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Daniel Reichman  
*University of Rochester*, [daniel.reichman@rochester.edu](mailto:daniel.reichman@rochester.edu)

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# From the Social Production of the Person to Transnational Capitalism: Parsons, Turner, and Globalization

**Daniel Reichman**

Department of Anthropology  
University of Rochester  
USA

## Introduction

Terence Turner's work serves as a model of anthropological scholarship that is committed to universal theory yet simultaneously grounded in the empirical study of one culture area. His work on indigenous peoples of Central Brazil has made landmark contributions to symbolic anthropology, theories of narrative, the body, kinship, Marxism, media, environmental anthropology, activism, and the study of globalization. Furthermore, his writings have resonated with a readership far beyond those of Latin American studies as defined in the North American academy. This paper focuses on the sometimes hidden influence that Turner's graduate school teacher, Talcott Parsons, had on his thought, and explores how Turner's Brazilian ethnography led to a critical rethinking of Parsons' general theory of action. While Turner's adaptation of Marxian theory of value to anthropology is often read as a practice-oriented alternative to structuralism (see, for example, Graeber 2001, 2013), I argue that it can also be fruitfully understood as a response to general theoretical questions first posed by Parsons.

Turner only partially outlined his vision of Marxian symbolic anthropology in a series of papers over the course of his career, and he never explicitly discussed its connection to Parsonian theory. This paper, I hope, will make the Parsonian connections clear and will help to elaborate some of Turner's important contributions to anthropological theory, particularly to the study of globalization and cultural change, an aspect of Turner's thought which has not attracted a great deal of attention in the literature compared to his earlier work on Kayapo myth, symbol, and social structure based on his Brazilian fieldwork.<sup>1</sup>

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Turner authored a series of papers (1998, 2002, 2003) on globalization, understood as the political, economic, and sociocultural integration of the world's nation-states into a single system connected by transnational capitalism. While this focus emerged from the Kayapo's own participation in global activist networks, new media, and ecofriendly consumerism projects in the 1980s and 1990s, the topic of globalization represented a change in Turner's focus in several important respects. He shifted his attention from bounded synchronic analysis of small-scale societies to the study of transnational political economy and changing class politics in the capitalist core countries. He also began to engage with Marxian political economy at the level of the nation-state and the world-system, an aspect of "conventional" Marxism that was virtually absent from his work until then.

Turner's own intellectual transition from "local" to "global" levels of analysis took place gradually (see his own narration of the early stages of this story in Turner 1991) and the connection between his Brazilian ethnography and his work on globalization is not always apparent. This paper argues that it is necessary to understand Turner's Parsonian roots in order to fully grasp the theoretical and political implications of his scholarship on globalization, and how his "local" Brazilian ethnography and his scholarship on "globalization" both emerge from his attempts to refine Parsonian systems theory through Marxism.

## Parsons Theory of Generalized Media of Interaction

Talcott Parsons was one of Turner's teachers and key influences while he was a graduate student in Harvard's Department of Social Relations, and two of Turner's early publications address Parsons' theory directly.<sup>2</sup> By the mid-1970s, Turner shifted his focus away from Parsonian theory and Parsons became more or less ignored in anthropology. In Marxism,

Turner found answers to Parsonian questions that remain fundamental to anthropology: How should anthropologists theorize the meaning of symbols in society? How can we systematically understand the relationship between symbolic forms and social practice? How do symbols operate as a link between intentional activity of individuals, collective norms, and social reproduction? To put it more succinctly: How do symbols mediate between agency and structure? Early in his career, Turner identified some limitations in Parsons' theories of social action, and Marxism provided the most satisfying resolution to those limitations.

During Turner's doctoral studies in the early 1960s, Talcott Parsons was at the height of his influence in the social sciences, leading Harvard's Department of Social Relations, a program created to integrate the latest research in anthropology, sociology, economics, and psychology to develop a general theory of social action. Clifford Geertz, who was a student in the program about ten years before Turner, describes the "almost millenarian exhilaration that attended the social relations department in the 1950s, and what we who were there then were pleased to call its Project—the construction of 'A Common Language for the Social Sciences'" (Geertz 2001:8). In a sense, the social relations project was the "big data" of its day, an attempt to develop a universal model of human behavior by bringing together the latest research in sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science, and economics. In this spirit, Parsons published an article in *Public Opinion Quarterly* in 1963 devoted to understanding and predicting voting behavior. The ostensible goal of the article, called "On the Concept of Influence," was to identify the factors that shape political opinions in modern society, but Parsons took the opportunity to offer what now seems like an audaciously ambitious theory of the role of "generalized media of social interaction" in human behavior.

"Generalized media of social interaction" are specialized symbolic systems that people employ to "to get results" in social interaction. Drawing on the linguists Jakobson and Halle, Parsons called language the prototypical generalized medium. Language is a shared (and therefore generalized) system of symbols used to "have an effect on the action of others" (Parsons 1963:38). But words are not the only generalized media of interaction. Parsons identifies three other media that shape particular subsystems of society: money, power, and influence. Money is the generalized medium of *economic* interaction which symbolizes utility or economic value. Power is the generalized medium of *political* interaction which symbolizes "effectiveness of collective action." Influence is the generalized medium that symbolizes persuasiveness in *social* interaction (Parsons 1963:48).

A brief overview of Parsons' framework helps us to understand its relations to anthropology. In Parsonian systems theory, economy, politics, culture, and society were all defined as interconnected "subsystems" within the general action system.<sup>3</sup> These subsystems were treated as ideal types that were separate from each other for analytical purposes but, of course, interacted with each other in the real world. Theorizing the nature of the interaction between the subsystems was the ultimate goal of the project, with each social science discipline contributing insights from its subsystem of specialization. Sociologists studied society, anthropologists studied culture, psychologists studied personality, economists studied the economy, and so on. Parsons viewed each subsystem on its own terms, while also developing a complex and, in hindsight, somewhat quixotic theory of how personality, economy, politics, culture, and society interacted to shape the actions of individuals. The study of influence was part of the study of the *social* subsystem, which dealt with patterned relationships, such as formal institutions, hierarchies, and kinship structures. Influence, he argued, was key to the study of voting decisions because it measured the ability of a social actor to persuade others to act without the use or threat of force. Influence was, in this sense, a generalized medium of *social* status as opposed to *political* status, which would be measured by power.<sup>5</sup>

The three media—money, power, and influence—share a generalized and abstract aspect. One can have a little or a lot of influence, money, or power. Like money, influence can be lost or gained, deflated or inflated under certain conditions. Think, for example, of how, as their social reputation as objective authorities is eroded by competing sources of information, the influence of mainstream news journalists has been "deflated" by the internet. While influence lacks the exact forms of measurement that money provides in the economic sphere, it does "measure" some capacity to act in a social system (and now we have quantitative internet-driven metrics of influence, proving Parsons was on the right track). In certain

*kinds* (socially recognized forms) of interaction, individuals refer to these symbolic codes to influence the behavior of others. Buyers persuade sellers to relinquish property by means of money; bosses direct workers to act by implicit or explicit reference to their power; doctors convince patients to trust their advice through influence. It can be a violation of social norms if one uses the wrong symbolic language for a certain kind of interaction, like using currency in a country where it is not legal tender. Bribery, for example, would be a case where money is used to “get results” in a situation where it is not normatively accepted. If a doctor used the threat of force (power) to convince a patient to follow a certain course of treatment, it would be a violation of social norms, using *power* rather than *influence* to get results.

In Parsons’ analogy, the relationship of “influence to information” mirrors that between “money and goods and services.” Each medium symbolically refers to a shared code that allows an actor to influence the behavior of others in a particular kind of social interaction. These are specialized languages, which, in Parsons’ (1963:45) notoriously opaque phrasing, “bridge the gap between the normative and factual aspects of the system in which they operate.” In other words, generalized media are concrete instantiations of the normative social order. They are the link between cultural systems of belief and the choices made by actual people in real life. People try to accumulate money, power, or influence. In doing so, they reproduce the normative social order that creates these specialized “languages” in the first place.

### Influence, Beauty, and Value

Turner argues in his 1968 paper (one of his first publications) that Parsons’ implied social evolutionism prevented the full realization of the potential of the concept of generalized media of social interaction. For Parsons, as societies progressed along a continuum from a simple to complex division of labor, symbolic media became increasingly abstract and generalized, leading to greater “degrees of freedom” in the kind of interactions that they could facilitate (Turner 1968:126). The supposed evolution from primitive gift economies to a money economy (passing through a phase of barter exchange) was, for Parsons, the paradigmatic example of this process. As the uses of money as a medium of exchange became less determined by social status and more open to individual manipulation—therefore more “generalized”—this process would increase the “degrees of freedom” in social interaction by creating an impersonal standard of value. In this theory, liberal individualism was at the top of the developmental pyramid because an impersonal system of value, unmoored from social status, allowed for a greater degree of individual freedom. Drawing on his fieldwork with the Kayapo, Turner interrogated Parsons’ typology of symbolic media by pointing to the existence of symbolic media that are not as generalized or abstract as money, but still shape social interaction in a way that is analogous in every other respect to the function of money in modern economies. How should one theorize these media that also operate as a specialized language that people use to “get results” in social life?<sup>5</sup>

Turner argued that generalized media of interaction function differently in gift economies than they do in modern capitalism. In gift economies, “the emphasis is not on how individual actors can manipulate the medium to ‘get results’ from other actors. It is on the standardization of the relationship between actors according to a collectively imposed pattern” (Turner 1968:126). Generalized media serve to model an ideal relationship between actors and to reinforce normative patterns of behavior by defining the terms of a particular kind of interaction. Symbolic media therefore become reflections of the orienting values that guide social behavior. In Turner’s theory, Kayapo symbols of beauty or completeness function as the conscious goal for individual transactions, and these symbolic media pattern the reproduction of social relationships, hierarchies, and individual identities. Symbolic representations of these values include ritual names, age group categories, and other markers of social status that function like monetary wealth in some ways, but cannot be exchanged or produced except through prescribed and limited forms of ceremonial action. These symbolic systems, objectified in ritual objects, bodily styles, and other symbolic tokens, do more than simply *reflect* gender relationships, age hierarchies, political systems, and family organization. The symbols play an active role in *producing* the social system as a whole, that is, they are

symbols that have a *function* in the total process of social reproduction. Turner's 1969 article in *Natural History* on Kayapo bodily decoration can therefore be seen as an ethnographic follow up to his theoretical gambit against Parsons. The article is an elegant symbolic analysis of how social values are materialized through dress and ornamentation of the individual body, and how styles of dress mark the transformation of the Kayapo as they move through the life cycle. He concludes the article by stating that, "the decoration of the body serves as a symbolic link between the 'inner man' and some of his society's most important values" (Turner 1969:70).

Money, Turner argues, plays a similar role in capitalist societies, by crystallizing buyer/seller as *a specific kind of relationship* out of the "miscellaneous welter" of social life (1968:132). "Generalized media, no matter how specialized in the direction of Gesellschaft and individual manipulation they may be, are always to some extent devices by which society as a whole imposes certain forms and limitations on the transactions in which they are used" (Turner 1968:126). In a key passage, Turner (1968:123) writes,

Generalized media operate as a kind of feedback system, linking the level of individual transactions between acting units and the level of collective or institutional structure by means of a "circulating" system of tokens or symbols which themselves reflect the structure of the transactional system they mediate.

In my opinion, this one complex sentence encapsulates one of the major concerns of Turner's lifelong theoretical project, and it identifies the crux of the issue that he eventually resolved through Marx's theory of value: the dialectical play between code and message, or between symbolic systems and practical activity. The key insight here is that symbols—such as money in capitalism or ritual names and objects for the Kayapo—are objective embodiments of social value that come to be the orienting guides to intentional activity, while simultaneously reproducing the social structures in which they operate. To clarify this move from Parsons to Marx, we can rephrase the Turner quotation cited above, swapping the term "value" for "generalized media." It would read:

*Value* [my rephrasing] operates as a feedback system, linking the level of individual consciousness and the level of collective or institutional structure by means of a "circulating" system of tokens or symbols which themselves reflect the structure of the system they mediate *albeit in alienated form* [italics are my addition].

My reference to "alienation" is crucial. Based on his reading of Marx's *Capital*, Turner took a critical stance toward collective systems of value, arguing that generalized media were alienated, objectified representations of human productive powers, not just reflections of shared systems of value and belief. "Value" was the generalized medium that structured almost all levels of capitalist society, including concepts of space/time, personhood, gender, and the family. It defined and imposed certain limitations on social interaction by defining what was desirable in a way that stunted (or at least diverted) human productive energies. In these terms, Turner's transition from Parsons to Marx is more of a critical revision of Parsonian functionalism than a radical break.

### Generalized Media and Commodity Fetishism

At this point, we must recognize that Turner added a strong critical dimension to Parsonian theory, which tended to take a "value-free" approach. Parsons had no theory of ideology, alienation, or fetishism. (In fact, I once asked Turner if he thought Parsons had any theory of ideology. He grinned and said, "No, but he had an ideological theory!") Parsons' entire approach was based on a model of social equilibrium in which cultural values functioned like glue to hold together political systems and social hierarchies. Authority, hierarchy, and social order were positively valued, as long as they were "functionally integrated" with the norma-

tive value system of the society in which they existed. By providing cultural legitimacy for any existing system of social relationships, cultural values performed a “pattern-maintenance” function that Parsons saw as the sign of a healthy social system. Turner’s Marxist revision viewed “pattern-maintenance” as an ideological defense of the normative social order, and he used Marxist concepts like alienation, fetishism, and ideology to critically reinterpret symbolic systems. If, for Parsons, symbolic systems were the glue that held society together, then for Turner this glue was brushed over deep cracks, holding together a structure which, if fractured or reoriented even a little, could lead to social transformations.

Turner’s use of Marx was not—at its root—focused on capitalism or even political economy *per se*. Turner saw Marx as a protosymbolic anthropologist who was able to systematically demonstrate how symbolic forms—value objectified in money, for example—oriented intentional activity while simultaneously facilitating social reproduction in a feedback loop which, crucially, *misrecognized* the total process through which symbolic forms were produced (see Graeber 2013).

Many readers will wonder, rightly, how Turner’s use of Marx differs from the more well-known use of “fetishism” used by many anthropologists, most famously Michael Taussig in *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*. For Taussig (1980), as with other anthropologists inspired by the Frankfurt School, the fetish was used as a concept to explain how modern capitalism hides or mystifies relationships of inequality behind a symbolic veil of autonomous exchange value. As is true of Turner’s theory, here the fetish also functions as an alienated representation of value that masks relations of inequality and exploitation. Turner’s major criticism of Taussig and Marxist anthropologists more generally was that they used the mode of production concept incorrectly in that they conceptually prioritized economic production and exchange over culture more broadly and, as a result, misconceived the base/superstructure relationship. In so doing, they treated the production of social relationships and cultural values as secondary to the production of the means of subsistence. In contrast, Turner viewed production as “a global process involving the production of social persons, families, and communal relations of cooperation as well as means of subsistence” (1986:101). From this perspective, economic production, the production of the family, symbolic values, and social institutions were all treated as a single integrated system.

For Turner, the total social system was always oriented toward the production of “social persons,” which, in effect, prioritized cultural value systems. If the entire social system was oriented towards the creation of fully developed “social persons” then the values that defined a “social person” in any particular culture were of primary importance, structuring every other aspect of the system. Turner did not therefore see fetishism as something that only afflicts capitalist societies. His entire oeuvre was premised on the idea that, to some degree, all societies rely on alienated symbolic representations to mediate the total process of social production, and the work of symbolic anthropology was to interpret the nature of this relationship in any given social system.<sup>6</sup> While Turner continually asserted that his treatment of production was true to the original ideas of Marx and Engels, we can also see its strong residual affinities with Parsonian systems theory; for Parsons as well as Turner, the *cultural* system provided the ultimate values that coordinated all the other dimensions of social action into a single integrated system. Ultimately Turner came to define as culture as *schema* following developmental psychologists Jean Piaget (Turner 1973). The basic idea of the *schema* metaphor was that cultural values functioned like a blueprint for the production of both the person and collective social institutions.

### The Parsonian Roots of Globalization

Turner’s theory required societies to be viewed as integrated systems. This was possible in a relatively small-scale society like the Kayapo but more difficult to apply to modern nation-states and the interactions between them. However, it is important to recognize that Parsonian systems theory was an importance antecedent to what became known as the study of globalization. The anthropology of globalization (and its predecessor, modernization) emerged from two debates in the 1950s and 1960s. The first concerned the theorization of processes of acculturation and modernization, while the second centered on Parsonian social

action theory. Prior to the 1950s, patterns of sociocultural change were understood through “diffusion” or “culture loss” or they were largely ignored as a thin veneer that overlaid the proper object of anthropological study, namely pre-capitalist cultural traditions. Beginning with the study of folk/urban transitions by people like Robert Redfield and Oscar Lewis, and moving to analysis of acculturation (Redfield, Linton and Herskovits 1936) anthropologists began to theorize the dynamics of change itself. Parsons provided a theoretical model that helped explain the relationship between urbanization, modernization, and changes in beliefs and values. The early work of Clifford Geertz perfectly synthesized these two concerns. His first major publication “Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example” illustrates Parsons’ influence on the study of modernization in the 1950s. Geertz (1957:33–34) writes:

One of the more useful ways—but far from the only one—of distinguishing between culture and social system is to see the former as an ordered system of meaning and of symbols, in terms of which social interaction takes place; and to see the latter as the pattern of social interaction itself. On the one level there is the framework of beliefs, expressive symbols, and values in terms of which individuals define their world, express their feelings, and make their judgments; on the other level there is the ongoing process of interactive behavior, whose persistent form we call social structure. Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes, the actually existing network of social relations.

Citing Parsons at length, Geertz (1957:34) describes the social system as having “the kind of integration one finds in an organism, where all the parts are united in a single causal web; each part is an element in a reverberating causal ring which ‘keeps the system going.’”

In this article, Geertz famously analyzes a Javanese funeral to argue that neither culture and society nor meaning and structure are always integrated or coordinated, particularly during moments of rapid change, when, for example, “traditional” Javanese peasants arrive in small cities and come into contact with the modern state. They carry out their social existence as city dwellers, yet culturally they still inhabit a “traditional” village. This was the first step towards Geertz’ repudiation of systems theory in favor of the more humanistic approach to meaning that characterized his later work. Turner, on the other hand, took the same basic question—the relationship between meaning and social structure—and branched off from Parsons in a completely different direction. Whereas Geertz moved more and more towards an “antisystem” definition of meaning as a contingent, local, historically-produced “web of signification,” Turner’s symbolic anthropology was nothing if not systematic and highly dependent on models that seem mechanistic in comparison to Geertz’ resolute antistructuralism.

As Geertz’ article demonstrates, the twentieth-century study of modernizing societies and cultural change—which I argue we are still dealing with in one way or another—was not originally supposed to help define modernity or capitalism. Quite the opposite. The original goal, derived from Parsons, was to study people in the midst of rapid change in one aspect of the social system—usually the economy during a transition to capitalism—and to then determine *how* that change shaped or was shaped by cultural or symbolic systems. When anthropologists looked at situations where cultural values were being contested, we could better understand how symbolic systems shaped human behavior.

Most contemporary anthropology has followed Geertz’ trajectory in one important respect: the link between macrosocial forces and systems of meaning—in the broadest terms “society and culture”—is asserted or vividly illustrated through ethnographic examples, but it is rarely theorized in the systematic, holistic, and synchronic sense of theory understood by both Parsons and Turner. This tendency is reflected in the style of contemporary ethnographic writing, in which descriptive ethnographic vignettes have become the paradigmatic form used to *illustrate* a connection between social forces and patterns of behavior. (In all of Turner’s writing, I can think of only one or two cases where he used a vignette to illustrate a theoretical argument.) As a result, we now have an incredibly detailed and valuable ethnographic record of, for example, the impact of neoliberalism on people around the world, but

the *process* through which a given social system—like neoliberal capitalism—produces particular forms of social consciousness is not systematically theorized. Contemporary anthropological theory thus tends to move in the opposite direction from that which Parsons or Turner might have wanted. For them, the important issue is not the political economic *system* itself (e.g. neoliberalism), but the *process* by which the collective/institutional aspects of any system come to influence the behavior of individual actors, i.e. the relationship between structure and agency, between *langue* and *parole*. Whereas the Geertzian approach seeks to represent the meanings made by others, the Turner/Parsons approach seeks to understand how meaning itself is made.<sup>7</sup>

### Marxist Political Economy Versus Social Production of the Person

Marxist political economy has provided another way to talk about structure and agency, and it is particularly influential in Latin Americanist anthropology where a certain variant continues to shape the field. The work of Eric Wolf, Sidney Mintz, June Nash, William Roseberry and others drew on Marxist concepts from dependency and world-systems theory, “solidifying the position of historically-oriented political economy within US anthropology” (Edelman and Haugerud 2004:14). In general, this work explored how the worldwide spread of capitalism transformed particular places around the world, particularly the Americas, focusing on how unequal trade relationships between commodity producing societies in the South (or periphery) and commodity consuming countries in the North (or core) shaped (or inhibited) patterns of “development.” In its latter forms, it applied Gramscian concepts of culture and hegemony to theorize the relationships between class formations and culture through time (see, for example, Roseberry 1996). Like Turner’s work, this variant of anthropological Marxism sought to theorize the relation between structure and agency, but here “structure” referred to the history of the global capitalist market and the ways in which the market produced patterns of exploitation in different settings around the world. While both variants of Marxism explored the relationship of cultural forms to the mode of production, Turner (1986) argued that “political economy” tended to define production from the point of view of the capitalist system, rather than prioritizing the production of social persons, relationships, and values as the *primary* driver of human behavior.

In the 1990s, the rising interest in globalization and neoliberalism adapted some of the basic approaches of world-systems theory to a “new” global economy, marked by new trade relationships, social movements, and, of course, “flows” (Appadurai 1996). Some of the structural concepts of Marxist political economy (like core/periphery and base/superstructure) were eschewed in the study of neoliberalism and globalization, yet most ethnographers of globalization are still dialecticians of one sort or another, in that we (I include myself in this category) attempt to trace the relationships between systems and social practice. This is where I believe Turner’s “global” view of social production provides a useful alternative to Marxist political economy.

Whether we use the term “neoliberalism,” “globalization,” “late capitalism,” “post-Fordism,” or just “capitalism,” much of recent anthropology of the Americas deals with the process by which macrolevel systems and microlevel practice are mutually constitutive. The connection between the anthropology of neoliberalism and Parsonian concepts is rarely acknowledged, but I would argue that anthropologists are still swimming in Parsonian waters in our attempts to formulate the relationship between symbolic systems and social structure, particularly during moments of rapid change, when the persistence of cultural values is contested. For example, in my own work (Reichman 2011) I analyzed the impact of migration on a rural Honduran community, describing how changes in the economy wrought by migration and new forms of agriculture led to changing value systems, religious movements, kinship systems, and political beliefs. This was very much a project with Parsonian roots, though it was also shaped by Appadurai-inspired debates about globalization and deterritorialized cultural movements, such as global migration, diasporic movements, and transnational consumerism. One of the contradictions of the anthropology of globalization was that it was premised on the existence of a single global system, yet the theory of “flows” and movements, derived from Appadurai (1996) and George Marcus (1998) was antistructural. If you

were looking for a more systematic model, you could turn to abstractions like “neoliberalism” or “post-Fordism,” but these categories often merely recast an economic “base/superstructure” relationship into a new idiom and did not fully theorize the production of social consciousness or meaning, except as a product of the political economic system treated as an external force.

Turner’s two articles on globalization (2002 and 2003) are both attempts to reformulate the changing relationship between the global market, the nation-state, and social consciousness through his theory of the social production of the person.<sup>8</sup> The basic claim is that since the 1970s, the role of the nation-state changed in the so-called advanced capitalist countries, mainly Europe and North America. The class compromise that had been achieved between labor and capital began to fray as states saw their principal role as mediating between the nation and global financial markets, which now existed beyond the regulatory control of any state or international organization. This is a well-known story of the roots of neoliberalism. As states began to weaken their ideological commitments to national well-being in the interest of global competitiveness, the ideological bond between nation and state, which Turner calls the principle of popular sovereignty, became thin. Nation and state were dehyphenated, and national progress as an ideological project lost its force or became in Turner’s words “an idiom of last resort for social losers and marginal groups to make claims upon the state for amelioration of their marginal or otherwise disadvantaged situations” (Turner 2002:64). New forms of social identity emerged in which individual differences based on race, gender, language, ethnicity, and lifestyle became the anchoring concepts of personal identity. Heterogeneity came to be a structuring principle or *schema* for the socialization of individuals. Particularity became a universal value. In the economic sphere, this led to neoliberalism; in the cultural sphere, this led to postmodernism. In the political sphere, this led to the rise of identity politics and issue oriented nonstate networks.

Whereas the modern nation-state sought to transform difference into similarity, the postmodern nation-state valued difference as an end in itself. Turner deepens our understanding of the genesis of this shift by tracing various forms of identity politics, new social movements, multiculturalism, and socially conscious consumerism back to changes in class politics that began to emerge in the 1970s. To this end he uses the Bakhtinian concept of the chronotope, a socially produced category of space and time that functions as a structuring principle or schema. Turner describes the chronotope of the modern nation-state as “diachronic assimilationism” through which the production of similarity out of difference becomes the orienting goal of the state. Under postmodernity, he argues, the chronotope of “synchronic pluralism” has become hegemonic, and diachronic notions of transformation, such as progress or modernization, have lost their ideological force. Turner (2002:70) continues,

The vision of society as a pluralism of equal differences is a static vision, with no room for the directed assimilation or transformation of any identity, collective or individual, into any other. “Synchronic pluralism” thus replaces the diachronic assimilationism (i.e., “progress”) of the modern nation-state as the new form of social consciousness—the chronotope, to use Bakhtin’s apt expression, of consumerism and the classes that primarily construct their social identities through it. Space as well as time takes on new forms and meanings. In the synchronic pluralist society of equal differences, there can be no “center,” nor any consequential boundary or periphery, in the sense of a point where difference begins to be devalued as alien or “underdeveloped.” Where all identities and cultural styles are equally valid and synchronically self-existing, there can be no “deeper” systemic dynamics or infrastructure, no underlying causes or constraints, but only a surface pattern of contrasting signs of difference. Synchrony as “pluralism” does not imply a motionless world of fixed spatial enclaves, but rather a world of aleatory movements and freely circulating discourses, where “flows” are reversible. Lacking a constant temporal direction, they do not become structurally consequential changes.

In this analysis, we see how Turner's Marxism can be scaled up to a complex society. Turner views the nation-state as the social institution that mediates social production, which he defined as "production in the widest human sense of the term, including the production of personal identity and empowerment for the realization of cultural values, as well as the production of material commodities and means of subsistence" (Turner 2002:78). In functional terms, the nation-state here takes the place of the Kayapo men's house as a collective institution that structures the transformation of individuals into particular kinds of social beings across a particular chronotope or spatiotemporal frame.

Without question, Turner's analysis of globalization takes place at a very high level of generality and there is a need to ethnographically substantiate some of his claims. Yet this theory remains one of the more ambitious anthropological attempts to systematically interpret political economic structures and systems of meaning under conditions of globalization. Turner's concept of the social production of the person provides a useful vocabulary to analyze systemic relationships without prioritizing the capitalist market, on the one hand, or aleatory cultural systems on the other. In short, it provides a way to think about the relationship between changing ways of life and changing ways of understanding and symbolically representing the world. The systematic approach in which all levels of social structure are directed toward a broad concept of "production" has clear Parsonian roots. Though it may be unrecognizable and out of fashion in a world that seems difficult to being treated as a coherent system, the Parsonian model of society and culture still exerts some influence.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Many of the ideas in this article emerged from discussions that I had with Turner while I completed my Ph.D. under his supervision at Cornell University between 2000 and 2006.

<sup>2</sup> See Turner 1968 on generalized media of social interaction and Turner 1976 on kinship and the family.

<sup>3</sup> Parsons used his own difficult terminology to describe his system. The economy can be understood as the "adaptive" subsystem; politics as the "goal attainment" subsystem; social relationships as "integrative"; and culture as the "latent" or "pattern-maintenance" subsystem.

<sup>4</sup> In an article that appears directly after Turner's 1968 paper in the same issue of *Sociological Inquiry*, Parsons added "commitment" as a fourth generalized medium that applies to the cultural subsystem. "Commitment" was a generalized measure of one's adherence to a particular cultural value system. The 1968 article seems like an indirect response to Turner's challenge (described in this article's following section), yet Turner's paper is mentioned only in passing at the beginning of Parsons' article.

<sup>5</sup> While answering this question, he developed another more nuanced critique to counter what he called the "individualistic emphasis" of Parsons' theory (Turner 1968:126).

<sup>6</sup> Turner viewed the Baining of New Britain, studied by Jane Fajans (1997) among others, as the least alienated society on Earth, because, according to Fajans, their value system was consciously oriented towards the production the social person—hence the title of her ethnography *They Make Themselves*.

<sup>7</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for this succinct explanation.

<sup>8</sup> These two publications are essentially the same and I will treat them as such.

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