

# Workshop on Structuration Theory

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| Professor Rob Stones | Western Sydney University  
9 November 2016, 9.00-15.00 hrs.

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## Preparatory Reading (item 3 is the most essential)

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- 1) *Sociological Reasoning* (London, Palgrave Macmillan; New York, St Martin's Press, 1996). Chapter 2, 'A Rich and Complex Ontology', pp.40-63.

This first reference is introductory material on key aspects of Anthony Giddens's original version of structuration theory and illustrative material from novels, which helps to see how it can be applied (The material in this chapter on Habermas can be skipped). The example in the chapter that is taken from Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda* is particularly useful. The seeds of SST can be seen here in the focused application of structuration theory to a specific case.

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- 2) 'Refusing the Realism-Structuration Divide', *European Journal of Social Theory* vol.4 no.2 (2001) pp.177-197. Reprinted in O'Donnell, M. (ed.) *Structure and Agency* [Sage Key Debates in Sociology] (London: Sage, May 2010). <http://est.sagepub.com/reports/most-cited>

This article argues against Margaret Archer's 'critical realist' position that critical realism and structuration theory are incompatible. Instead, it argues for their mutual compatibility in a narrative that began to develop some of the key dimensions of SST.

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- 3) *Structuration Theory* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). In Palgrave Macmillan's Series Traditions in Social Theory.

- Chapter 3 'Strong Structuration 1: Ontology', pp.75-115.,
- Chapter 4 - section entitled 'Epistemological and Methodological Considerations in the Research Process', pp.120-127.

This third reference is one of the key statements of strong structuration theory (SST). It should come with a warning that it is quite demanding, but with the reassurance that reading it before the session will help, and that I will try to clarify the various notions within the workshop session.

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4) 'Theories of Social Action', in Bryan Turner (ed.) *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 2009. pp. 84-105.

This gives an account of many of the action-centred ingredients that are synthesized in strong structuration - so helps to embed and situate the SST ideas in the wider social theory literature. It's important that this is the *NEW Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, as the old one has a similarly titled article by my good friend Ira J. Cohen.

The fourth reference is useful background material on a range of different theories of action, so that one can see how structuration theory and SST synthesize from many sources.

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5) Co-authored with Trish Greenhalgh and Deborah Swinglehurst, D. "Choose and Book : A Sociological Analysis of 'Resistance' to an Expert System", *Social Science and Medicine*, vol 104 , 2014, pp 210 - 219.

The fifth piece is the application of strong structuration to a case study dealing with the implementation of technology within the UK National Health Service. It combines SST with some powerful insights of Giddens into the character of late modernity, particularly his notions of disembedding and 'expert systems'.

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6) *Why Current Affairs Needs Social Theory* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

This book has SST at its core, but also draws in a wider set of social theories in order to provide a set of tools to increase the sophistication with which readers of, and audiences for, news and current affairs can interpret the accounts they are given. Chapter 3, 'What We Do When We Make Sense of Borgen', pages 59-93, outlines many of the key concepts of SST in an accessible way through a detailed analysis of an episode from the powerful Danish political drama series Borgen.

The book contains many illustrative examples of news from around the world, including a section on 'Democracy and Conflict in Thailand 2001-10', which analyses four western news and current affairs accounts of recent Thai politics, drawing on analyses carried out together with Dr Ake Tangsupvattana, Dean of the Faculty of Political Science at Chulalongkorn University (see pages 146-152). Also see the freely available on-line blog for *Theory, Culture & Society*, Rob Stones, 'Why, and How, Social Theorists Should Engage with Audiences for

News and Current Affairs', which are reflections on the reasons for writing Why Current Affairs Needs Social Theory:

<http://www.theoryculturesociety.org/rob-stones-on-news-current-affairs-audiences-and-social-theorists/>

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## Additional References

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