and social and organizational networks. In the lacunae created by the diminution of general theory and simple positivism—and perhaps *because* of those lacunae—the abduction that Swedberg endorses has produced a great deal of sociological knowledge.

Marx and Engels wrote in the *Communist Manifesto* (using the gendered language of their day), ''All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.'' Sociologists, like everyone else, face our own historical moment, one in which science, even so-called hard science, confronts skepticism, doubt, and ''alternative facts.'' Under prevailing conditions that can be called postmodern (even if the term has become anathema), and given our own sensibilities about historicity and the complexities of culture and meaning, we have not been well positioned to formulate more general conceptual frameworks and theories of the social. Adams, Clemens, and Orloff were perhaps more prophetic than empirical when they argued that ''meta-narrative and synoptic grand theory are making a comeback'' (2005:60–61). Yet their prophecy raises an important possibility. With smart thinking through theory of the sort that Martin displays and a license for imagination and creativity that Swedberg encourages, our decades of wandering in the theoretical wilderness may yet yield a new mutual engagement and reconstruction among competing approaches, and even theoretical syntheses that will take forms we are as yet unable to anticipate. Certainly our times cry out for novel sociological ways of theorizing. Richard Swedberg and John Levi Martin, individually and together, reestablish the centrality of theorizing as an anchoring project of sociology. We, our discipline, and hopefully our societies will all benefit if we do as they recommend: don't ''learn'' theory, theorize!

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A Brilliant Work in General Theory

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Andrew Abbott's new book is another masterful installment in what is now a long series of important works by one of the leading sociologists in the United States. The reader of *Processual Sociology* will find some very creative and useful ideas in its pages. Abbott's work, in brief, represents a most welcome contribution to modern sociology, and especially to its theory part.

Before describing the content of *Processual Sociology*, it may be helpful to say something about Abbot's ambition with this work. In the preface he introduces himself to the reader as a descendent of pragmatism and the Chicago School of Sociology. He also

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notes that ''unfortunately, none in the Chicago School bothered to write systematic theory'' (p. x). The reader understands that to produce such a systematic theory is exactly what Abbott himself wants to do.

In the very last lines of the book, however, he describes his failure to do so. In the late 1990s, he says, he produced a 400-page manuscript that is still unfinished, despite many efforts to complete it. As a replacement for the treatise in sociological theory that he did not write, Abbott decided to put together this book of essays.

At this point the reader may wonder what exactly is going on here. Why the failure to produce a general theory that systematizes the core ideas of the many brilliant Chicago sociologists from W. I. Thomas and Robert Park to Everett C. Hughes and Howard Becker? Is it due to Abbott's failure to pull together the various theoretical threads of the Chicago School, or is something else involved?

Given Abbott's versatility as a theorist, my sense is that something else is involved. This something else, I will also suggest, is not only what stopped sociologists of the caliber of Thomas, Park, and so on from producing works of great theory. To be a bit polemical: the fact is that no American sociologist has been able to produce the kind of path-breaking theory that we find in the works of Weber, Durkheim, and Marx.

Some of the answer to the question of what has blocked the production of great theory in the Chicago School as well as more generally in the United States has, to my mind, to do with the strong emphasis in American sociology on methods. With some exaggeration, one can say that the history of American sociology is the history of its methods. While the Europeans laid a strong theoretical foundation for sociology, the contribution of the Americans was of a different kind. They supplied the fledging new discipline with a solid set of methods, something that modernized sociology and prevented it from turning into a theory-heavy and outmoded discipline as the twentieth century progressed.

As I see it, this focus on methods is precisely what constitutes the major contribution of American sociology to modern sociology. It has come in several installments. In the early 1900s, the members of the Chicago School collectively invented and introduced field methods into sociology. After the Second World War, the sociologists at Columbia University launched the use of quantitative methods on a grand scale. And today computational sociologists and networks analysts are forging ahead.

The emphasis on methods that can be found in U.S. sociology should not be seen as a form of empiricism, driven by a dismissive attitude to theory, or what is known as ''methodologism'' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:26–35). The story is considerably more complex.

Some clues to what happened to American sociology and set it on its current course, I suggest, can be found by looking at the quintessential type of American philosophy that emerged in the late 1800s, namely pragmatism. In this type of philosophy, which has deeply influenced American sociology, it is argued that ideas are only developed through practice, not through introspection, library research, and the like. Ideas are not only produced through practice; this is also where they show their true worth. Theory and methods, in other words, are closely united and tend to merge, a bit like Kant's means and ends merge in the ideas of Dewey. You learn by doing; you get ideas by acting and by solving problems. In brief, insights and truths are developed through a process—the process of acting.

After this detour, let me now return to Abbott's book and its arguments. In *Processual Sociology*, Abbott has chosen to focus his efforts to build a new type of sociological theory precisely around the concept of process. His earlier efforts in this direction were centered on the notions of sequence and events, but these have now been subsumed under the new master-category of process. The result is what Abbott calls processual sociology or *processualism*, a term that he sometimes uses and that suggests that he wants to see his effort as a general doctrine of sorts.

It should be emphasized that Abbott is uniquely qualified to undertake the task of exploring the category of process. By this I am not referring to his talent as a sociologist and a theorist, both of which are generally acknowledged. What I am instead thinking of is the nearly encyclopedic knowledge of

quantitative methods that Abbott has developed during his thirty years or so as the main editor and/or board member of the *American Journal of Sociology*.

Drawing on this knowledge, Abbott has helped to create a new and very useful genre in written sociology, namely the essay that presents and discusses the theoretical underpinnings of the methods that are used in modern empirical research. ''Transcending General Linear Reality'' (1988) is probably the best-known example of this. In brief, it is precisely the coming together of theory and method that helps Abbott to produce his processual sociology and to turn it into something that is both novel in American sociology and a product of it.

Processual Sociology consists of nine chapters and a chapter-long epilogue. Roughly half of the chapters have been published elsewhere. In terms of its content, the book can be said to contain a full presentation of processual sociology plus some applications of this type of sociology. A few of the chapters are well-known to most readers, such as ''Lyrical Sociology'' (Chapter 4) and ''The Idea of Outcome'' (Chapter 6). Others deserve to be so, like ''The Historicality of Individuals'' (Chapter 1) and ''Social Order and Process'' (Chapter 7), both of which are here published for the first time.

The reading of Abbott's book is mostly hard and demanding, but since the end result is rewarding, this is more of an observation than a complaint. When Abbott wants to write well, he does so, but theory is not only tough when it comes to the thinking—it is also hard to express in any form other than dry, abstract prose. Examples abound in the history of sociology of books you cannot read for more than a few minutes without taking a break, from *Economy and Society* by Weber to *The Social System* by Parsons.

Abbott's main message in *Processual Sociology* is not that we should add the category of process to our tool kit of concepts and put his name on it. He has a bigger goal in mind. His ambition, to recall, is to write an updated version of that theory book the Chicago sociologists never wanted or got around to writing. He wants to recast the general approach of sociology *tout court*.

Abbot's general point of departure for this huge enterprise comes from his earlier work on time and can be described as a focus on the present moment or the now. ''We live in a tensed world,'' as he puts it (p. 195). All that happens, and ever has happened, has done so in the now and in the form of *events*. The past is gone and the future is not yet here. The event is therefore the fundamental category in processual sociology; and the social process consists of many such events. ''The social world is a world of events'' (p. 201).

The past is always present in the now, Abbott emphasizes, and this means that processual sociology is deeply historical (*historicality*). The future is present in the form of opportunities and choices in the now. The past is *encoded* in the individual and other social entities. By this is meant that it leaves traces in the body, in the memory, in records, and so on.

Individuals and other social entities are continuously created and recreated out of events, making up *lineages* over time. These lineages can be knit together in various ways, making up *linked ecologies* in the present. The lineages are grounded in locality; they also contest and constrain one another:

> Institutions and social groups are not fixed beings that can succeed one another, but lineages of events strung together over time, to which new things are always being bound, and from which old things are always being detached. Nor are these lineages concentric structures, as in the familiar hierarchical list of individual, family, community, and society that echoes through the problem-of-order tradition right down to contemporary sociology textbooks. Rather, they crosscut and interpenetrate and divide and rejoin to make a web of structure as complex across the spaces of the present as it is interwoven over moments of time. (p. 202)

This is roughly what Abbot's theoretical picture of the social world looks like, and the words that have been placed in italics in this review are the major new categories he brings to bear on it. He then applies the processual perspective to a series of topics, showing how this ''opens up'' the standard

sociological analysis to new insights and ideas (p. 226). This is done in a series of essays, each of which discusses a separate topic such as order, inequality, outcome, and human nature. The result is that theoretical ideas, which may sound artificial and forced when presented in a few sentences, now come to life and sparkle.

In making an analysis from the perspective of processualism, Abbott argues, the sociologist must realize the central importance of values. Many social entities can best be described as ''congealed values'' (e.g., p. 279). His main point (which I found hard to follow) seems to be that values have a phenomenological quality that cannot be reduced to the existence of social forces; and this must be acknowledged in the analysis. This not only goes for the people sociologists study but also for the sociologist herself. In a similar way, the sociologist has to attend to the emotional dimension of social life and give expression to ''the beauty and sadness'' of human existence (p. 121).

Sociology has its roots in the humanities, according to Abbott, who advocates what he calls a humanistic sociology (e.g., pp. xiv, 272–92). Sociologists should live as they learn and write. As an example of his own contribution to the common good, Abbott cites his extensive work in defense of books and libraries (p. 254, note 2, with a reference to a fuller description in *Digital Paper* [2014], his book on how to do electronic and library research).

Does Abbott pull it off? Has he overcome whatever it was that blocked and held back the Chicago sociologists from developing a theory that would match the depth and excellence of their empirical studies? The answer to this question is, in my view, yes and no. Yes, in the sense that Abbott is very successful in extracting and analyzing the kind of theory that is embedded in the methods that are used in sociology. In his essay on linear sociology from the 1980s, this meant that Abbott exposed and criticized a theoretical approach that he disapproved of (variable sociology, in all brevity). In writing *Processual Sociology*, however, his task was a different and also a more difficult one. Here he had to develop a positive theory himself, drawing on a tradition in sociology in which theory had deliberately been so closely built into the methods that the two had practically merged.

The way that Abbott decided to work his way out of this dilemma, as I see it, was by recasting this problem with the help of the term ''process.'' This worked well enough, and *Processual Sociology* is clearly a first-rate contribution to modern sociological theory, even if it is a bit of a torso, as the author himself is the first to acknowledge. I am not sure that Abbott's book will be more read than the treatises by Parsons, Coleman, and Harrison White, but it is to this class of major theoretical works that Abbott's book belongs.

It is clear from Abbott's volume that he has done a lot of hard thinking and also that he has chosen to travel a solitary road for a very long time now. The effort, however, has paid off; and I especially find three of his ideas to be very powerful as well as brilliant theoretical accomplishments. The first is his distinction between tensed and untensed time. The second is his notion of the encoding of individuals. And the third is the idea that the focus on outcome in sociology should be replaced with an emphasis on process.

All of these ideas deserve to become part of the sociological tradition, meaning by this that they can be broken out of Abbott's overall theory and used in other types of analyses. They are all both powerful and explosive in their own right. As a friend of mine likes to put it, you can easily run a mile with each of them.

The main inspiration for Abbott's distinction between what he calls tensed and untensed time comes from the work of philosopher J. M. E. McTaggart (1908). There exist two types of time, according to McTaggart: the continuous flow of time, in the form of the past, the present, and the future; and ordered sequences of time, say the period from 1914 to 1933 in Europe. The untensed or flow-like kind of time is the one that Abbott wants to build processual sociology on. Everything changes, he argues, when we look at social relationships, organizations, and more from the perspective that they are born anew every second.

But being born anew does not mean that the past does not count. This is where historicality and encoding come in. The idea of

encoding is used by Abbott to counter the common practice in sociology to consider people as some kind of tabula rasa the very moment they step into a sociological analysis. Individuals do not only have a history, but that history has become part of them and is present in everything they do. If you lived through the Depression or participated in the Civil Rights Movement, this is now encoded into you; and it will set you apart from others. Many populations that sociologists study consist of people with different encodings; and this will affect the dynamics of what happens.

Abbott illustrates the difference between focusing on outcome and process with two types of studies that Paul Lazarsfeld carried out. In his marketing type of studies, Lazarsfeld focused squarely on the outcome: what were the factors that made X buy a car of brand Y? Abbott contrasts this approach to the one that can be found in *Voting* (1954), a famous election study that Lazarsfeld carried out together with two of his colleagues in Elmira, NY, just before the presidential election in 1948. Here the main concern was not how to explain the final decision of people, that is, how they voted on election day. It was instead on what was going on behind the aggregate figures, on the shifting back and forth of some people while others remained steadfast in their opinions. In Abbott's formulation: "It is the millions of minor motions—the little processes of action and change and aging—that produce the aggregate stability" (p. 169).

Having pointed to a couple of the many highlights in Abbott's work, I also want to add some critical remarks, aimed more at the tradition that Abbott works in than at his project of a processual sociology. In my view, theory needs considerably more distance from methods than the pragmatists are willing to grant it. Most thinking is not even vaguely involved with action or practical problem-solving of the pragmatist kind; and this is something that everyone can convince themselves of by reading *Mrs. Dalloway* or by taking a quick look at what they have been thinking during the last 24 hours. Thinking has an autonomous quality that is biologically and not socially based (e.g., Berwick and Chomsky 2015).

Without granting theory the independence and freedom of movement that it needs, it will be unable to take the kind of bold leaps that move science ahead. Note also that theory needs as much patient work as methods, but it is work of a different kind. Until this type of work has been carried out, there will continue to be a lack of balance between theory and methods in contemporary sociology. There is a well-known saying that for good sociology you need good theory, good methods, and good data. Let us agree that all three are needed—but also that each is granted its own independent space.

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