

# Embodied Culture as Procedure: Rethinking the Link Between Personal and Objective Culture<sup>1</sup>

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*Recent developments cognitive science and the philosophy of mind point to a radically new way of understanding the way that culture comes to be embodied in human agents. According to these emerging perspectives, persons can only embody culture in the form of procedure: context sensitive skills for the fast categorization, perception and exploitation of the response-dependent properties of objects and settings. Procedures are fundamentally and irreducibly embodied, while a lot of what we refer to as culture exists in an externalized, objectified form. This means that the format in which culture is externally encountered is radically distinct from the one in which it is embodied. This (re)opens the problematic of the linkage or interfacing between external and objectified culture, a central problem in cultural theory that became obfuscated, and spuriously “resolved” by phenomenological and functionalist theorists who presumed that culture is internalized in the same way in which it appears in external form. I close by outlining the implications for thinking of embodied culture as procedure, as well as developing novel ways of understanding how persons “interface” with the external world of objectified cultural objects and artifacts.*

## Introduction

Looking through the contemporary theoretical landscape, we find very few ways of conceptualizing the enculturation process that do not rely on the metaphorical imagery of the (format-preserving) “transfer” of objectified cultural contents *from* the *external* environment *into* the *internal* environment of the person. That is, enculturation is conceptualized—either explicitly or more commonly, implicitly—primarily as a *learning* process. Learning, in its turn, is conceived mainly as the *recreation* of mental copies of public culture. In the most ambitious (functionalist)

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1 This is a heavily revised version of a paper originally prepared for the Symposium on Social Science and Sustainable Consumption, held in Helsinki, Finland, April 2011. I would like to thank Alan Warde and anonymous reader and the rest of the symposium participants for providing helpful comments, criticisms and suggestions.

Alan Warde & Dale Southerton (eds.) 2012  
The Habits of Consumption

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version of this story persons become encultured agents because culture is literally embodied as an organized system of symbolic mental representations that are constitutive of the individual personality (Parsons 1951; Parsons and Shils 1951). These internalized representations provide the content-based guidelines that canalize motivated action toward the pursuit of specific goals (Spiro 1987). The canonical formulation here is provided by Parsons (1964), who borrows the Freudian metaphor or “introjection” to conceptualize the way in which persons become encultured subjects via the internalization of objectified cultural contents infused with affective value.

In this agenda-setting account, the internalization process requires the linguistic (or otherwise symbolically mediated) “transmission” of these contents from person to person or from environment to person (Turner 1994). This is a claim to which both functionalist and post-functionalist phenomenological theorists gave their consent (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Parsons 1964). In this specific respect the phenomenological “break” with structural-functionalism is much less radical than traditionally portrayed in standard histories of twentieth century sociological theory. While differing in the details, and while certainly rejecting the pseudo-psychoanalytic formulation favored by Parsons, almost all contemporary accounts of the enculturation process retain some (however attenuated) version of the content-internalization story. The major theoretical schools of contemporary cultural theory differ only on the presumed nature of what this content is, with the major phenomenological input resolving itself into a substitution of the “valuational” and “normative” components favored by functionalism in favor of the “cognitive” components preferred by phenomenological theorists (Heritage, 1984; Warner, 1978; Berger and Luckmann 1966). Thus, regardless of whether they are talking about “values,” “conceptual schemes,” “classifications,” “schemas” or “codes” (Parsons 1951, 1964; Zerubavel 1993; Alexander 2003; D’Andrade 1992; Spiro 1987)—very few analysts question the *content*-internalization requirement, and all hold on to some modified version of the presumption that the end product of the enculturation process is the storage of some (systematic? ) set of lingua-form representations of external culture “within” the agent.

In this chapter I outline what I refer to as *procedural* theory of culture and enculturation. This theory makes the “radical” claim that *persons are not cognitively capable of “internalizing” (e.g. learning, memorizing, introjecting, etc.) cultural content or symbolic representations* (Martin 2010). It follows that enculturation (or learning) cannot consist in the “storing” of previously objectified representations into long-term memory in a way that preserves the properties that those representations display in their objectified state, properties such as (logical) systematicity or status as representational symbols. Because the theory is built on the sharp distinction between the nature and constitutive properties that pertain to culture as it is encountered in its externalized state and culture in its embodied state, what is

not a problem for the functionalist or the phenomenological account—such as questions of how embodied culture becomes objectified culture and how persons use embodied skills to interface with already existing embodied culture—become central problems of interest in the procedural theory.

### **Enculturation without content-internalization**

It might seem nonsensical or counter-intuitive to even suppose that we can formulate a coherent account of enculturation without relying on some version of the content internalization story. My main goal in what follows is to convince the reader that, however entrenched, the idealized model of enculturation as content-internalization is just that: *a model*, one that can be done away with within an empirically defensible account of how persons become encultured subjects. To that effect, I propose that the postulate of content-internalization is a dispensable, analytically retrogressive appendage to contemporary cultural theory. This argument stands regardless of the type of internalized content story that we are talking about. Thus, saying that the content that is stored by persons as part of their cultural endowment is “schematic” and not specific content (Sewell 1992; D’Andrade 1992), is still a version of the content-internalization story and therefore it is rejected in the present account.

If content-internalization is not a necessary postulate for building a coherent theory of how culture is embodied by persons, then why is it that it has been thought as necessary by previous theorists? I argue that the apparent necessity of thinking of culture as internalized content rests on an equivocation of how culture is (mentally) represented by persons. This confusion seems to have two main sources.

### **The nature of mental representations**

First, cultural theorists generally start from a rather restrictive notion of mental representation. From this perspective, only that which is expressible as propositional content and has the status of an external symbol counts as learnable culture, and thus as potential components of our personal cultural endowment. Under this canonical conceptualization, the possibility that personal culture might consist of non-content bearing representations (or non-representational mental entities) is nonsensical, because the notion of a mental entity which is not representational in the content-bearing sense is not allowed for. The traditional internalization account cannot handle such entities, because it cannot conceive of any “transmission” mechanisms for cultural elements that are not conceptualized as content-bearing representations (Turner, 1994). The procedural theory offered here departs from recent critiques in the philosophy of mind in which the notion that the main

components of what is usually called “mind” are content-bearing representations—and the notion that for something to count as mental it must have such “intentional” propositional content—has been summarily criticized and rejected as unworkable. Under this emerging set of perspectives, the existence of mental entities that do not carry representational content as traditionally conceived but which are still part of our acquired set of capacities is increasingly uncontroversial (e.g. Hutto, 2008; Churchland 2007; Varela et al. 1991).<sup>2</sup>

### The reconstructive aspect of embodied cultural production

Second, social scientists (like most people) appear to be taken-in by the fact that persons are able to produce objectified cultural content unproblematically—primarily but not exclusively through “talk”—as *evidence* that they have indeed internalized the content that they so readily produce. They thus confuse a *reconstructive* process of online content-production for a *reduplicative* process of “search” and “retrieval” of “stored” cultural content. The postulate of content-internalization naturally emerges as a ready-made explanation for this chronically experienced phenomenon. If persons produce cultural content on the spot (for instance when asked their opinion about a given subject within an interview setting), then it seems reasonable to suppose that that content must have been *retrieved* from the person’s knowledge-stock (long-term memory), which serves as a repository for content that was deposited there through a cultural internalization process. Here learning is the transfer of previously public representations from the outside and their “storage” into long-term memory and recall is the “retrieval” of those contents from the “system” in which they were stored (Roediger 1980). This is the incorporation-encoding-retrieval model of learning and so-called long-term memory.

This account of what happens during online objectification of culture in talk has come under withering attack in post-functionalist theorizing. Swidler (1986) was the first to question the notion that culture is powerful *because* it is deeply internalized. In her most recent work, she suggests that persons engage in regulated improvisation (drawing on a loose “toolkit” of partly internal, partly externalized heuristics and competences) to engage in public acts of cultural performance. These performances then give the illusion that their action is driven by static, free-standing cultural contents (Swidler 2001a).

In spite of this, the presumption that persons carry cultural content around with them is hard to shake. Something like it continues to surreptitiously color various

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<sup>2</sup> The theoretical problem with the equation of “mental” with “propositional content” stored static representations, was first pointed out in social science and philosophy by Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Hayek (1952).

theoretical and empirical approaches to the “measurement” of culture. The entire apparatus of attitude and opinion research and the clinical interview method relies on the implicit assumption that the content recorded in the interview setting is the culture that has been incorporated by the laity. When the (predictable) fact that no such (stable) representations are there to be found, the problematic of “non-attitudes” emerges (Converse 1974; Zaller 1992; Martin 2000). From point of view of the procedural theory offered here, the (lack of) empirically problematic status of attitudes, opinions and (representational) values is a non-problem, since the (pre) existence of these internalized content-bearing mental entities is ruled out from the start.

### Personal culture as procedure

At this point, the reader may be asking: if we reject the notion that propositional or representational content is capable of being learned or stored *qua* representation, and that the production of content on the spot is dependent upon pre-existing representations retrieved from a long-term memory store then what are we left with? The procedural theory (as it names implies) suggest that culture is embodied and thus made personal as (non-content involving) *procedures*. These procedures have no real functional or structural analogue in the public world of objectified culture. Accordingly, culture is made personal *exclusively* in the form of dynamic, action-centered, context-sensitive, non-content-bearing, non-propositional, non-symbolic, sensorimotor-competences. These non-representational cultured competences are themselves productive of the objectified performances, traces and artifacts (including spoken and written language but also including the production of material culture) that constitute objectified, symbolic culture (Gallese and Lakoff 2005). Thus, I propose that personal culture is in its very essence *procedural culture*.

As already mentioned, the procedural theory denies that the incorporation-encoding-retrieval model is an empirically valid (or theoretically useful) description of what happens when persons generate explicit cultural content. This includes those contents that take the form of cultural performances which are liable to be “re-described” using content-based language such as ritual and institutionalized ceremony. Instead, the procedural theory of culture suggests that the production of the content in question is always *reconstructive* (Bartlett 1932; Neisser 1967). This recurrent, skill-dependent reconstruction depends on cultured competences (embodied as procedure) that themselves have neither the status of, nor can be adequately made explicit as, (propositional) contents. The theory proposes that cultural content is always *constructed online and in real time* by persons when they encounter situations that (socially) require the production of this content (Coulson 2001; Shore 1991; Fauconnier 1994). The ease with which persons

generate cultural content (e.g. when prodded by social scientists, when motivated by content-inducing institutions, or when engaged in their own creative projects), generates the illusion that that content was always sitting there inside the person's head waiting to be let out and that all that they did was simply to "access" this "stored" content (Barsalou 1987; Clark 1993).

### **Modification without content-internalization**

It is important to note that while the theory denies that persons learn or internalize cultural content as part of the enculturation process, the theory also claims that persons are durably modified by virtue of developing in a given material and symbolic environment (Bourdieu, 1990). In this respect, the conventional *theory* of enculturation as the picking up of content from the outside must not be thought of as essentially a *definition* of the concept of enculturation, as it is perfectly possible to become an encultured subject in the sense of being deeply modified by our experience in a certain social and material environment *without picking up any explicit cultural contents* (Bourdieu 1990).

This practice-theoretical claim has a superficial affinity with certain schools of post-functionalist theorizing that are distinctive for their categorical rejection of the Freudo-Parsonian internalization model of enculturation: namely, Ann Swidler's (2001a) toolkit approach and contemporary versions of ethnomethodology inspired by Garfinkel (1967). The key difference is that both of these general approaches subscribe to a "weak enculturation" model—or in the case of ethnomethodology, subscribe to a methodological agnosticism regarding the issue of cultural internalization---in which the person is not thought of as being necessarily modified in a consequential or enduring way via the enculturation process (Lizardo and Strand 2010). Instead of conceiving of the link between culture and action as entailing deep internalization, these approaches posit that this linkage is to be found in the external structuration of action by existing stock of objectified cultural content.

From the perspective of the procedural approach offered here, both toolkit theorists and ethnomethodologists (incorrectly) refuse to develop a positive account of how persons come to be cognitively modified by virtue of being members of a given culture, or implicitly presume that one is not required (Swidler 2008; Garfinkel 1967); they thus throw the baby of a positive theory of enculturation with the bathwater of the Freudo-Parsonian introjection model. In the procedural approach, it is possible to keep the classical insight that enculturation entails durable cognitive modification (e.g. Parsons 1951), while rejecting the implausible model of how culture becomes personal—e.g. by being internalized into the personality as need dispositions— inherited from functionalism or by presuming that cognitive

representations become learned as *representational symbols* (Geertz 1973a) as presumed by most contemporary theories of enculturation that depart from the “cognitive” and “linguistic” turns in cultural analysis.

### **Objectified culture: Language, ritual, media, artifacts and institutions**

The procedural theory proposes that, in contrast to personal culture, objectified culture is made up of content-bearing vehicles. These vehicles usually—but not always—take the form of external symbols, which serve a representational function (Kolers and Roediger 1984). Because personal culture does not consist of content-bearing internal representations with symbolic or representational content, it follows that personal culture cannot be thought of as a format-preserving analogue (e.g. a representational “copy”) of objectified culture. This is a controversial claim, because current cultural theories that make room for the process of cultural internalization presume that there is a one-to-one mapping between personal culture and objectified culture at the level of content. That is, they allow for the possibility of learning as the formation of internal representations that “refer” to objectified cultural contents. The procedural theory of culture denies that such a symbolic or referential mapping exists.

In general objectified culture is made available to persons in *mediated* form. In non-literate societies and, in both literate and non-literate societies, in contexts where direct (non-linguistic) experience is primary in (realms usually relegated to “informal” activities), objectified culture is typically found in the form of, practices (e.g. ways of talking or walking) objects and artifacts both “mundane” artifacts and aesthetic, ritual or religious objects (material culture). In literate societies objectified culture is typically encountered as written texts and other verbal communications. Objectified culture is also increasingly likely to be found in the form of non-verbal multi-modal media “images” transmitted via television, movies, radio, recorded and digital media, and today the world wide web (media culture). Finally and most importantly culture may also be externally objectified in *institutions* (Zucker 1983): externally available rules systems for the definition of the situation, the allocation of rewards, the matching of persons, objects or events to categories and the (*public*) assignment of abilities and capacities to symbolically constituted structures and actors, and more broadly, rules for the determination and fixation of (cognitive) truth, (modal) possibility and (moral) responsibility in situations where this becomes a matter of public import (Meyer 1977; Douglas 1986; Zucker 1988; Meyer et al. 1994; Searle 2008).

The procedural theory adopts the practice-theoretical precept that culture cannot be publicly objectified while retaining its original properties (Bourdieu, 1990).

Instead, the only way to gain (indirect) access to personal culture in its embodied state is by a (multi-layered) process of “translation” of implicit cultured skills into public representations that cognitive scientist Annette Karmiloff-Smith (1992) has referred to as *representational redescription* or *explicitation*. An important point to keep in mind here is that the ability to make procedural culture representationally explicit is *itself* a form of procedural culture which can be traced back to certain forms of concrete experience and systematic “enskillment” (Palsson 1994; Ingold 2000). Thus, the capacity to make procedural culture explicit, for instance through talk, writing, or even via (lay or professional) “theorizing” is itself differentially distributed across persons and tied to the material and social conditions under which persons develop as enskilled agents (Bourdieu 2000).

### **The primacy of personal culture in the production of (objectified) culture**

When procedural skills are applied to the construction and generation of explicit cultural contents or the modification of the objectified cultural environment then explicit, objectified culture is generated. Here the prototypical activity is simply the *production* of “talk” (Schegloff, 2000); although I include all skillful “production of culture” as an example of objectification (Peterson 1976). In the case of empirical access to objectified culture as discourse or talk, standard social-scientific methods such as the “clinical interview” pioneered by Jean Piaget and imported into the social sciences by Elton Mayo (Hsueh 2004) are the most appropriate resources of social-scientific investigation (e.g. Lamont 1992; Swidler 2001a; Illouz 1997).

From the point of view of the procedural theory, the fact that persons are generally very good at producing objectified, seemingly “content-ful” knowledge acquired through their exposure to the general culture (e.g. beliefs, sayings, proverbs) or episodic knowledge related to their own lives (including the biographical memory of learning about objectified features of the culture, such as memories of sitting in a classroom) is deceiving, since it is very easy to mistake the end-product of the application of procedural skill for “the culture” itself (Strauss and Quinn 1997). This leads to the mistake of thinking that personal and objectified culture share a similar (representational) format, a proposition that is explicitly denied in the procedural theory.

The ability to produce objectified culture is a form of skill which itself is differentially distributed across social groups depending on their experiential history (which accounts for their having gained this skill) and opportunity to exercise this skill in everyday settings (Bourdieu 1984; Illouz 1997); taking the objectified products of the application of given procedural competences as “culture” would lead to the untoward implication that some social groups (e.g. the loquacious Western middle

class denizens populating a lot the interview-based studies in social science) simply have “more culture” than others. Depending on our conceptualization of the notion of “culture”, this statement could be both true and false; from a procedural point of view, some persons may be relatively better-positioned to produce linguistically objectifiable culture (see for instance Bourdieu (1984, chap. 8) on the “production” of political opinions). However, this does not mean that they actually possess the cultured abilities to skillfully navigate the very social settings that serve as the “referents” of their objectifications.

Cultural analysts are always at risk of making a grave analytic error when they mistake the objectified *product* of the application of procedural skill to the “task” of producing objectified culture as talk (e.g. the talk itself) for the “culture” that person has putatively “internalized.” In the very same way, we must not confuse the status of this culture as public and objective with the relative *permanence* of this culture. A lot of the externally objectified culture that plays a role in our lives is permanently recorded in durable media (e.g. writing). However, ephemeral public culture is constantly generated through witnessable practices and through talk.

Embodied, personal culture is doubly primary in relation to public, objectified culture. First, it is the base competence that persons mobilize in order to *generate* observable streams of (mainly stereotyped but sometimes novel) cultural content in publicly accessible formats. This content may range from such common forms as talk, accounts, justifications, discourses and vocabularies of motive to mundane and extra-mundane “rituals” and ways of framing experience. The content so produced may also be permanently objectified and stereotyped in a public form. Second, it serves as the basis to *interpret*, and *incorporate* (existing stocks of) and generate (further amounts of) objectified culture. In this respect, the distinction between two broad classes of (procedural) cultured competences (productive and interpretative) plays an important role in the theory.

These two sets of competences need not co-exist in the same person (e.g. when producing talk about a given domain) and across persons they may exhibit wide variability in depth, coordination and degree of development. For instance, the capacity to read is an interpretation-relevant cultured competence that allows for the ability of persons to interface with the objective culture embedded in written texts (Griswold, 2008), while the capacity to write is a production-relevant cultured competence that allows for the production of even more objectified text-based culture that other persons can interface with. In fact the uneven and non-overlapping distribution of these sorts of skills produces the recurrent differentiation of actors between “producers” and “consumers” that serves as the basis of a wide range of social spheres. When cultured competences come in these “consumption/production” reciprocal pairs they are likely to serve as the basis of self-sustaining worlds (“fields” of organized striving (Martin 2003)) in which actors come to orient

towards one another based on the ability to (procedurally) “decode” objects produced via a set of cultured competences that presuppose the widespread ability to incorporate those objectified cultural performances that are routinely produced within that world (Bourdieu 1983).

This distinction is cross-cut by another set of procedural cultured competences, this time keyed to relative ability to “redescribe” implicit competences into explicit objectified forms. Thus, persons may have the ability to incorporate (“consume”) or produce objectified culture, without having the requisite skill to *describe how* they do this in linguistic form. The existence of a skill to produce an objectified (and objectifiable) performance is not dependent on the associated existence of a linguistic skill to also comment on the presence of this practical competence (Bourdieu 1984). Persons generally “know more than they can tell” (Bourdieu 1990; Bloch 1998). In addition persons may possess the skill to *talk about* or *refer* to objectified cultural domains, without possessing the skill to *effectively navigate* these domains. The procedural theory of culture thus offers a solution to the knowledge-use paradox that has haunted recent cultural analysis (Swidler 2001a).

This implies that, consistent with so-called “dual-process” arguments, not all culture that is produced in real time by actors when prompted (culture elicited when actors are asked to mobilize their declarative skills) is relevant for the explanation of social action (Swidler 2001a); conversely a lot of procedural culture that is in fact mobilized in everyday decision-making is refractory to the application of declarative explicitation skills on the part of the agent (Bourdieu 1990; Vaisey 2009; Bloch 1998; Wilson and Nisbett 1978). A key implication of the argument is that the personal ability to produce culture in real-time as “declarations” (e.g. accounts, or vocabularies of motive (Scott and Lyman 1968; Mills 1940)) cannot be considered an empirical basis to conclude that related practical skills to navigate those objectified cultural realms that serve as the “referents” of those declarations also exist. This accounts for the observation that the skills necessary to produce talk “about” culture are not inherently correlated with the skills necessary to use that culture in action (Swidler 2001a). The procedural theory predicts that there should exist non-negotiable asymmetries between the ability to deploy competences to produce “about” knowledge of objectified culture and the possession of “how” knowledge as to how to navigate settings where this objectified cultural content is relevant (Ryle 2002). In sorting through the large amount of culture that informants report knowing about, the analyst faces the *problem of relevance*: separating the skillful ability to produce “about” knowledge from the ability to actually put that knowledge to use.

## Concluding remarks

The theory of culture and enculturation offered here rests on a series of controversial claims. Two of them stand out, because they forcefully break with commonly accepted notions in contemporary cultural theory. First, I argued that the format that culture requires to be objectified is antithetical to the format that culture acquires when it becomes embodied in persons. Thus, processes of cultural objectification and processes of cultural embodiment must be analytically and empirically distinguished; they cannot be considered part of a continuous “dialectic” or “cycle” of internalization and externalization as has been customary in post-functionalist accounts inspired by phenomenology (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

Cultural embodiment requires *direct experience* in objectified cultural realms; it cannot be simply thought of as the unproblematic transmission of content via public media such as language. Cultural embodiment presupposes a process of “enskillment” (Palsson 1994) that at its very essence boils down to the systematic acquisition, via repetitive experience, of practical, embodied competences keyed to the ability to use culture and navigate culturally constituted objectified realms in their various forms (e.g. culture as language, code, ritual, artifact, and institution). Codes may exist, yet persons may lack any capacity to use or understand them; artifacts may be discovered even after the embodied competences that resulted in their production are gone; institutions may survive as objectified rule systems or bundles of explicit categories, yet the capacity to apply the rules or deploy the categories could have atrophied, and so on.

Culture becomes embodied as skill only through the bottleneck of practice and experience. Once embodied as skill, it partakes of distinct properties and forms of organization that are in fact antithetical to those that are characteristic of the public cultural realm. The proposed model of *enculturation as enskillment* entails the capacitation of the actor to engage in direct activity, not the spectatorial (re)creation of representational, disembodied (and thus “mental”) copies of public culture which are then endowed with some mysterious capacity to compel the body to act in this or that way. There is no symbolic shortcut that makes persons encultured subjects via a mysterious non-material realm of “culture” conceived as representational symbols subsisting in dis-embodied media (Geertz 1973b; Parsons 1951). Experience is primary, and symbols are just part (and a very delimited one as such) of experience.

The procedural theory problematizes the pervasive (and for that reason taken-for-granted) processes of cultural objectification observable in everyday life. In contrast to the pre-existing content-retrieval model that dominates the post-functionalist theoretical landscape, the translation of implicit skills into objectified cultural productions requires the acquisition of very distinct forms of cultured competences. These productions and explicitation skills are tied to use, and are

unequally and unevenly distributed. Interpretation relevant skills (necessary for certain uses of public culture) are thus distinct from production-relevant skills. The translation of implicit, embodied culture into explicit disembodied symbols remains a murky, and ill-understood process, but one that—once we shake off the misleading content-retrieval model that makes it seem unproblematic—will hopefully attract the full attention of cultural theorists.

One thing that is surely clear is that the production of all objectified cultural content (internal soliloquies included) is *fully reconstructive* and requires the iterative application of embodied competences. This means that the consistent production of the same set of objectified contents—the wholly grail of cross-temporal (test/re-test) “reliability” in public opinion research—is expected to be the exception rather than the rule. At this level therefore, objectified culture may appear “fragmented”—as has become standard dogma in contemporary cultural theory—even if it emerges from the deployment of non-fragmented and actually very systematic set of embodied competences. Here, the elevation of the property “fragmentation” to a generic property of “culture” as an abstraction (e.g. Sewell 2005; Swidler 1995), relies on the misguided equation of “culture” with objectified culture. As a rule, because experience tends to be structured in a stronger way than the personal capacity to produce structured cultural performances (Rosch 1973), the generation of structured cultural competences at the personal level can co-exist with the apparent fragmentation of culture at the objectified level (Bourdieu 1990).

Second I argued that enculturation cannot be profitably thought of as the internalization of cultural content nor that “cultural communication” can be profitably thought of as the back and forth “sending” of those contents (e.g. Leach 1976; Lévi-Strauss 1966). I proposed instead that a theory of enculturation can (and must) do away with the imagery of enculturation as the transmission and internalization of representational contents. This leads to the radical claim that persons can become encultured subjects without in the very least internalizing *any* cultural content as traditionally conceived (e.g. content-bearing representations).

If it is possible to do away with the notion that persons become encultured subjects through the internalization of content, then why is it that it *seems* so intuitive and natural to think of persons as actually carrying a huge amount of cultural content in their heads wherever they go? I propose that this impression is itself a result of the fact that persons do not “store” culture in a format that can be usefully (or defensibly) characterized as content-bearing. Instead, it is precisely because persons are such skillful generators of (stereotyped) cultural content “on the spot” (Swidler 2001a) that it seems as if that (highly structured) content was there all along. This is *the pre-existing content illusion*. Insofar as cultural theorists

in sociology continue to fall prey to the content illusion then no real progress can be made on the “hard problems” and paradoxes in contemporary cultural analysis.

This goes for both cultural theorists who retain a more or less classical account of enculturation as the acquisition of internal copies of external culture (and who thus link culture to action via the motivational or cognitive power of mental representations to direct action and frame experience and perception) or those who prescribe a (for the most part) judicious anti-mentalism and focus instead on the external structuring capacity of culture as objectified, public representations (e.g. non-internalized “codes” in Swidler’s (2001a) terms). The procedural theory offered here parts company with the first group of theorists by proposing that no content-bearing representations can be internalized as mental entities that exert causal power over persons by motivating action (e.g. Parsons 1964; Alexander 2003; Spiro 1987; D’Andrade 1992) or that constitute their phenomenology by “filtering” experience (e.g. Zerubavel 1993; Leach 1976; Douglas 1986). The procedural theory thus effectively (if somewhat radically) deals with the problem that there is in fact little empirical evidence in the social or in the cognitive sciences, that such structured mental representations as attitudes, opinions, categories or concepts exist as stored entities in long-term memory (Zaller 1992; Barsalou 1987) and even more implausibly that such disembodied abstractions could possibly bear the causal power to direct action or somehow constitute experience (Bloch 1986).

The procedural theory does this *without* abandoning the notion that culture is made personal in some form; instead the theory redefines personal culture as context-sensitive, irreducibly embodied *procedures*. In this way, it parts company with the Geertzian anti-mentalism of the second group but it does so by resorting to a non-representationalist form of mentalism, one that is increasingly becoming the most influential position in cognitive science and the philosophy of mind (Clark 2003; Varela et al. 1991; Hutto 2008) and which is fully consistent with recent developments in practice theory (Bourdieu 1990; Wacquant 2004; Swidler 2001b; Palsson 1994). This allows the theory to affirm the claim that persons become encultured subjects by being subject to the non-random strictures of a given experiential history in a realm of social, material and objectified cultural objects and settings. Thus, the notion of cognitive modification by way of experience is decoupled from the notion of the internalization of explicit symbols and propositions.

While the framework offered here has the virtue of cutting through some core conceptual issues that remain mysterious or under-theorized from traditional perspectives, the conceptual re-orientation that it carries with it opens up an entire new set of problematic issues in cultural theorizing. These issues had been prematurely foreclosed in the era of post-functionalist phenomenological approaches to cultural analysis that rely on the imagery of a dialectic of internalization and externalization (Berger and Luckmann 1966). In particular, the specific ways

in which persons acquire (and the vicissitudes that may befall such acquisition) and use irreducibly embodied skills to interface and learn how to use disembodied cultural resources, and the way in which explicit, public cultural resources emerge from the operation and deployment of implicit, non-symbolic competences stand as important issues to be resolved, clarified and more explicitly theorized. I have attempted to provide some very preliminary illustrations of how the problem of cultural interfacing and the problem of cultural production can be handled from the within the procedural theory offered here, but a lot of more careful theorizing and conceptualization of these matters remains to be done.

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