Power: Interpersonal, Organizational, and Global Dimensions
Monday, 21 November 2005

TOPIC: Transformations in location and sources of authority.

First we discussed transformations in what look like the organizational structure of society, role of family, community, religion. Then we discussed the emergence of professional experts as new sources of knowledge that substitute for these traditional organizations, mediating institutions. Then, we discussed two examples about how the location of authority had shifted in the modern world to professionals. We left off with professional authority in family relations. Today we add another perspective to the same question: a **transformation in social life produced (in the end) by technology** (and maybe all along by technology). What happens when you regularly, repeatedly, observe yourselves, when function and instrumental knowledge become dominant over the taken for granted, habitual, organizations (institutions) and explanations? We are slowly moving from discussion of organizational shifts (in forms of aggregation and membership) along with associated types of authority to questions about reflexivity and feedback in this system.

Most of the time, individuals live in a world that is taken for granted. Today we'll take another cut at this **taken for granted** world and how might it have changed over time.

Alred Schutz (German philosopher) – the fundamental structures/organizations/patterns in which social life takes place are not questioned but are lived as seemingly natural and self-evident aspects of life. This **taken for granted** quality pertains to our interpersonal relations (e.g. when we talk we face each other, or looking into eyes is so patterned that it's taken as sign of sexuality/affection). This taken for granted quality pertains to interpersonal/micro arena as well as the larger/macro world of nations, states, and societies.

e.g. classroom = familiar routine, unlikely that participants in this situation reflect upon what is going on unless something happens to interrupt **routine**.
– Most interactions are not codified (vs. the syllabus), like what we should wear, coming to class and sitting in seats, using pens instead of crayons – these behaviors are not directly discussed about but actually go on day to day.
– We have so much **assumption of what ought to happen** that we do not speak about what goes on.

The large context of **institutions** (e.g. universities, economies, families) serve as the background of this classroom and will go unquestioned most of the time. This **taken for granted world** is being massively questioned because it is **changing so rapidly**. So many unaccustomed things are happening, interactions with little precedent. Thus, we are left with few ways to interpret or understand what is happening (**no legitimizing myths** or norms); we cannot make sense of experience or have meaning. Family, religion, and state are often questioned because they no longer seem to perform taken for granted tasks, and this becomes a problem we must think about, solve, get rid of. Change produces lots of things we're not used to. To THINK about society was itself a cultural revolution; the beginnings of aspiration for a science of society.

Recall Marx: **superstructure and base**. We have to protect the organization of society, this

taken for granted quality of life. Society has a whole set of explanations, justifications, promises, myths to be applied to those instances when someone *does* raise a question.

> e.g. the recognition that babies come from somewhere is an extraordinary notion for 5 year old, a problem she must ponder. We have available in every society a set of stories, explanations, ready tales from where babies come from – or don't we? Maybe those stories are changing and are a good indication!

> 50 years ago = stork brings a baby, or married people love each other and have a baby. not *really* where babies come from.

> 1960s = this story faded and the biology story began to proliferate, sometimes in the context of a family and sometimes not (single parenthood)

What happens with this change and why does it change?

These devices are used to maintain this taken for granted quality of life – they are called **legitimations** (sometimes myths or not). They range from "things have always been like this and always will be" (as Weber tells us) to moral statements, "the good way" of doing things to religious systems, "God made it this way, good people do it this way"

Throughout history, **religion** most often offered these legitimations. Their mechanisms of operation are simple and common. Structures and institutions of society are interrelated as being part of the basic order of the universe: oneness of people, the way they do things, nature and gods, *linking routine social experience by the very nature of things willed by the gods.*

> e.g. ancient Egypt = notion of wholeness of universe was called ***ma'at***, "the right order of things," extends world of gods to world of man embracing both in an all encompassing meaning.
> – the gods in accordance with *ma'at* in the ways they run the universe. To be in conformity with *ma'at* was to be in proper communion with the gods.
> – *ma'at* also extended to institutional relationships in society, e.g. the king was embodiment of the gods. All proper ways of doing things were extensions of *ma'at,* e.g. how to build house or organize a family. Thus, you could read order in nature as well as social structure and government.
> – approved ways of living (social conventions chosen), the *underlying order of things that linked the individual to the entire universe.*

The **linkage between society and the cosmos** prevailed in the Western world up through the Middle Ages. In the Western world, *ma'at* was called **natural law**. This persists to this day in jurisprudence, e.g. decisions that courts make should be consistent with the natural law of the universe (e.g. what is naturally male or female, what is a marriage).

The **peculiar crisis of modern society** began with the **disintegration** of this **vision of unity** in society, i.e. the disintegration of Christiandom and then the split of states from religions governance. The **progressive weakening of religious rule** is the beginning of modern history (1500s onward) and has created an ever deepening crisis of legitimation. The past 500 years have thus been *very* different from the years prior.

This **challenge to the religious legitimations** of society was extended to the **political sphere** and finally to every sector to the institutional society until the end of the 20th century. Now, the battle over the **family** is the expression of the same process as the family can no longer be taken for granted as it has been.

The threats to the taken for granted qualities of social experience have become **more frequent** and therefore **more radical and destabilizing**. When the taken for granted quality of a society is weakened, that society as a whole (or sections of it) become a problem. Consequently, people began to think about social matters, e.g. regarding the riots in France, commentators said, "We should have known."

Figure below: Spatial class distribution.
Europe = money in the city, poor in suburbs
United states = money in fancy suburbs, poverty in cities – but now, **gentrification**
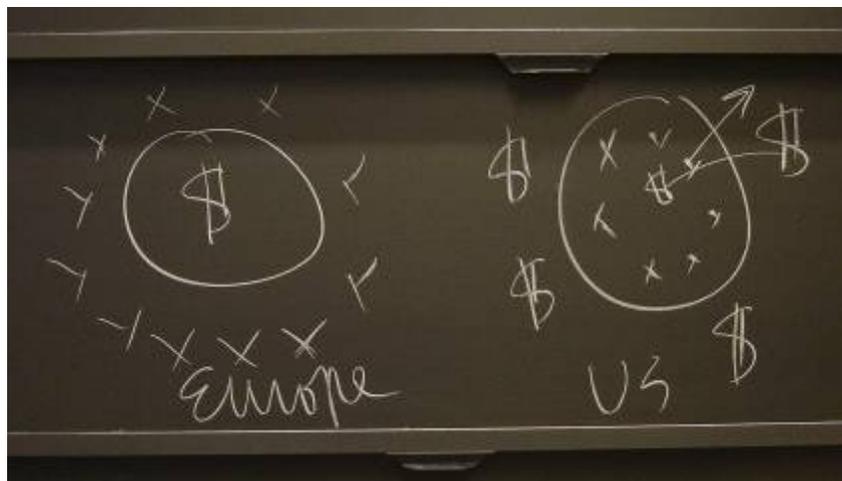
What happened in France and the suburban riots? There was no explanation, so people had to look for one. They had to think how is society organized? Why are so many young disaffected?

(Jean Baudrillard argued, concerning these riots, that we don't pay attention to our African citizens in France, unlike America where he believed everyone was an immigrant. France believes it is a people.)

Any number of incidents in a life or society can produce a situation that calls for explanation.

　　e.g. American college students now have so much uncertainty. Since the 1960s there has been **escalating observation of our selves.** With job uncertainty, what major to choose? what myth/story can we tell to silence that fear?

Ways that inspire re-evaluation of society

• **Shocks to the taken for granted world** = foreign invasions, war, civil strife, massive contact with alien culture (e.g. the sci-fi vision of unity arises with alien encounters). These shocks can provide occasions for the **weakening of the taken for granted quality**. People **question basic assumptions** of society and have new ideas about how we should live together. Such situations are fertile grounds for **rethinking society**, for making it a problem (this is how we

get social science!).

- If people are **marginalized/excluded**, they may consequently become observers
  - e.g. W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1863, American (African American) sociologist) wrote *Souls of Black Folk* (1910) about the African-American experience. He described the double consciousness of black Americans, to see self from the perspective of both the white community and the black community. Black Americans were not part of the taken for granted world and had to figure out how to fit in.
  - **Exploited classes, deviant groups** (practices or beliefs) provide a social context conducive to reflections about society, e.g. homosexuals who are artists reflect on society because they are outsiders.

Examples of shocks to the taken for granted life are found throughout history. Thucydides wrote about this, writing about the Peloponnesian War and the Greek defeat lead him to think about social order. We could say these were the first social scientists.

What is different about today? Machiavelli and Hobbes thought about **change** and why it was the way it was. **Key difference: temporal pace**. **Crises** in history used to take a long time to develop. If the crisis in modern society can be said to begin with the **disintegration of the Christian world**, it reached its climax with the **French Revolution**:

> With the French Revolution, there was a rapid transformation – absolute state and its institutions had seemed to fill the gap left by the disintegration of the church and slow demise of feudal aristocracy. A hierarchy of states and legitimations by divine right provided a new explanation for the taken for granted order of life. Great Enlightenment thinkers (such as Machiavelli and Hobbes) had cast increasing doubt on validity and legitimacy on this order. The Revolution of 1789 shattered this in massive upheaval with monumental proportions that had a global effect! The French Revolution overturned monarchy, killed the king, effectively putting the nail in the coffin of absolute monarchy. The execution of king was a bloody and dramatic ratification of this historic act. It inaugurated period of crisis during which all instituions increasingly questioned and perceived in new ways. And since, the French Revolution has never really stopped. (Example of joke/story concerning French Revolution: Kissinger visits Chinese Premier in 1974 and asks what he thinks the consequences of the Fr. Revolution have been. The Chinese leader replies, illustrating Chinese long view of history, "too soon to tell.")

There has been a decline of religion and after that the decline of absolute monarchs. This was not only a source of the **destruction of the old world** and the **replacement of religious legitimations,** there was a **parallel development of science, empiricism, technology**! New forms of authority: expert, technical knowledge. As Foucault said: truth is claim to power; knowledge/power. In sum, this is the transformation of authority.

What we have in the modern world is change – change in the speed of change and the planning of change and this is a shock for the taken for granted world.

e.g. Typing – The keyboard was designed for most common use (letter arrangement). We still have the same keyboard layout and it's taken for granted (even though the mechanical source of

its design, to prevent keys from sticking when commonly associated letters were pressed). Compare: In the 1970s/1980/1990s we got word processing programs (just two survived the competition, though). Now we get new programs each year! *The rate at which you have to learn something new is escalating.* This is dramatically different from having to learn new skills every months instead of every few years, versus having the same skills one's entire life. What should we teach so it is useful 10 years from now?

There is a change in the **speed and organization of change**. This difference in organization and speed of change has encouraged the designation, a **"technological society"** – change is the possible meaning of society, i.e **change constitutes society**.

– Society is now seen this way because of our ability to plan, implement the willed purpose of change- to engineer social relations – **technology has encouraged us to see our selves and our institutions as inventions**, human creations, not at all natural, not god given, not immutable or unchangeable but instead the opposite – fragile, infinitely malleable and thus more open to human intervention. **Change has become purposeful,** not accidental, not gradual, but purposive, immediate, repetitively changing.

– We used to perceive change as the unanticipated outcome of intended action (Merton, 1936). It is willed, designed, **funded**, organized. Historically, change has always been the *unanticipated* consequences but now we *plan* the changes and organize them.

– We can **change society itself** and reorganize our communal life, recreate our selves and our bodies (by what we eat, by surgery, by genetic manipulation), and what constitutes a family and the production of the next generation.

The **successes of science** and the **decline in religion** has produced a technological society where *anything undesired is ripe to be converted into a social problem* (situations that need to be solved).

– There now seem to be lots of these undesired situations which are *not* taken for granted.

– The mission of science is to take nothing for granted, and the consequence of this is that the physical world is ripe for investigation but equally, so are our very selves. What is a person? These are open to speculations.

Science and technology are changing meaning of our very selves!

e.g. What did it mean to be a mother in 1885 and what does it mean to be a mother now in 2005?

– In 1885, over 75% of families in US lived on a farm. The typical family had an average of 6 children. The wife baked bread, grew vegetables, washed clothing by hand. Spring cleaning was necessary to remove soot and grime from fires all winter – this tradition was re-enacted and taken for granted in cities up until the1950s although the houses were not heated by wood burning stoves making soot. There were few canned goods – not until end of 19th century that distribution of factory canned goods was adequate. Refrigeration was tried in 1799, by 1850 railroads carried vegetables in beds of ice. Not until the 1930s were there refrigerated trucks. Since 1960s, fruits/vegetables fly all over the world. Now, the wife works 8 to 12 hours a day. The housewife in 2005 could be mother, doctor, president of PTA, while also sexy alluring and attractive at night (media message). She has **many roles**!

– We talk about these many roles as **segmentation**, moving from one role to another. Political/social culture claims that she should have the opportunity to do all these things, but it is only possible to do so because of science and technology. She is a doctor for 3 hours, then goes home to see daughter, then back to see patients, meet with colleagues, then back home for a leisurely prepared dinner – she can do all this because of a car, purchased dinner,

dishwasher, washer/dryer, vacuum cleaner, paid help, chemicals, furnace with an air filter, electricity to allow more work. Without technological change, one could not play these multiple roles. *What it means to enact **a** social role has been transformed so radically!*
– Because people have multiple roles and they can segment their different roles, so their **interactions** with each other have changed too! The contemporary adult interacts with a child in shorter periods of time than the farm wife. What *is* a mother? The previous mother led a contained life, geographically and temporally. The contemporary mother is all over the place in one day, one week.
– It's hard to define what is a mother – maybe that's why we have a surrogate argument about abortion (note Faye Ginsberg's book).   Consider the anti-abortion movement – if women can have abortion on demand, then they will have to have a different responsibility for their lives, a different relationship to men.
– It is a quantitative problem that is simultaneously qualitative: more interactions, for shorter duration, over larger spatial arrays! What does this produce in terms of loyalty, commitment, emotion, priorities?

If complexity and diversity characterize our lives with multiple roles and multiple identities, then our complex and multi-faceted reality is enshrined in new unstable, disturbing, problematic definitions.

3 Consequences of Modern Life (as a result of complexity caused by technology)

◆ **PLURALISM, POSSIBILITY, & PERFECTABILITY**
– There is the reality of multiple roles. Awareness of diverse alternatives gives us the notion that all things are possible. By **observing variety**, we see differences we did not see in traditional societies. We observe all the possibilities!
– We have the notion that technology actually works. If technology works why won't it *continue* to work? Inadvertently we create the **image of perfectibility:** all things are possible, our life is proof that it's possible.
  – For example, birth (surrogate pregnancy, in vitro fertilization) and death (assisted suicide) are **decisions**. We have to decide whether to have babies, how to have babies, when to die, how to fix our bodies (appearance, eat, soon genetic therapy). *Everything is an option! A decision.*
  – This technology that teaches/reinforces the notion that all is possible and life is perfectible also effects a renewed interest in **religion** – emergence of renewed millennial religions who believe in the second coming of Christ, evangelicals also. **Science and religion mesh**, teaching us heaven on earth will come. Looking for grounds, explanations, justifications for all this decision-making.
– The search for perfectibility and the belief that all things are possible leads to enormous **disillusion –** this is the **revolution of rising expectations**. These disjunctions are not due to deprivation but *relative* **deprivation** and disappointments. (There is a parallel to the evangelical family and the idea of perfection of life on earth.)
– We get enormous **dissatisfaction** with minor disruptions. We're used to the idea that we can just "fix" things, be it a refrigerator, a car, or even a marriage. But it can't just be fixed! We have the notion that something is ruined simply because it has a problem, that it needs to be fixed; rather, it *should* have been perfect.
--**Ideas of possibility and perfection foster disillusion.**

◆ **LOSS OF CONTROL**
  – We are losing control over our search for possibility and perfection. We can't control the pace/information/interactions that constitute our lives. We've become so interdependent that any individual has difficulty managing, no less resisting the outside demands without giving up the ability to function in society - be in a place to make a living.
  – The **media** causes enormous **pressures of acceptability**.
  – Parents cannot control information that flows to their children (n.b. the recent increase in home schooling). TV/media has transformed ability of parents to raise their own children. We **cannot screen information**, so children learn/see/experience lots of things deemed inappropriate by parents.
      – The New York Times reported that children are losing their innocence, that they know about lots of things. But the greatest change is *not* that they are "losing innocence" but that we are **changing the concept of childhood so that it does not include a notion of innocence**. Parents used to want to shelter their children, but now there is the new belief that children must be exposed early to adult experiences in order to survive in an increasingly uncontrollable world. **The age of protection has been replaced by age of preparation**.

◆ **DEFERENCE TO AUTHORITY**
  – We defer to authority to create the perfect person, perfect society. We defer to the **authority** and the **expertise** who will help us make it perfect and prepare our children.
  – Experts give us techniques and information but they end up defining what *should* be done. They describe not only *what* is possible, **how** to achieve it, but also why it *is good*. Thus, it's **not only technical knowledge – it ends up being moral knowledge!**
  – At the beginning of the 20th century, the fragility of the modern family and child also seemed apparent. Under modern capitalism, industrial societies had high rates of **immigration** and **mobility.** The family became *nuclear* rather than *extended* – families were struggling without networks of support.
  – **Family experts** as early as the early 20th century suggested that the family needed to be *helped* – so we got professionals in family life, family therapists, social workers.
      – The idea emerged that the **family is unable to protect itself or prepare children** adequately, and this was most apparent in the immigrant family (prevalent at the turn of the 20th century but also applicable today). Immigrant families supposedly didn't know how to care for children – thus, there was the idea that certain kinds of families increasingly needed the help of these trained professionals.
      – The family became an endangered species, and a particular coalition of family advocates emerged, and profited – they became a **profession**! Families who were to be helped became pawns. What was the solution? Take the children away!
      – From 1900-1920, juvenile courts removed immigrant children from their families and put in foster care/orphanages/institutions. In the modern world, we have more tolerance and don't remove kids quite so quickly. But what we have now is an **industry of child and family helpers**. Up until the 1920s, there were private charities and churches, and middle- to upper-class ladies worked on behalf of the poor and the needy (e.g. Eleanor Roosevelt). These women were replaced by professionals. At the time, rich middle class ladies working for poor was the norm. But in the 1920s, states established services for children and widows. In the 1930s came the New Deal, and it became the Office for Children. By the end of WWII, protection of children became subsumed into welfare. Helping **Children became conflated with poverty!**

- – Who is the voice for children's interests today? Schools, teachers unions, markets? Where is their voice, who will defend their rights? Today it is the work of professionals and entrepreneurs – **children have no organizational forceful advocate who does not also have their own interest.**
- – Those who have a vested financial interest in defining and recognizing problems – these are the people who define children's lives as problems. Those who have that niche /interest are the ones who claim there is a need for more service, that this intervention is required. There is an array of helpers out there trained to fix people's lives – it's a **product/service to fix a life**. Thus, there is a **monopoly of social issues by professionals,** and this has serious political/social consequences.

Summary: We've seen how the location of authority has shifted and the definition of human life is the province for people for whom this is their professional work. What happens when authority lies with people who make a living by defining people's lives as a problem or who define life as perfectible?