

# 'FORMAL SOCIOLOGY' IS NOT MULTIDIMENSIONAL: BREAKING THE 'CODE' IN PARSONS' FRAGMENT ON SIMMEL

by Jeffrey C. Alexander

As with any disputation about a sociological 'classic', to engage in an interpretation of Parsons is to talk about the nature of contemporary society. While certainly textual rather than empirical, such generalized discourse is no less important than research programs in the development of sociology (Alexander and Colomy 1992). Textual disputation, in other words, is a primary means of doing sociological theory.

After many years of often extremely distorted interpretation, from friend and foe alike, some first rate studies of Parsons are beginning to appear that are interpretative-theoretical contributions in their own right (Holton and Turner 1986, Robertson and Turner 1991, Wearne 1989, Wenzel 1990). The publication by *Teoria Sociologica* of «George Simmel and Ferdinand Tönnies: Social relationships and the Elements of Action» - the long sought 'lost fragment' from an early draft manuscript of Parsons' *The Structure of Social Action* - presents an opportunity to complement this recent work by laying to rest one of the earlier period's most persistent disputes.

It is well-known that Parsons was not content to legitimate the 'theory of action' he developed in *Structure* on discursive, analytic, or hermeneutic grounds alone. He committed himself also to offering what he described as an 'empirical proof'. He claimed that the theories of the greatest social scientist of the time had all 'converged' on

the same action elements. This ambitious historical claim left a door wide open to Parsons' critics. They had only to prove that there were great theorists other than the ones Parsons discussed whose work did not converge with the analytic elements he laid out<sup>1</sup>. One obvious challenger of classical status was Marx, but he was not of the same generation as the thinkers - Weber, Durkheim, Marshall, and Pareto - whom Parsons had highlighted in his 1937 work. A better candidate was Simmel. He was a great theorist of the same generation, and he was left out. This is where our story begins.

From the 1950s until the present day, critics of Parsonian theory have argued that leaving Simmel out was, in fact, profoundly consequential. His absence from *Structure*, they have argued, cut Parsons off from an important branch of the turn-of-the-century intellectual movement that it was his professed goal to synthesize. Because Parsons did not have Simmel, he could not speak, or at least not speak properly, about a number of vital matters that Simmel had brought to light, about the structural and material aspects of society, about phenomena of conflict, exchange, and hierarchy, about reification, and about interaction as it relates to social structure and social change. Levine (e.g., 1980 [1957], cf., Alexander 1989) is the best-known interpreter to make this claim, but Coser's extremely influential *The Functions of Social Conflict* (1956) rested on similar grounds, as did Bendix's and Wolff's early translations of Simmel's essays, *Conflict and the Web of Group Affiliations* (Simmel 1955). For Coser, Wolff, and Bendix, if not for Levine, Simmel provided a non-Marxist version of the newly conceived 'conflict theory' that was the first challenger to Parsonian thought in the 1950s. Simmelian conflict theory, they believed, could be an alternative to the neo-Marxist conflict theories of Dahrendorf, Lockwood, and Rex.

For more than 30 years the case for the importance of the 'missing Simmel' has been argued hypothetically, in the manner of most such discussions in the history of social thought. Sometimes Parsons' critics argued that Parsons didn't know Simmel; at other times they suggested that he was afraid to speak of him because to do so would have

---

<sup>1</sup> They could, of course, also prove that one of the theorists Parsons had discussed did not actually converge. This, indeed, was the strategy of one of the most mechanistic challenges to Parsons' early work launched by Pope et his colleagues during the 1970s, the goal of which was to 'de-Parsonsize' Weber and Durkheim.

proved his early theory to have been wrong. But something unusual has happened. What Parsons actually thought about Simmel, and came very close to publishing, is now available. Its existence allows the claims about the consequentiality of the 'missing Simmel' to be examined more realistically, if not, of course, to be settled once and for all.

I begin by noting one of the peculiarities of these critical claims. Although they were issued by critics of Parsons' discussion in *Structure*, these critics themselves accepted the empiricist epistemology of convergence that was perhaps that great work's weakest claim (Alexander 1989). In effect, they argued that, if only Simmel had been included, Parsons' data base would have been different. The new data would have changed the results of Parsons' induction, and a new theory would have been the result. This argument follows Parsons' own self-presentation in suggesting that he was conducting an empiricist rather than hermeneutic exercise. It assumes that Parsons did not already have at least the outlines of his 'action theory' well in hand before *Structure* was written. It assumes, too, that 'Simmel' is an object whose theoretical implications are available for observation or interpretation in an unambiguous way.

The publication of this fragment demonstrates that neither of these assumptions is true. Parsons' theory would not have changed if he had included Simmel as an object of his interpretative ambition. For Parsons did not ignore Simmel; he disagreed with him in a fundamental way. This is the reason he excluded Simmel from *Structure*. Parsons could weave a narrative of convergence only if he included theorists whom, he believed, had converged in the right way. This was a matter of belief, which itself rested on interpretation. Indeed, I will suggest toward the end of this essay that, differently interpreted, Simmel could just as easily have been grist for Parsons' convergence mill.

Original theorists write and think in a code they have themselves invented. If one is not familiar with their writing, it can seem like mystifying gibberish. Parsons not only developed his own intricate code but had the lamentable tendency, inherent in systematic thinkers, to camouflage his theoretical tastes behind objective-seeming elements in the code. In this way the code could signal implications and judgments of which he himself was afraid to speak.

Parsons' fragment on Simmel is permeated by this camouflaging and objectifying strategy. Because of it, Parsons appears to use most of his ammunition indicting Simmel on relatively trivial grounds, ignoring the themes in Simmel's theory which should have drawn his best shots. The theoretical tone is evasively neutral. Parsons is hiding behind his code. If we learn its language, however, we can see that the signals Parsons sends out do, in fact, indict Simmel of having committed theoretical errors of the most fundamental kind.

Parsons' criticism of Simmel's formal sociology seems to turn on the abstract, relatively restricted issues of scientific methodology and disciplinary boundary maintenance. He claims that Simmel misunderstands the nature of 'emergentism' in science; that because of this error Simmel is unable to develop an explanatory theory; that this failure in turn reduces formal theory to mere description; and that, for all these reasons, Simmel's theory cannot defend sociology against the other social sciences.

These arguments are formalistic rather than substantive; they are also tendentious. We will see that there are passages where Parsons himself acknowledges the emergent status of Simmel's 'forms', which do provide a new level of causality in an explanatory sense. So constructed, formal theory can hardly be mere description. While Parsons' efforts to legitimate sociology by analogy with natural science practice were sophisticated, moreover, they appear thoroughly anachronistic to us today, as does his effort to build upon this status to defend the distinctive scientific status of the field.

These discourses on science and sociology, then, were not compelling arguments in themselves. They were, however, vital elements in the complex code that Parsons developed in his early work. In this context, they functioned simultaneously to obscure and to signal the more fundamental, substantive, and legitimate reservations that Parsons had about Simmel's formal sociology.

The way in which methodological and theoretical issues, form and content, were guardedly intertwined in the Parsonian code is well illustrated by the phrase that Parsons employed in *Structure* to sum up everything he disliked in his theoretical enemies - 'positivistic utilitarianism'. As the coupling implies, Parsons saw positivism as an integral part of the individualistic and rationalistic approach to action and order he was fighting against. For positivism, Parsons believed, fooled

theorists into accepting appearances without reconstructing them analytically, that is, according to their own prior, theoretical reasons. It was this failure at analytical reconstruction that led people to adopt the rationalistic individualism upon which utilitarianism was based.

Adopting a less mirroring and empiricist view of the relation between observation and theory building, Parsons argued against individualistic social theory that theorists should not be fooled by appearances into believing that 'concrete', or 'empirical', actors were actually individuals in an analytical sense. Empirical individuals must be understood, rather, as social constructions that have emergent properties at the level of contingent action and personality, formed particularly from building blocks provided by the value elements of society. Parsons argued against rationalistic theory on similar grounds. Actions like economic exchange appeared to be thoroughly utilitarian only because theorists looked at them from the outside, in an empiricist way. Seen from a more analytic point of view, every 'unit act' is composed of several different elements, not only the rational ones. Norms, values, means, ends, and effort are all present, in tension with one another and with various kinds of physical and nonphysical environments.

Parsons' aim in making these criticism was ostensibly to construct a more truly scientific, less positivistic version of the human studies, an achievement which would also defend sociology against the imperialism of economics. More deeply, however, it is clear that he utilized these methodological arguments, much as he used historical ones, to build a case against rationalistic, materialist, and individualistic thinking which he opposed on more substantive, presuppositional grounds. In analytical terms, Parsons did not believe that the objective and the subjective, the individual and the collective, were nearly as dichotomized as did the reigning theories of his day, although he acknowledged the presence of powerful social forces that were pushing the empirical referents of these terms farther apart. On normative grounds, moreover, Parsons believed that rationalist, materialist, and individualist theories played an insidious social role, undermining not only social theory but the learning capacities, the intellectual reflexivity, of industrial society itself.

It is clear, in other words, that methodological and disciplinary issues were, ultimately, signifiers rather than signifieds in Parsons'

theoretical code. They were analogically (and sometimes not altogether logically) related to compelling substantive issues and to ultimate values. The terms of the debate between Parsons and his enemies were theoretical social, and ideological. For Parsons, synthetic social theory was not only a means of creating a more integrated sociology but a more integrated society as well.

We must read Parsons' objections to Simmel, then, not only intrinsically, for the information they communicate, but symbolically, in terms of their referents in Parsons' overarching code. When we do so, we will see that Parsons objected to Simmel's methodological assumptions and his approach to theory-building because he believed they were the source of substantive commitments that were similar to the ones Parsons criticized throughout his early work. Indeed, very similar objections (briefly referred to in this fragment) emerged in Parsons' treatment of Weber. For, despite his intensive admiration for the 'other' great German sociologist, Parsons recoiled from the objectified and instrumental elements in Weber's theory of modern society. Parsons traced these problems, not to substantive theoretical commitments or presuppositions, but to a methodological issue, to Weber's use of 'type' rather than 'analytic' concepts in the construction of the explanatory units he employed (see, e.g., Parsons 1947: 22-29, 58-60). He reproached Weber for thinking descriptively rather than analytically, and he argued that Weber's genial historical insights could be saved only by reformulating them in terms of the non-empirical referents, the 'action' variables, that lie beneath the typifications that make up the observational, interactional units of everyday life. Substantively, what Parsons objected to was Weber's conception of modern society as an 'iron cage', but he explained this problem only in formal terms, as the result of Weber's methodological errors, his misunderstanding of theory-building in sociology.

When Parsons first discusses Simmel's work in this fragment, he actually acknowledges that his formal discussions do involve abstraction from 'concretely existent', i.e., merely empirical, phenomena. He goes on to argue, however, that these early discussions are not truly abstract because Simmel begins with classes of 'concrete motives'. This empiricism means that Simmel can come up only with concepts that refer merely to 'classes of concrete acts', which Parsons implicitly criticizes as an approach that reinforces the traditional, dichoto-

mizing disciplinary boundaries between fields like economics, government, sociology, and religion.

Yet we know, and Parsons knew, that this was not, in fact, the ambition of Simmel's formal sociology, which actually intended to avoid disciplinary conflicts by creating sociology as a kind of post-substance, supra-disciplinary method. Yet, when Parsons does come to terms with the actual drift of Simmel's work, he insists on restating his critique in the same coded terms.

Parsons now acknowledges that Simmel's 'social relations', the object of his formal sociology, did in fact indicate emergent properties, 'forms' that seemed to have much in common with the analytical focus he himself was proposing for sociological theory. He moves on to vitiate this recognition, however, by what seems at first to be a most peculiar critique. Parsons accuses Simmel's forms of being «nothing... but the structural aspect of social relationship» (original italics). He then claims that, while emergent properties, structures can be explained only by their parts. Because they do not constitute causal factors in and of themselves, they cannot function as independent variables or provide the basis for 'explanatory theory'. Parsons makes an analogy between Simmel's formal structures and a waterfall, claiming that «no scientist would think of [such] a form as an independent element». Because changes in a structure's form are attributable, not to its own emergent properties, but to changes in its parts, Parsons insists that Simmel's 'forms' are 'epiphenomenal'.

This argument is surely wrong. It is wrong textually because it is contradictory. It goes against the initial recognition of emergentism and the later acknowledgment that social structures are, in fact, emergent properties. The critique is also wrong empirically; as Simmel convincingly demonstrates, formal aspects of social relations do possess structures - certainly size is one - that play an independent causal role in the explanation of social life.

Why does Parsons offer such weak arguments? He does so because they evoke central terms in his broader theoretical code. This broadening is illustrated when Parsons tries to argue that Simmel's structural formalism is not really analytical, but descriptive. «It is true», Parsons acknowledges, «that 'forms of relationship' is not a concrete descriptive category... but it is not in *our* sense an analytical element» (original italics). This is Parsons' problem. He recognizes

the analytical status of Simmel's forms, but he also recognizes that they do not conform to the theoretical categories that Parsons claims an analytical theory implies. When he insists that Simmel's categories are not analytical in 'our' sense, he is introducing a possibility for different kinds of analytic theory which he has never acknowledged before, or since. Indeed, he quickly closes this possibility off by saying that, if Simmel's forms are not descriptive, at least (perhaps because they are not analytic in 'our' sense) they possess a 'descriptive aspect'. This residual category indicates that Parsons is struggling with something that challenges the formalism of his own theoretical code. His problem is that, while Simmel's sociology is analytical in a philosophical sense, it does not reveal the more substantive, presuppositional attributes that Parsons claimed that an anti-empiricist position implied. Simmel emphasized conflict and exchange. Did this mean that an 'antipositivistic utilitarianism' might be possible? Parsons confesses, indeed, that «in spite of the abstraction involved it [Simmel's formal theory] is a mode of abstraction which directly cuts across the line of analysis into elements of action which has been our main concern». Parsons theorized the 'elements of action' in order to overcome individualistic and rationalistic theory. If we understand the larger code, then, we can see that what Parsons is really complaining about here is that Simmel's analytic sociology does not challenge rationalistic and individualistic thinking, at least in the same way as his own.

The submerged substance of this polemic begins to be revealed when Parsons likens Simmel's forms to the structural concepts 'division of labor' and 'exchange' in 'ordinary economic theory'. He argues that these concepts are abstractions, or 'resultants', of smaller parts, or 'interactions'. These formal structures, in other words, must be seen as economic *actions*, which according to Parsons's theory are hybrids of rational *and* nonrational elements. He proceeds to insist, indeed, that because interactions may contain different weightings of the elements of action, processes like the division of labor, exchange, and contractual relationships - principal concepts in Simmel's formal sociology - do not have any consistent empirical shape. They are not, in other words, invariant social forms. As proof, Parsons evokes Durkheim's emphasis on the noncontractual elements of contract. He uses this to chide Simmel for thinking contract, or exchange, could be



analyzed simply on the basis of its form. Once again, he implicitly points to non rational elements: «For there to exist contractual elements in the relations of individuals on a large scale there must exist in the same social systems other elements of a different order not formulated in the conception of contractual relation». When Parsons insists that to think only in terms of contract is to think in terms of 'the ad hoc interests of the contracting parties', he is linking Simmel's formal theory to individualism and rationalism. He argues that there must be an element that lies 'above' such individual interests, and suggest he has established this in his other writings. It is the 'institutional' element, which Parsons identifies in *Structure*, and elsewhere (Parsons 1990 [1934], Alexander 1990) with the normative element of action. What Parsons meant by 'analytic in our sense' is now completely clear. It is the ability to differentiate between the economic elements (means, situation) and the noneconomic elements (ends, norms) of action.

Now that we have cracked the code, we can see exactly in what Parsons' objections to Simmel consist. Simmel's formal sociology must fail, by virtue of its very formality, to clarify whether, and to what degree, such fundamental processes as conflict, exchange, and contract-making are instrumental and inherently conflictual or normatively mediated and possibly integrative. As I will argue below, the substance of Simmel's formal sociology emphasizes normative elements, his choice of forms seems to indicate, in fact, the very opposite, as its impact on contemporary sociological theory seems to suggest. Coser used Simmel to argue that virtually every important social process can be understood as one form of hostile strategy or another. Homans used Simmel to legitimate an exclusive focus on utilitarian exchange and a focus on individual interaction rather than group solidarity or institutions.

These Simmelian approaches, along with conflict and exchange theory in their nonSimmelian modes, suffer from exactly the problems that Parsons surmised. They take the forms for the reality of action, refusing to go beneath the one-sided appearance of conflict or exchange to discover the normative and collective elements beneath. For every conflict is mediated by social integration in a significant way. This is exactly why, as Ekeh (1974) argued two decades ago, social exchange theory has developed another tradition in addition to the in-

dividualistic and rationalist one, beginning with Mauss and continuing through Levi-Strauss. The empirical process of exchange, in other words, can be interpreted in different, theoretically-depended ways. Parsons' ultimate reply to Simmel is that «in principle *all* the elements of action are relevant to the understanding of any particular 'social form'» (original italics). Is it any accident that, in his later writings, Parsons developed his own theory of the 'generalized media of exchange' that exploded the rationalistic notion of simple exchange and elaborated the complexity of extraindividual controls?

At one point in this highly encoded essay Parsons praises Simmel for his 'brilliant' essays, so 'full of suggestion and insight' about «what *purported* to be specific social forms» (my italics)<sup>2</sup>. At another point Parsons suggests that even Simmel was compelled, in these substantive essays, to refer to nonformal elements, particularly to historically-specific factors and motives. It is a shame that Parsons concluded that these Simmel essays «are of relatively little help for our purposes» and failed almost entirely to discuss them, because in fact Parsons was righter than he knew. For in his theories of both exchange and conflict Simmel was compelled, despite the ostensibly formal quality of his theory, to go beyond the utilitarian and individualistic elements that the 'forms' of these processes seemed so clearly to invoke.

For example, although Simmel could classify types of conflicts and communicate their distinctive structures in formal terms, he could not explain how they come to take the different forms they do without referring to the differential impact of historically variable cultural constraints. In such discussions Simmel actually developed an original theory of the mediating role of highly generalized, universalistic cultural elements. He called these 'concepts', and described them as notions like 'person', 'women', 'rights', and 'worker'. Simmel suggests, indeed, that it is the increasing importance of such widely shared and highly general ideas that allows conflict to be integrative and competitive rather than disintegrating and revolutionary. Empirically, Simmel was no doubt overly optimistic about the impact of such cul-

---

<sup>2</sup> 'Purported' is extremely revealing. For Parsons, Simmel's essays could not be about the formalism of social organization and brilliant and illuminating at the same time. They could be positively evaluated only if they avoided formalism, hence only 'purported' to be formalistic.

tural constraints. Nonetheless, he was suggesting, in this line of his thinking, exactly the kind of interpenetration of culture and social system that Parsons' anti-dualistic action theory aimed to provide.

It is important to recall that 'formal sociology' did not exhaust Simmel's intellectual ambition, which included also a proposal for cultural studies. Because it suggested that institutional analysis could proceed without formal attention to historically specific meaning, this split negatively affected subsequent sociological thought. It is possible to argue, nonetheless, that despite his prescriptive claims, Simmel's formal sociology was highly interpenetrated by his 'cultural sociology'. If Parsons had read Simmel more closely and with less scientific baggage of his own, he might have been able to notice this interpenetration. If he had, he would have been able to mount a more imminent and sympathetic criticism. For, in fact, Simmel certainly was as involved as 'the founding fathers' in the convergence that Parsons professed to discover in fin-de-siècle sociology. But Parsons was preoccupied with providing an alternative to the school of 'formal sociology' (Parsons 1979) and he could not see anything in Simmel except the party line.

I began this brief essay with the assertion that to interpret Parsons is also, at the same time, to explore contemporary society. I have suggested that Parsons' struggle with 'Simmel' was an effort to integrate, enrich, and complexify society. At the end of this fragment, Parsons argues that Tönnies' dichotomy of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* represents a prime example of the dichotomizing, 'type-theorizing' for which he has so sharply criticized Simmel. In the published section on Tönnies in *Structure*, Parsons showed how the famous conceptual antinomy undermined the ability of moderns to understand the continuing role of normative integration in modern 'societal' (e.g. *gesellschaftlich*) life. It was this continuity that informed Parsons' theory of professions and modern collegiality, which showed how rational authority could form the reference for non-rational, solidary bonds that allowed modern, anti-authoritarian standards of legitimacy. In the 1960s and 1970s, this line of thought crystallized in Parsons' conception of the 'societal community', arguably his single most important contribution to the macrosociology of contemporary life.

By societal community Parsons referred to an arena of contemporary societies that mediates the extremes of ultimate values and the

practical realities of money, power, individuation, and contingent conflict. It was the realm of solidarity that provided regulative norms which, to the degree they were differentiated from other spheres and from ascriptive ties, could be a liberating, democratizing force in social life<sup>3</sup>. With this theory, Parsons greatly enriched Marshall's rather thin conception of citizenship and initiated a series of studies on ethnic and racial conflict, religious tolerance, and the role of law. It is here, I believe, that we find the practical embodiment of the abstruse, even obfuscatory language that Parsons used to criticize Simmel in the initial stages of his intellectual life.

### *Bibliography*

Jeffrey C. Alexander

1988a, «The Mass News Media in Historical, and Comparative? Perspective», in Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Action and Its Environments*, Columbia UP, New York, pp. 108-152

1988b, «Core Group, Ethnic Outgroup, and Social Differentiation», in *ibid.*, pp. 78-106

1989, «Against Historicism/For Theory: Reply to Levine», *Sociological Theory*, 7, pp. 118-121

1990, «Commentary: Structure, Value, and Action: On Parsons' 'Prolegomena'», *American Sociological Review*, 55, pp. 339-345

---

<sup>3</sup> In their very interesting and highly ambitious recent work, Cohen and Arato (1992) make a compelling argument that Parsons' theory of 'societal community' should be viewed as a singular contribution to the line of thinking that emerged with Hegel's theory of civil society and which has crystallized in the new democratic social movements in Latin America and Eastern Europe today. It can be argued, indeed, that Parsons' theory of societal community provides the only viable take-off point for a sociological theory of civil society today. In recent years neo-functionalists have, in effect, been making precisely this argument, via a loosely connected series of theoretical, historical, and contemporary sociological studies. Mayhew (1992) rediscovers the origins of societal community in English Puritanism and early modern liberalism. Sciulli (1992) redefines societal community in terms of proceduralism, developing a theory of 'societal constitutionalism' that tries to explain and evaluate problem of authoritarianism in public and private life. In my own work, I earlier made use of societal community to develop a neofunctionalist approach to news media (1988a) and ethnic exclusion (1989b). More recently (Alexander 1992, Alexander and Smith forthcoming), I have tried to broaden the concept in order to develop a more cultural, institutional, and agonistic theory of civil society.

- 1992, «Citizen and Enemy as Symbolic Classification: On the Polarizing Discourse of Civil Society», in Marcel Fournier, Michelle Lamont (Eds.), *Where Culture Talks*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago
- Jeffrey C. Alexander, Paul Colomy  
1992, «Traditions and Competition: Preface to a Postpositivist Approach to Knowledge Cumulation», in George Ritzer (Ed.), *Metatheorizing*, Sage, London-Los Angeles, pp. 27-52
- Jeffrey C. Alexander, Phil Smith  
forthcoming, «The Discourse of American Civil Society: A New Proposal for Cultural Studies», *Theory and Society*
- Jean Cohen, Andrew Arato  
1992, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, Beacon Press, Boston
- Lewis Coser  
1956, *The Functions of Social Conflict*, Free Press, New York
- Peter Ekeh  
1974, *Social Exchange Theory: The Two Traditions*, Harvard UP, Cambridge, Mass.
- Robert Holton, Bryan S. Turner  
1986, *Talcott Parsons on Economy and Society*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London
- Donald N. Levine  
1980, «Introduction to the Arno Press Edition», in Donald N. Levine, *Simmel and Parsons*, Arno Press, New York, pp. iii-lxix
- Leon Mayhew  
1992, «Political Rhetoric and the Contemporary Public», in Colomy (ed.), *The Dynamics of Social Systems*, Sage, London-Los Angeles, pp. 190-214
- Talcott Parsons  
1947, «Introduction», in Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Free Press, New York, pp. 3-86  
1979, *Letter to Jeff Alexander*, unpublished manuscript, January 19  
1990 [1934], «Prolegomena to a Theory of Social Institutions», *American Sociological Review*, 55, pp. 319-333
- David Sciulli  
1992, *Theory of Societal Constitutionalism: Foundations of a Non-Marxist-Critical Theory*, Cambridge UP, New York

Roland Robertson, Bryan S. Turner (Eds.)  
1992, *Talcott Parsons: Theorist of Modernity*, Sage, London-Los Angeles

Georg Simmel  
1955, *Conflict and the Web of Group Affiliations*, translated by and introduced by Kurt Wolff and Reinhard Bendix, introduced by Everett Hughes, Free Press, Glencoe, Ill.

Bruce Wearne  
1989, *The Theory and Scholarship of Talcott Parsons to 1951*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge-New York

Harald Wenzel  
1990, *Die Ordnung des Handelns: Talcott Parsons' Theorie des allgemeinen Handlungssystem*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M.