

STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL ACTION

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STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL ACTION

On Constituting and Connecting
Social Worlds

BY

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CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures</i>	vii
<i>Preface and Acknowledgments</i>	ix
1. How Is Social Structure Possible?	1
Structure, Structuration, and Morphogenesis	3
Collective Action	8
Social Structure as Virtual Structure	12
2. Interaction, Social Worlds, and Figural Structures	19
Routine Grounds of Social Interaction	22
The Interaction Order	28
Figural Structures and Social Networks	36
Conclusion	43
3. Institutions, Practices, and Formational Structure	47
The Ontology of Emergent Structures	48
Institutions, Practices, and Parts	52
Theorising Formational Structure	54
Modelling Formational Structures	63
Conclusion	68
4. Integration, Contradiction, and Conflict	71
Social Integration and System Integration	73
Social Conflict in France	75
<i>Bibliography</i>	83
<i>Index</i>	101

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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1.	A Virtual Circle.	12
Figure 1.2.	Levels and Elements of Social Structure.	16
Figure 2.1.	A Figurational Structure.	34
Figure 2.2.	Figurational Structure of the Norton Street Gang.	35
Figure 3.1.	A Formational Structure.	51
Figure 3.2.	The Overall Social Structure.	52
Figure 3.3.	A Blockmodel and Its Image Graph.	66
Figure 3.4.	A Formational Structure Produced through Blockmodelling.	67
Figure 4.1.	Key Events in French History.	76

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My concern for the relationship between social action and social structure was first ignited when I read Talcott Parsons's *Structure of Social Action* as a student in 1968. This demonstrated clearly the interdependence of the two ideas and the ways in which this recognition pointed the way towards a comprehensive theoretical understanding of social life. A reading of David Lockwood's articles on system thinking showed how Parsons's insights could be built upon and the complexity of social structure could be understood. David's work, and my correspondence with him before I became a colleague at Essex University in 1994, was a constant source of inspiration for my investigations into social structure and social action.

The particular ideas developed in this book were first set out in a short book written with José López at Essex and published in 2000. These ideas were subsequently developed in discussions with Dave Elder-Vass, whose publications explored the construction of social structure and its emergence from social interactions. The underlying assumption of these discussions with José and Dave was that the oft-cited divergence between action and structure is fundamentally unfounded. There is no way that either idea can properly be understood in isolation from the other. Social structure is nothing other than a product of social action, but action itself is necessarily structured by social processes. Despite the persistent denials of this, I hold firmly to it being a self-evident conclusion to draw. This book develops the foundations for this conclusion.

The book grew out of chapters written at the invitation of Håkon Leiulfstrud and Peter Sohlberg for their books *Concepts in Action* and *Constructing Social Research Objects* (Brill, 2017 and 2021). In addition to the intellectual debts that I owe to David Lockwood, José López, and Dave Elder-Vass, I am grateful to Cambridge University Press for permission to reprint Figure 6.13 from *Generalized Blockmodelling* (Doreian, Batagelj, and Ferligoj, 2005) as my Figure 3.4.