there are even more digital media, the variables in the theory of interaction rituals will continue to operate. IR theory may be modified but it would still be a key to understanding social behavior in a very digitalized world.

Political economy of interaction rituals

JU: You state that people seek to maximize their emotional energy. For this, they need other participants, which creates a market of supply and demand. But what is missing in that picture are the people who organize or who stage the interaction, for example, in politics where people with lots of money try to influence these processes. In order to understand which symbols charge people with emotion, would you also have to look at how the interaction ritual came about? Who brought everybody together?

RC: Everything is worth getting into our picture but how strong are the various effects? A lot of money is put into political advertisements but those advertisers are naïve. The creators of political advertisements think they can easily manipulate people's opinions. On the contrary, I think that human beings are quite good at picking up whether other people are in an authentic or an inauthentic rhythm. Generally, all politicians are very inauthentic. For one thing, they have to give the same speech over and over again, so it becomes routine for them. And, if you are good in politics, then you have to make deals and change your position from time to time. When politicians first appear, they may seem more consistent and authentic and they become more inauthentic as they go along. Politics is basically an inauthentic kind of activity. Micro-sociology shows that people are actually quite sensitive to picking that up. This is why politicians may spend a lot of money on TV advertisements and still lose the election.

Newly developed symbols usually have the strongest emotional charge, and this happens through the delegitimation of old symbols. The delegitimation of old symbols is an emotional shift that helps to develop new symbols; failed rituals open the way to new rituals. The first few years of the French Revolution of 1789 show this clearly. Most of the things that were highly legitimated in the old regime became negatively legitimated during the revolution. Meanwhile the French developed entirely new symbols like wearing the revolutionary cockade on your hat – you could be killed for not wearing it. Micro-processes became central once the government of France had broken down. Politics depended on which group could create emotional domination in the assembly halls of Paris. Behind these were smaller groups who would meet and plan how to manipulate the assembly. France became a series of giant Durkheimian gatherings, which generated a series of new symbols and charismatic leaders.

In such situations, it does not look like people can buy their way into power. It has some effect in normal times in democracies. But in periods of state breakdown with widespread mobilization of crowds and movements, emotional resources are more important than money. The American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s did not come about because of monetary inputs. It was supported by the higher classes in some places, but this was not its main source of strength. The Nazis became the most popular movement in right-wing politics in Germany in the 1920s by deliberately trying to invent symbols. The Nazis were very concerned not to look like the other conservatives. The conservatives would march in the main streets with old German flags from the pre-Weimar period. Hitler explicitly said that he wanted his movement to look different. So, they invented their own uniform and their own symbols, like the swastika emblem, which contains red because they were trying to attract the left. Instead of marching in the main streets, they marched into the workers' neighborhoods to create excitement by

fighting with the socialists. Like other social movements, the amount of money it took was not large. The symbolic inventions were more important. So, altogether I am not pessimistic that people with money always control politics. In times of crisis, insurgents usually can invent more powerful rituals.

Most of these historic examples are of groups that invented new ways to assemble and mobilize people. Rodney Stark (1996) has a very good book about the rise of Christianity, which emphasizes the value of having martyrs. The Christians did not set out to have martyrs, but once it happened, they realized it was a very powerful symbolic tool. The Romans contributed to this effect because they would not just put someone in prison or kill them right away, but would take their prisoners all the way to Rome to be judged. Everywhere the prisoners went, there would be a procession around them that put them in the center of attention. The Romans thought it would dissuade people but it had the opposite effect. The collective emotion made it more attractive for people to become martyrs; and having martyrs convinced more people that there must be something important that they are willing to be tortured to death for – that there must be truth to that religion. Creating martyrs became an important recruiting technique for Christianity. After a while they would compete with each other about who could be more of a martyr than someone else.

Today, militant Islamists attract attention by similar methods like suicide bombers. ISIS uses the social media to publicize their violent rituals, like mass executions, where they chop off people's heads and post videos of it. If you are their opponent, you consider it an atrocity but for people who do not like the West anyway, this tactic generates attention and emotional energy, which keeps up morale and helps them recruit new members. They do not need to attract a million people as long as they have a few thousand dedicated followers.

The new sociology of violence

DW: Why do you think Weber and Durkheim never explicitly wrote about violence or war? Since then, there have been quite some developments going on in the study of violence in sociology. At the moment, we can speak of a new sociology of violence, to which your book has made an important contribution. How would you situate the new sociology of violence next to theories on structural violence?

RC: Weber wrote about violence in a very general sense, but he wrote mainly about world history and was mainly concerned with the origins of the modern world. Before the First World War, he wrote about how Germany got into a very difficult political and diplomatic position. He wrote that Germany did not have good allies and that they should not try to fight France and England at the same time. When the war broke out, like everybody else, he was enthusiastic for a while. He activated his army commission and they put him into a bureaucratic job in a hospital. Within three or four months, he had lost his enthusiasm. He resigned his commission and tried to put his weight into political negotiation with Britain.

What happened with Durkheim is more of a tragedy. Before the war, Durkheim himself was an internationalist and belonged to an international group that was in favor of world peace. He had particularly good relations with German scholars. After the

assassination at Sarajevo, there were a lot of pro-war demonstrations in France. The French intellectuals almost all started to join in the war effort. Durkheim himself did so to the point that he wrote nothing of value in sociology after the war broke out. He wrote the most shameless propaganda about how French civilization had always been superior to the German one. He also wrote about the history of French education and made the point that it was better than the German education system, which was very hypocritical because he had been sent by the Ministry of Education in the 1870s to investigate the German education system and see what reforms had been made there that could be adopted in France. Durkheim destroyed himself intellectually doing wartime propaganda, and he became more and more depressed. He could not even give lectures any more.

This happened to Durkheim even before his son died in the war. Marcel Fournier (2007) shows this in his biography of Durkheim. The last chapter is very depressing to read. You can see Durkheim reducing himself to nothing more than a French nationalist and how he became unable to write sociology. It was not inevitable that all intellectuals should lose their autonomy in the war. In Britain, Bertrand Russell stuck to his pacifist position and got sent to jail. On the German/Austrian side, one of the intellectuals that came out best was Sigmund Freud. During the war, he wrote, among other things, his analysis of death instincts. It might not be a tremendously good psychoanalytic theory but it is an attempt to analyze the war effort during that time instead of joining it. So, it was possible to do this.

Today there is a more widespread interest in all aspects of violence than perhaps any other time in the social sciences. During the 1940s and 1950s, there was a very specific interest in explaining the Nazis, as if nothing like that had ever happened anywhere else. These were very particularistic arguments. Then came a period of declining interest in violence even though the Vietnam War was going on. I just think the field has gotten more mature now. Our historical material has gotten better, our micro data has gotten better, and there has been a lot more field research on violent milieux. Researchers like Elijah Anderson, Alice Goffman, and Bowen Paulle are good examples. We have just reached a critical mass of data and better theorization.

This new theory of violence is different from the notion of structural violence which, I think, is an attempt to make a moral evaluation. That is a political or philosophical move but it does not help us as sociologists. Certainly we want to explain structural inequality, but its form is not at all like the dynamics of violence as we see it empirically. Some people would define violence as anything that instills a sense of social inequality and domination into its participants, but whether this has an effect on actual physical violence is an empirical question. A large proportion of children, for example, do things in play which involves fighting and some sort of domination. But since it is defined in a play frame, it does not have much of carryover to anything outside of that frame. Some theorists say that if we did not have any games with emotional dominance among children, then we would not have violence in adults. But I do not think that is empirically accurate. I doubt that many of the political officials who are in charge when war breaks out necessarily have anything in their family background that accounts for it. Being in that office is sufficient to explain what they do with the state – which is, after all, an organization founded on military power.

I do think it is very worthwhile investigating what children at different ages see in various situations, and what emotions people actually feel at those times. When I saw a dead body for the first time, for instance, I was four years old. That was in Berlin. The reason I saw this was because my father was working in the State Department and he took his family to Germany in 1946. One day the Russians had got permission to come and dig up our back yard because there were dead Russian soldiers buried there. I remember my older sister and I watching them from the window. My mother would say that we could not play across the street because there were unexploded bombs. But that was just a fact. My parents did not emotionally mark this as traumatic or shocking, just something you needed to pay attention to. So I think the emotional marker is what is important, not the mere fact of violence itself.

What I really do not like is the move that Bourdieu makes to talk about stratification as if it is symbolic violence because then you lose causality. If you get rid of the distinction between symbolic and personal violence, you make it impossible to talk about the difference between attacking another human being and attacking a physical object. So I think it is worth keeping that distinction. A typical pattern in riots is a group of three to six people who are attacking one person who got isolated. But in one of my photos from Pakistan there are four rioters attacking a motorcycle. The structure of the picture is very similar except for, in this case, it is a motorcycle. It looks like the same object, the motorcycle is just a surrogate for a person. And in the year 2005, there were the so-called banlieu riots in France. These riots consisted almost entirely of burning cars and buses. In that case, symbolic violence is an attack on public objects. Particularly if you live in a poor area, the cars are not likely to belong to people from your social class and the buses are in some sense part of the state. But there was very little real violence against people. Symbolic violence is cheap and easy; real violence is not.

One thing that makes violence against people different is that people must overcome the barrier of confrontational tension and fear.[2] There are several ways how confrontational tension can be circumvented, leading people into a subjective tunnel of violence. One of the pathways is when a violent person becomes caught up in one's own rhythm (such as hitting or firing, over and over again) without paying too much attention to the other person. We see that pattern particularly in accounts by police officers who would not stop firing until their gun is empty. They fell into a rhythm. Police describe their experience as tunnel vision as they did not see much else of the situation except their weapon and its target. Once they start, they cannot stop.

In another version of violence, there is asymmetrical entrainment or a reciprocity between the attacker and the victim. This happens where the victim becomes completely passive, allowing the attacker to escape from confrontational tension. Asymmetrical entrainment also happens in one type of domestic violence, although, in general, domestic violence has three main kinds. There is the kind that is symmetrical, that happens among young couples where the fights are evenly matched and for them it often turns into a game. And then there is the type where one really beats up the other, typically the man beating up the women or an adult beating a child. In such cases, the victim may try to resist but the attacker gets completely into that subjective tunnel of rhythmic attack. The third type is where the dominant partner has trained the other partner to act as the victim. That is also what bullies do: they get their victims to act that part.

Military violence is another topic, but it also depends on emotional reactions and emotional domination. A new question is whether emotions will disappear if all weaponry is run by high tech. Some military thinkers since the 1990s have been saying that high tech weaponry is going to transform war because there will no longer be what Clausewitz called friction; no fog of war. Soldiers' emotions which cause them to do ineffective things will disappear by replacing soldiers with computers and other machines. But is this really happening? My investigations suggest that high tech weapon systems are quite vulnerable to each other, for instance, by electronic hacking. Also, high tech weapons can break down, sometimes for banal reasons, like not having enough electric batteries to use them in the field, or that a radar-deceiving aircraft hull has to be repaired. I have asked soldiers who fought in Afghanistan about high tech weapons, like the ones that will locate where an enemies' artillery fire is coming from and then counterattack exactly that place. But soldiers say they rarely have these weapons because they are big and difficult to transport, they are very expensive, and you usually don't have them when you need them. Further, if you have a highly interconnected computerized system, it also becomes very vulnerable to breakdowns. If it breaks down in one place, the problem gets rapidly propagated everywhere. So, on the whole, you do not want to design a military system that is too centralized, since it would be too vulnerable.

My overall conclusion on high tech military is that there is a tendency for high tech weapons systems to deteriorate back to less high tech forms after they have been put into action and undergone attrition. When militaries attack each other, they are trying to degrade each other's organization and equipment. The one who is capable of moving back to a lower level of technology faster will be the one who wins. So we get back to the emotional processes that cause friction. When ISIS took over northern Iraq in a couple of weeks in 2014, it was clearly an emotional effect. An army of 10,000 men beat an army of 250,000 men. The Iraqi army just fell apart, even though it had better weapons. They were completely demoralized. So that was an emotional victory and not a technological victory.

Attention space

DW: One of the concepts that reappears in your work is the idea of attention space. This points to the importance of social adjustment, to a shared focus of attention, and action. You used this idea of attention space to analyze violence in immediate situations in your book *Violence*, and also, in *The Sociology of Philosophies*, to conceptualize the struggle between philosophers' intellectual ideas, which transcends situations across time and space. On what level of the social would you position the concept of attention space? And could you compare this notion of attention space to Bourdieu's concept of field?

RC: I started with a network analysis of philosophers and was able to inductively establish the principle that the people who become most famous in the future have more connections to other people who also have high levels of fame – as predecessors, contemporaries, and successors. A teacher like Aristotle had hundreds of students, and someone in more modern times like Wilhelm Wundt might have several thousands, whereas only half a dozen of those students themselves became important. So there had to be something else besides the network connection and I decided to call this a limited

attention space. By analyzing the networks of philosophers, it became apparent that you never get one extremely famous person at one time. There are always at least two and typically three. That is because they are dividing up the field with their arguments. They are arguing against each other.

On the other hand, there are many ways to create innovations in a field. You could easily create schools of thought that are distinct from each other. However, it is on the receptive part of the network that most of those complicated distinctions are no longer paid attention to. This provides a theoretical explanation why there is an upper limit that no more than about six positions are able to transmit themselves successfully to later generations. If you look at people's careers, you see that they have to make a choice at some point and I think this applies to us today as well as to most intellectuals throughout history. You may start out with high ambition but you eventually realize that you are probably better off following somebody else, and by being a recognized follower of a school you will get some modest recognition, rather than risking having no followers at all, if you are going alone. This happened to the generation directly after Immanuel Kant, most explicitly in the career of Schopenhauer. He was the youngest of the next generation, and he had to wait till he was 60 years old, when his rivals were dead, before there was room in the attention space for him.

The concept of limited attention space perhaps occupies a nebulous position in theory. It is not very micro, but where else would it be located? One place it is located is on the receptive side of a network, the future part of a network. On a more micro level, the people who are very successful in the intellectual field have eminent teachers but the important thing they learn from them is not the specific content of their teachers' ideas. What they learn is how the field operates. They internalize it so well that they can make their moves in their minds – i.e. create new ideas – without having to think strategically about who these ideas will appeal to. The attention space gets into the unconsciousness of intellectuals as members of the field. This is similar to what Bourdieu says about fields. What is actually missing in the concept of Bourdieu is the limited attention space, that there is only room for a certain number of people in the field. I started out, then, with network patterns of success and failure as reputations get transmitted across the generations, and I eventually ended up with the concept of limited attention space.

The first time I realized attention space can be applied also to non-intellectual processes was in studying riots. In photos and videos of riots, you can see that there is a relative small percentage of the people in the video who are actually doing anything violent. You see clusters of six to 12 people in the front, throwing rocks, and perhaps a hundred people in the background doing nothing. So why don't the hundred stay home and let the ten do the rioting? The problem is that the latter would not feel that they have any emotional backup. And in other ways audiences have a very strong effect. When they are making noise and showing that they are paying attention, this sustains the rioters. Small-scale fights quickly end when the audience stops paying attention to them. So the concept of attention space seems to come out again in riots and in other sorts of collective violence. In police violence, we find that the more police that are called to a scene of a crime, the greater the chance that someone will be badly hurt by the police. I think that is an audience effect.

In addition, I think that there are different-sized attention spaces in different spheres, such as politics and the economy. For economic fields, Harrison White (2002) argued that it is impossible to have a monopoly in a field of production. You have to have a Coca-Cola and a Pepsi Cola, or a Google and a Facebook, in order to define the field they are competing in. He also looked at data on market shares and came to the conclusion that there will typically be two or three producers who have big market shares and then a tail of six to ten who get little market share. It is also something that evolves over time. At the beginning of a new industry, there will be a lot of contenders and then it will be winnowed down to a fairly small number. Economic fields move much more rapidly than the intellectual world where it takes around 30 years to shift the six most prominent positions. Whereas in the world of capitalist enterprises it shifts more rapidly in reducing to smaller numbers dominating the market.

In politics, the lowest number is two. At a minimum, there are two opponents. Whenever you have a political campaign with a lot of political positions, there is a period where the numbers have to wind down. In this respect, politics is like violent conflict. Whenever a fight actually breaks out, it is almost impossible for people to fight more than one fight at the same time. It is just cognitively and emotionally too confusing. That is the reason why, when violence or a war starts, some of the groups or states who have been enemies will have to become friends or neutrals, at least for the time being. So the way this works in the intellectual attention space and the way it works in economics and politics seem to be different because the number of viable positions and the speed of change over time are different. A more general theory of attention spaces still needs to be developed.

On sociology

DW: In the last part of *The Sociology of Philosophies*, you describe sociology as somewhere between the abstraction-reflexivity tendency and rapid discovery science. What do you think of the balance sociology has found now?

RC: The phase of rapid discovery has picked up in recent years. The process of increasing abstraction-reflexivity is specific to the history of philosophy, and in mathematics, so that really big shifts in philosophy occur when someone has discovered more of an abstract way of dealing with questions. And then you can replay the debates that went on before at a new level. Specific empirical sciences, like chemistry, carve out a field of analysis which has enough abstraction so that you can make general statements, but it refuses to go more abstract, in order to do empirical work. If you go to a more abstract level, discussions are conceptual rather than empirical.

Sociology certainly has had its debates along that line. The ethnomethodologists are notable in this respect because they actually are philosophical phenomenologists. Garfinkel annoyed a lot of sociologists by saying that sociology does not exist, the only thing that does exist is the ethnomethods for making sense of things. Ethnomethodologists do not like what people like myself do in micro-sociology because we are not doing philosophical phenomenology. We are just using empirical methods on behavior in everyday life and trying to find patterns in its details. Once you see that the ethnomethodologists, in the pure Garfinkel sense, are working in phenomenology instead of

sociology, we can stop quarreling because we are doing something else. Another thing that changed the discussion was conversation analysis, which became an empirical discipline. Using tape recordings and analyzing the moves that people make in conversations became a kind of discovery science.

To become a rapid discovery science, you need to have research equipment which is refined enough so that manipulating the equipment will provide something new to discover. This happened to physical science in the nineteenth century when researchers attached electric batteries to a basin where chemicals are poured into water, then running a current through the liquid to read out the electric spectrum. This is how they developed more advanced forms of chemistry. They had a research device that created new data and allowed them to discover all sorts of new elements with different composition. Or they attached the spectrum-reading instrument to a telescope and were able to read the spectrum of objects in outer space, and so forth.

Do we have research equipment of that sort? Maybe video ethnography. For a long time we either asked people what they did or you could eyeball it yourself. But now we are getting data that we are able to view over and over again, getting up close to the micro-details of interaction. We find new patterns in the data, if you have a theoretical eye for where to look, but also new discoveries allow new theory. Video ethnography may well be the part of sociology which is going to be much more like a rapid discovery science in the next couple of decades.

Another research front with potential for rapid discovery is data collected from social media. Although it would be naïve to say that because a lot of people are using social media, it must have some kind of enormous effect. But do we have any more refined theories about what effects mediated communication should have? How does it relate to political mobilization theories? How does it relate to stratification? Questions about whether interaction ritual theory works in the electronic media are fruitful questions. We have some theoretical leads that point us to where we can find better data for these questions. Then we can develop better theories from the data. Also, I think something like that is starting to happen in network analysis. Until recently, network analysts spent most of their time sharpening their descriptive algorithms, and some network analysts did not want there to be any content to the networks, deliberately ignoring what people in the networks are doing. But now you can attach conventional variables to network processes. Network analysis is also starting to become more dynamic. It is of course a lot easier to work with networks that are static than figuring out how they change. Now we are starting to understand how networks change – see, for instance, John Levi Martin's book, *Social Structures* (2009), which shows which kind of networks can become very large, and which kinds fall apart as they get larger. Today we are lucky to live in a period when some of the new sub-fields of sociology are on the verge of becoming mature. We are getting good data. We will get good theories.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Notes

1. We would like to thank Randall Collins and the other participants in the interview: Amanda Ferrandino, Barbara van der Ent, Sander van Haperen, Bowen Paulle and Justus Uitermark. In this article the questions are mainly posed by Don Weenink (DW), Alex van der Zeeuw (AZ) and Justus Uitermark (JU).
2. Collins (2008) uses the term confrontational tension and fear (*ct/f*) to denote the emotional arousal that occurs when people engage in mutual antagonistic involvement. They feel tense, as their focus of attention is increasingly on their antagonism, on their not being attuned with the other. The crucial point is that *ct/f* forms a barrier that keeps people from using violence.

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