

# INTRODUCTION

## Knowledge and Verification

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### Models of Analysis

The analytical question uniting the following essays is: What are the processes whereby knowledge is incorporated, verified, and integrated into new institutional wholes in the context of what Mark C. Taylor (2001) has termed “emerging network culture”?<sup>1</sup>

This privileging reference to the lingo of an anthropological outsider at the outset of our preamble does not set the agenda for our consideration, here and in reference to the five ethnographic essays to follow, of the relationship between knowledge and verification in institutional settings. There are older roots in anthropology itself as to the question of—as it was once framed—the naturalization of truth claims within institutions. However, we will end where Taylor begins, with what may be regarded as Taylor’s (and his complexity theorist associates’) challenge to ethnography, namely, to comprehend global institutional webs in which

[n]either totalizing structures that repress differences nor oppositional differences that exclude commonality are adequate in the [contemporary] plurality of worlds ... To think what post-structuralism leaves unthought is to think a non-totalizing structure that nonetheless acts as a whole. Such a structure would be neither a universal grid organizing opposites nor a dialectical system synthesizing opposites but a seamy web in which what comes together is held apart and what is held apart comes together ... Complex communication webs and information networks, which function holistically but not totalistically, are the milieu in which everything rises and passes away. These webs and networks are characterized by a distinctive logic that distinguishes them from classical structures and dialectical systems. Though always eluding classificatory schemes constructed to capture them, webs and networks nevertheless display certain rules that guide their operation. The articulation of these rules defines the contours of nontotalizing structures that function as a whole. (2001: 12)

This is heady language with which to introduce five modest ethnographic pieces. Yet we believe that these words, properly situated and reduced to practical application, can inspire us to new avenues of exploration of contemporary institutional arrangements that move beyond the current preoccupations with ‘hegemonic structures,’ ‘discourse,’ and ‘alterity.’ A brief outline of a critique of these concepts is necessary.

The reader will be familiar with the general tenor of criticism raised in anthropology in the 1970s and beyond, against the sort of holisms—‘society,’ ‘community,’ ‘culture,’ ‘solidarity’—that writers from Marx and Durkheim to Schutz, Douglas, and Geertz employed to theorize “the social construction of reality” (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Among these criticisms the most enduring school of thought pointed out the absence of, or ambiguousness regarding, the role of power in the generation and reinforcement of societal truths. Again speaking in broad strokes, the reader will readily associate this approach with the work of Michel Foucault:

Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true ... ‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which it induces and which extends it. A ‘regime’ of truth. (1984: 73–74)

While Foucault’s disciples may be right that it was he who first called attention to the political context for truth claims (see, for instance, Rabinow 1986), we fault the model in practice for a number of reasons. First, in Foucault’s world, the mirroring roles of willful discourse constructors on the one hand, and “docile body” subjects of such power on the other, represents an exaggeration<sup>2</sup> that disallows the experientially familiar sense in which new societal or institutional truths are assembled from meaningfully related but nevertheless incidental streams of knowledge—and even if knowledge is deployed with some intention, there is an aggregate effect not equal to that intention. In each of the studies below, the outcomes of attempts at power/knowledge are unsuccessful, uncontrollable, or are, at the least, still in progress—no predictable trajectory, as would follow “an ever more efficient and effective insinuation of power” (Glaeser, this issue), is apparent.

Second, a critique following upon Latour’s (1993) theory of quasi-phenomena and hybridization, Foucault’s theory has inspired constructivist interpretations of social life<sup>3</sup> that result in a theory of closed, relativistic units (in the sense that there obtain separate and incommensurable veridical criteria) of society that are bounded by power interests. The only comparative or integrative framework imaginable is one in which Power/Knowledge System A competes with Power/Knowledge System B in the determination of truth claims. Such a model leaves us high and dry when confronting institutional globalization or “emerging

network culture,” that is, unless we regard these as being handmaids only to an expanded imperialism, as indeed, some writers have proposed.

At risk of over-flogging this *cheval de bataille*, we wish to point out that one can discover the inadequacy of the Foucauldian framework in a range of cases. For instance, it is certainly true that projecting statist discourse may serve the Burmese military regime in their strategy to power. However, as Jordt illustrates in her paper, the truly “multiple and inconsistent frameworks for thinking and action” that dominate the Burmese politico-religious reality preclude the realization of state power in expedient terms. No single episteme organizes the whole, the system remains unstable, and the state model continues to fail to take root. Similarly, Glaeser argues for his analysis of Stasi (East Germany’s former secret police) in their handling of the GDR’s peace and civil rights movements during the 1980s: “the kind of knowledge production enabled by such power aspirations (i.e., as in Foucault’s knowledge/power formula) ultimately undermines the exercise of power.” The dialectic between attempts at control and reactions to it ended by creating new forms of knowledge—and consequently a loosening rather than a tightening of state control of these movements. In Daniel Breslau’s paper, game theory has emerged as a competitor to the classical and neoclassical economic “invisible hand” model in management training. Rather than exerting an “actual influence on decisions reached ... [game theory] serves as a kind of sociodicy, a social theory which justifies suffering as a necessary evil.” Thus, there may be different yet coexistent moral frameworks for economic ‘truths’ that represent neither an explicit form of domination (even while it rewards some experts in “strategic management”) nor a hidden or counter-discourse that similarly reveals the exclusion and confinement of knowledge for subjected populations. Joshua Breslau reports in his study a tension between the global system of biomedical scientific credibility, and “a locally grounded network of practitioners and a semi-autonomous center of interpretation” organized by the Japanese *ikyoku* patronage system. Breslau argues that these two spheres are mediated by apprenticeship practices, characterized by “informal transmission of (non)traditional practices from master to novice in situations of actual clinical activity.” Breslau regards apprenticeship as “a structured process of institutional transformation.” Finally, Malaby emphasizes the uncertainty of the outcome of the recent rollout of the euro in Greece. Its success would be determined, not by rhetoric about European unification or even the already de facto status of the euro in the economic system, but by the immediate competence Greeks could acquire and demonstrate in use and valuation of the currency itself. As Sally Falk Moore commented on Malaby’s description, “in every transaction is an affirmation.”<sup>4</sup> One need not resort to a strict transactionalist theory, such as Frederick Barth’s (1966), to discern the uses for interpreting abrupt social knowledge acquisition and verification of an exchange<sup>5</sup> rather than discourse paradigm.

Having introduced the subject and papers largely in terms of what models of analysis will not work, let us turn to what we wish to propose in their place.

## Processes of Incorporation, Verification, and Integration: Formation of ‘New Wholes’

Those involved in the management of institutions of any kind recognize the gulf that separates the truism that ‘institutions must change in order to survive’ and the difficulty of carrying it off. The prominent management consultant and author, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, multiplied her fame with a book entitled *When Giants Learn to Dance* (1989). In this book she argues that corporations must rid themselves of uniform routines and streamline their operations to become responsive to competition in the “post-entrepreneurial” age. The tension explored in that and scores of other books of its ilk (to deploy these obliquely as both primary and secondary data), is between corporations that have conquered the market and achieved success by virtue of their size—in industry it is generally held that big is good and bigger is better, corresponding with the political economist’s view that capitalism is defined by its expansion (e.g., Harvey 1995)—and the necessity to adapt to changing ‘environmental’ circumstances. These latter can include laws, market prices for raw materials and human resources, consumer preferences, and much more. The most salient new challenges to management, however, are held to be those connected to the proliferation of information—hence the ‘information age’ and the ‘age of complexity.’ There has arisen to cope with this phenomenon a multi-billion dollar industry called “knowledge management,” said to

cater to the critical issues of organizational adaption, survival and competence in face of increasingly discontinuous environmental change ... Essentially, it embodies organizational processes that seek synergistic combination of data and information processing capacity of information technologies, and the creative and innovative capacity of human beings. (Malhotra 2003)

The challenge of complexity in business is matched by a copious and capricious popular trade literature (as Daniel Breslau points out in his paper on the uses of game theory) intended to help managers learn how to incorporate the complexity rather than be overwhelmed by it.

An additional assumption or prerequisite for our brief discussion is as follows: The success of any institution relies on its legitimacy which, in turn, rests on its ability to verify the truths underwriting its functioning. Verification of the sources of institutional knowledge (speaking from the point of view of its members) calls for truths that “fit with the nature of the universe,” as Douglas says in her work on institutions (1986: 47):

Institutions must make sense and be acceptable, in other words, in purpose, symbol, ethic, and classificatory scheme to its members. However, there can be shown to exist a tension between the necessity an institution has to be perceived as a system—that is, a whole that can thereby create and substantiate self-evidences for its members—and the requirement every institution has to transform itself into

being currently relevant in changing external circumstances and knowledges. If the institution does not incorporate and integrate these, it fails in its objectives

Thus do we arrive at our methodological cum theoretical claim that it is in the analysis of the processes of *incorporation*, *verification*, and *integration*, in particular, that we can begin to observe how institutions transform or fail to transform into ‘new wholes.’ The sense of the three processes we propose will emerge best from a look at how they reflect the data in the ethnographic essays. At risk of literalizing and thus simplifying what in practice are intertwined processes, we offer the following progression:

1. The contemporary era is marked by the availability of information and “styles of reasoning” (to borrow Hacking’s [1982] term) from many sources. Institutions (corporate, professional, governmental) are faced with the requirement to take into account and *incorporate* these new knowledges so that they can ...
2. Maintain coherence, relevance, and legitimacy to their members. In the language of *verification*, this means that institutions must show or be seen as operating on the basis of some kind of verity, and that this claim is verifiable in moral and classificatory terms.<sup>6</sup>
3. The processes of incorporation and their verification suggest the formation (if simultaneous) of newly *integrated* wholes, reflecting an admixture of knowledges. Institutions are the principal repositories and contributors to new forms of knowledge, and thus are implicated in the macro-theoretical concepts of ‘emergent complexity’ and the re-embedding of dis-embedded systems of thought and practice.

Beginning with Glaeser’s paper, we can observe that were Stasi to be successful at containing the peace and civil rights movements it wished to monitor and control, it would have been necessary for it to not only assimilate new information, which it did after its own fashion, but to do so in accordance with a new mode of analysis of data altogether, which it did not do (failure of incorporation). Trapped by its worldview and particular data collection practices, Stasi, as an unintended consequence of its epistemic practices (as Glaeser calls them), failed to achieve its goal and instead, ironically, “added to the activist’s accelerating disenchantment with real-existing socialism and to their increasing radicalization” (failure of verification). In analogy to Weber’s dichotomy of repression vs. sharing of authority in circumstances of rule (cited and discussed in Jordt’s paper), hegemony of epistemology is itself a mode of repression, and for this reason must eventually fail. The peace and civil rights activists, as we may extrapolate from Glaeser’s brief comment about them, could perceive their being misunderstood by the state, and were led therefore to pursue alienation from it in order to achieve their goals. In the process of reaction to state control, new knowledge was created that could undermine the power base of Stasi and the GDR (failure of integration).

In the case of Japanese psychiatry, we might derive from Breslau's portrait that if Japanese psychiatry ignores changes in the knowledge structure and style of reasoning of a globalizing field (as embodied in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) and ICD (International Statistical Classification of Diseases), it will soon confront a similar fate to Stasi. Japanese psychiatry would be interpreted as encountering a similar failure to that of the Japanese banking system, which has been widely blamed for the contemporary recession. The banks (and fiscal policy in general) have been accused of obstructing the free flow of capital by virtue of their particular form of corporate patronage (the equivalent of the *ikyoku* system for physicians that Breslau describes), which Riles (2002) speaks of as leading to a "failure of knowledge" and which would conform in our nomenclature to a failure of incorporation. In this instance, Breslau argues that it is a paradoxical form of knowledge verification he is witnessing in the rounds of the novice psychiatrist, since the Western psychiatric nosology of psychiatric disorders is at once alien and suspect among many Japanese psychiatrists, and at the same time, foundational to the legitimacy of the profession in the globalizing world of psychiatry. Novices or trainees are the embodiment of the process of integration, or the formation of a new whole that will be Japanese psychiatry in the future. The verification of the emerging system—the mixture of *ikyoku* and international psychiatric criteria—amounts to the transformation and adaptation of the existing structure of practice and discourse. Pedagogy, which is Breslau's focus, is crucial because it is where new members are socialized; it is literally the site where truths are tested and verified, and where these become the internalized content of the new order.

In Malaby's case of the euro rollout in Greece, the 'new whole' being created by the verification procedures of individual citizens in their use of the currency is what Baudrillard might refer to as a 'hyper-nationality'—or to use one of his own expressions, "the idea of Europe" (1981: 60). Continuing for a moment in this idiom of analysis, we can say that the incorporation of different signs (currencies) into a single system will yield a union of them for both semiotic and practical purposes. A single moral economy, as Malaby has it, will now be possible, enabling regulatory, tax, labor, and even criminal unities to emerge across Europe. These also are new wholes, bound by common signs, rhetorics, and practices, which will be in keeping with other emergent economic integrations in other parts of the world, such as NAFTA or ASEAN—although in the European case, a greater claim to unity is being asserted, as the rationality of instantaneous currency conversion in Malaby's report can figuratively denote. And, as was earlier pointed out, in Malaby's case, competency in the use of the new currency suggests a unified rationality and morality simultaneously—the building blocks of any economic truth claim.

Daniel Breslau argues that game theory is a new technique for knowledge management, for the processing of competitive information. In some ways, Breslau's case is the most suggestive of the benefits of the processual approach. Business corporations, whose internal expansion finds unique expression

among all other kinds of institutions as external realization (Applbaum 1999), are especially fertile sites for understanding the formation of new wholes through knowledge incorporation and verification.<sup>7</sup>

The potential ambiguity or simultaneity in the processual sequence between incorporation and verification of knowledge (as well as between practice and discourse) is raised by Jordt's case of régime legitimacy-seeking in Burma. Jordt speaks of the "imbrication of surfaces of knowledge" between the régime and the populace—a dichotomy that at first evokes the classical distinction between state and civil society, but by the end of the discussion, can be understood as obscuring rather than illuminating actual political process. To wit, the circulation of the sacred tooth relic and the white elephant in Burma are linked to populist Buddhist practices, at exactly the same time as they are integrally linked to legitimacy claims of the régime. It is the régime itself which initiates these events. Its claims to truth and (thereby) legitimacy are verifiable by the participation of masses of people in the events, at the same time that such participation implies further integration of the separate "surfaces of knowledge" represented by Buddhist soteriology and monarchical standards of legitimacy, on the one hand, and international models of democracy, regime performance, and nation statism, on the other.

In conclusion, we agree once again with Taylor when he claims that while culture theorists "repeatedly claim to recover *difference*, their arguments always come down to the *same*: systems and structures inevitably totalize by excluding difference and repressing otherness" (2001: 48). At the very least, the cases presented in this theme issue—not to even speculate upon what studies of Internet communities, crime networks, or other 'action-at-a-distance' entities might yield—suggest that where multiple styles of reasoning and forms of knowledge stand side-by-side, as in the globalizing world they do increasingly, their tendency is to either reach syncretic integration within the thereby transformed institutional structure (realized by processes of verification), or suffer the consequences. Stasi, for example, strict in its allegiance to communist ideologies and ways of sorting data about activists, was a microcosm in the larger failure of the communist system to assimilate the required pace of information incorporation that now characterizes globalization's largest dimension. (Those who attribute the collapse of communism to its failure as a competitor in the de facto global market system are making a similar argument, in essence; communist manufacturers were not assimilating techniques and technologies developed elsewhere, at the same time that their consumers' requirements and expectations were being conditioned by outside sources of knowledge.) At the other extreme, the corporate assimilation of game theory, along with a host of other information-sorting techniques (decision theory, operations research, cybernetics, system theory, etc.) singles it out as the most flexible kind of institution, and therefore the most likely to survive intact the emerging complexity. Of course, by incorporating such techniques as epistemological verities, the knowledge-oriented corporation is also contributing to the proliferation of the information age beyond the borders of the post-industrialized triad.

The watchwords for future investigation have less to do with systems or complexity theory, which have theoretical limitations of their own, not to mention translation difficulties vis-à-vis anthropology. We have gestured in this direction to alert the reader to deficiencies in reigning theories of ‘knowledge and verification’ in anthropology, which may prevent us from garnering our characteristically holistic insight into sociocultural phenomena. As the papers themselves demonstrate far beyond our ability to encapsulate them in the framework set out in this introduction, future insights into the emergent situation will come from processually informed ethnographic investigation.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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## NOTES

1. The following brief introduction takes as its task, not principally the setting forth of general principles, to which the essays conform or are exemplary of, but a contextualization, presentation, and analytical synthesis of the papers themselves. Four of the contributors presented their work at the American Anthropological Association meetings in New Orleans in November 2002, followed by comments from Sally Falk Moore.
2. Malaby has pointed out what he regards to be a gap between Foucault’s own rather subtle analysis of how discourses produce truth-power in the context of institutions, such as in *Discipline and Punish*, and the less carefully contextualized instances, such as in *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, where Foucault “can get rhetorically carried away with his own argumentation ... and as a result, he can in fact assert a picture of power-knowledge-truth that is not so different from current and typical caricatures of him” (personal communication 22 October 2002).
3. Note, as a prominent example, the following passage from Haraway:

The biomedical-biotechnical body is a semiotic system, a complex meaning-producing field, for which the discourse of immunology—that is, the central biomedical discourse on recognition/misrecognition—has become a high-stakes practice in many senses ... Race and sex, like individuals, are artifacts sustained or undermined by the discursive nexus of knowledge and power. (1993: 378)

We believe it is reasonable to make the distinction between accepting that truth may be pragmatically derived without claiming that it is ‘constructed.’

4. American Anthropological Association meetings, New Orleans, 24 November 2002.
5. Following Austin here (1962) one might even include “word actions” in the exchange rather than discourse framework.
6. We use the term *verification* informally to describe the kinds of everyday logic used in the evaluation of social beliefs, ideologies, practices, etc. We are not here evaluating, as classical Western epistemology would have it, whether the procedures for justifying whether or not a truth claim are warranted.

7. The scientific laboratory is another potent site for observing such processes, as the work of Latour (1987) and Rabinow (1996), for instance, can be invoked to demonstrate. It was in some sense our desire to study epistemic practices in settings other than scientific that originally united us in our project. Inclusion of an ethnography of a scientific enterprise, and one perhaps of new media such as the Internet, would be eminently consistent with our goal.

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