

Neither Vertical Nor Horizontal A Theory of Political Organization

Our theoretical framework

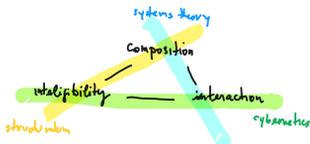
Category theory as grammar for tekology



constraints
action space

Action-Constraint-Reduction Diagrams

Organizational trinitarianism



Atomic logic

Modifications, facts, singularities

Evental traces and co-limits

Multi-layered logics

Political body

Complex political interiority

Epistemic mediations and immanent modeling

Logic of struggles and the interior/boundary/environment distinctions

Poset of regional synthetic traces

Decision points

Organs

Organs that form the largest upper-bounds still smaller than evental traces

Trade-off between synthetic power of organ and its novel atomic composition

Relation between mode A and mode B

A region of a political body conceived as a concrete point of view on the world

Synthesis of parameter spaces across multiple organs

Comb between system and environment

Mapping as error measure between actions and constraints

Negations in multilayered logics: A, B and C

Strategies are not determined on parameter spaces, but on parameter spaces filtered by known constraints (Optics)

Propagation of political constraints onto already existing social mediations

Compatibility, order, synthesis - on the movement as a whole

Compatibility, order, synthesis - on organs of the political body

B = 0

Organizational trinitarianism

54 propositions from the book:

- The **organizational point of view** is not in itself political, it is the point of view which departs from the assumption that "nothing is completely disorganized" (Bogdanov)
- The organizational point of view is neither that of relations (too vague) nor that of connections (too stable), but the one where each thing is both **considered as an aggregate of elements and as itself an element** of higher-order aggregates. Scale-relativity is therefore built into the organizational point of view.
- "**Potestas**" (power over) can be defined as the set of social constraints/ actions that act towards the reproduction of the current world, i.e., so that people remain elements of already existing aggregates or are themselves aggregates of elements that are already recognized as existing.
- "**Potentia**" (power to) can be defined as the set of social actions /constraints that act towards the production of new aggregates that can do things that their elements cannot and the production of new elements that do not belong to already existing aggregates.
- The production of "potentia" does entail a scale-shift or expansion of less powerful elements into more powerful aggregates, but it does not necessarily entail the production of a unified collective: the large-scale description of this system will therefore include a **gradient of more or less dispersed or centralized organizations**.
- The **ecological point of view** is the one that starts from the network of organizations that compose this gradient and the different effects its distributed action can produce, depending on its dynamic structure.
- Climate crisis** is the concrete historical challenge that justifies the need to think in accordance to 1. to 6.
- The nature of complex systems further justifies that, given the conditions for irreversible global change to be produced, we cannot ascribe looser aggregate ties to one particular scale and strong collective actions to another.
- Both "potestas" and "potentia" are materially conditioned, that is, they are costs and capacities determined by the use of some available energy. The ecological point of view is therefore one which considers the **force organizations can produce under condition of some shared resources**.
- There is only a **functional distinction between "potestas" and "potentia"**, and an organizational process that increases our capacity to act can, in a second moment, become one that arrests or contains this capacity.
- The **question of political organization** is, therefore, both the question of how to collectively increase our capacity to act and the question of how to prevent this collective effort from becoming an autonomous power that acts against our interests.
- "Verticalists" tend to accept greater autonomy of the organization over the organized for the sake of a more unified acting capacity, while "horizontalists" tend to accept greater dispersion of the organized within the organization to avoid the inversion of "potentia" into "potestas". But from the ecological point of view, **these two extremes are part of the same space of affordances**.
- If the organizational point of view treats things simultaneously as both aggregates and elements, the "**transindividual**" perspective adds the dynamic whereby collectives are seen as an effect of the relations between individuals, but individuals are also the product of the relations themselves.
- The process through which a new relation is established via individuals and collectives is that of **imitation**, when the relation is further propagated, or of **invention**, when a bifurcation allows for it to split and a new relation to be produced.
- The function of initiating some behavior is called a **leadership function** - it does not entail, however, that such function is solidified into a leadership position, itself the effect of a new capacity to act becoming a new restriction of that capacity.
- Leadership functions therefore unify collective action, by inventing relations that, through imitation, give a dynamic shape to organizations - but all **unifications are partial**, both because they take place at a particular scale, and not at all of them, and because they take place in the context of a network of more or less unified aggregates.
- The **crisis of the idea of revolution** in our times concern the necessity to think large-scale system transformation without the following three assumptions: (i) that history tends towards some determinate direction (historical **teleology**), (ii) that a political subject will be spontaneously generated out of objective social conditions (historical **transitivity**) and (iii) that systemic change implies a clear cut, after which the system is remodeled after pre-established plans (historical **hylomorphism**).
- Against these three assumptions, we must (i) conceive of history as **contingent** mixture of tendencies, (ii) conceive of political subjects as something which must be **composed**, and (iii) conceive of novel forms as the emergent outcome of **complex social processes**.
- The concept of "**self-organization**" is not capable of moving beyond the assumptions of 17, rather giving a 'positive' spin to these three assumptions when they emerge from within the relative boundary set on the limits of the system treated as a self-organizing one.
- The only possible self-organizing system (a system that can be analysed without its environment) is the universe as a whole.
- Even though all self-organized systems can be described as hetero-organized, **there is still different gradations of reciprocity between organized and organizing systems**, from mutual conditioning to very asymmetric determinations.
- The **distinction between organized and self-organized ultimately hinges on the position of the observer** and whether we adopt the point of view from inside the process itself.
- An organizational way to distinguish between vertical and horizontal dynamics is by adopting the **point of view of network formation** and describing this difference in terms of degrees of centrality of nodes, taken as a measure of a node's capacity to act on a certain part of this network.
- What we might call "**the movement**" is ultimately a non-totalizable network of networks, connecting forms of action, forms of organization, different degrees of engagement with these, into a distributed ecology.
- From the ecological point of view, we can define the method of "**diversity of tactics**" and highlight some of its traits: (i) **environmental reshaping** - when two disconnected organizations influence one another by influencing the same environment, (ii) **functional differentiation** - when political evaluations of political distinguish the effects of actions rather than the identity of actors, (iii) **resource sharing** - when an organization treats its own wealth as a partial product of the ecology itself, inviting non-competitive behaviour, (iv) **cooperative games** - when organizations treat political space as not necessarily a zero-sum game, allowing for mutually beneficial results, (v) **emergent agency** - when organizations realize that no intended result can be traced back to the action of one sole part of the organizational ecology.
- These are, first of all, **descriptive** traits of really existing ecologies, but also possible **prescriptions** for a tactical method that takes into consideration the really existing network of organizations when tackling political goals. Thinking ecologically increases the likelihood of positive reinforcement in organizational ecologies.
- From the point of view of the diversity of tactics, competition between alternatives can be seen as a **relative conflict between forces rather than as an absolute opposition** - rather than evaluating solutions in clear cut terms, we can evaluate them as negotiations that increase or decrease each part's capacity to act.
- Self-organization is only globally possible (as a perspective and as a capacity) while **self-management** is only locally possible (where stable unities can be momentarily produced).
- An organization in which the leadership function is not stabilized into one position, but varies amongst its parts, is said to present **distributed leadership**.
- The function of leading - of introducing some modulation of collective behavior that can propagate across a network - is akin to initiating a process of **diffusion**. It is common and takes place all the time - its stabilization as a personal position is what is rare.
- The **more complex a task or transformation, the more complex the work through which a diffusion process can take place** and propagate itself at its aggregate scale. A leading network-event might be amply propagated but never produce scalar effects or achieve aggregate effects at the expense of the means to propagate itself.
- The more durable and complex an initiative is, the greater the chance that organizational cores will form - that is, organizational clusters that are in position to further propagate and reinforce certain political behaviours beyond the initial force of eventual leadership-events. **Organizational cores** are forms in which diffusions are established, concentrating the collective capacity to act in certain directions.
- Organizational cores can acquire **different degrees of stability**, from one-off events to consolidated institutional authority.
- Organizational cores that serve the additional function of experimentally determining a way to further a movement's direction will be said to momentarily fulfill a **vanguard function**.
- The **legitimacy** of a functional vanguard is defined by its recognition as such by other parts of the system.
- A possible mechanism, called **diffusion control**, to prevent functional vanguards from becoming established authorities is the trade-off between the size and plasticity of organizational cores that allows them to act as vanguards and the size and structure which might guarantee their capacity to control the movement.
- A more or less stable set of organizational cores subjected to diffuse control constitute a **platform**, in that this complex collaborative space conditions but does not determines political results.
- The objectives, protocols and resources that constitute, through organizing cores, a given platform offer to people the possibility of different degrees and forms of political participation, with different levels of engagement. **A platform induces, rather than produces, an effect, by establishing a certain constraint or deviation-amplitude** within which actions still lead to the same outcome.
- Platforms allow for actions to imitate other actions, rather than actors imitate actors** - as in organize cores. This transformation produces a tension between the original organizing cores and the actors engaged in the subsequent replication stage.
- Leadership-initiatives** are not ones that offer a directive to a movement, but rather ones that help a movement question its own collective will, prompting - rather than enforcing - a strategic vision.
- Strategies** are not theories of change, but assessments of where to go from the standpoint of where we are, with the available resources.
- Failures** are only informative when strategies are situated, revealing new constraints and impasses.
- We can distinguish **three basic logics of change**: ruptural, interstitial and symbiotic. **Strategic pluralism** is the point of view that, departing from our concrete resources and position, asks which combination of these logics can take us where we want to go.
- Strategic goals** increase in direct proportion to the force that one can yield to test them - therefore, the complexity and reach of organizing cores conditions the effective scope of strategic imagination.
- The production of long-tail effects of organizing cores on non-activists is called **base-building**. Base-building potential is therefore conditioned on the available capacity of organized social life to perpetuate political behaviours and effects.
- The concatenation of different steps and sequences conducive to a systemic objective is called the **directionality** of a movement.
- Diversity of strategies** does not imply that different political movements will naturally tend towards some positive aggregate direction, but rather that every strategy must have some meta-strategy of how to incorporate other organizations and their own logics into one's own process, making everyone responsible for constructing the ecology's direction.
- There can be parts of an ecology which are concerned with connecting other organizations, these can be called **connective parties**. Connective parties are however partial connectors and do not stand for the organizational ecology itself, lest they become ineffective (having subsumed within themselves what they sought to externally connect).
- The problem of how new behaviours propagate by latching onto already existing constraints is called the **problem of fitness** - on one extreme, we have absolutely new behaviours, in total discontinuity with existing structures, incapable of latching onto reality, and, on another, we have absolutely established forms, in total continuity with social reality, incapable of passing on new constraints.
- The problem of fitness is ultimately **equivalent to the issue of the leadership-function** and what, under specific conditions, counts as an effective network-event.
- The property of some signal to be received by a given system as information, rather than noise, is called "**hacceity**" (Simondon) and it concerns range of tension between signals too distinct from a system's structure to count as information and signals too similar from this structure to count as new information.
- The act of finding a direction to a movement that works **within the fitness range of an ecology** - that is the function of a vanguard.
- We call **practice** the domain in which informational tension - the range within which fitness can be achieved - is experimentally verifiable.
- Radicality** is a relational concept, defined in the context of a concrete situation - a concrete range of informational tension - as the direction given by the smallest upper-bound of new information that remains within the range of propagatable differences.

Questions:

Q1: The ecological point of view seems more 'situated' than the organizational one - could we say it stands to the latter as second-order cybernetics stands to first-order one? How do we distinguish the ecological point of view from an economic one, broadly construed?

Q2: How do you see the relation between ecology as the logic of large living systems and ecology as a political logic - are these the same? is it implies that, ultimately, thinking political organizations ecologically should extend towards thinking ecology politically? (asked)

Q3: The difference between potentia and potestas is relative and functional, but is it scalar as well? Can something that has power-over in one scale allow for power-to in another? At stake here is the possibility that an immediate experience of restriction conditions a mediated effect of increased freedom (which nevertheless we do not immediately experience as such)

Q4: Scale-relativity seems to imply a discontinuity between cumulative hierarchies, such that the transindividual dynamic of back-and-forth between collectives and individuals can be broken and the individuals seen from their own perspective and seen from the perspective of collectives might acquire contradictory properties.

Q5: Second-order cybernetics studies 'observing systems', but it does not seem to deal with what constitutes an observer - Simondon's theory of informational tension goes in this direction (asking what constitutes information for a given observer), but the question of "what counts as a point of view" seems to be open (unless its ultimate answer is always "an individual").

Q6: It is clear that part of what makes a robust prescriptive model is that it also capable of describing reality. But is the model of political ecology also a model of political forms more generally (are institutions, parties, companies, etc. cases of these concepts?) or does it describe only the new concrete political processes happening today?

Q7: It seems that rather than an opposition between two paradigms, the distinction between "force" and "form" should be rather subsumed under a single one: clear-cut formal oppositions tend to appear as such from a certain distance, while from close by we might see the real opposition of forces - just as forces themselves, when seen from even closer, reveal formal properties and constraints, etc.

Q8: Though the project of a political ecology seems to highlight the possibility of resource sharing, mutually beneficial efforts, etc, how do we understand antagonisms within the Left, not only as productive tensions, but also the cases of veritable fagocitation of an ecosystem by some part of it, like a more dominant party - it seems that, without a reference to a broader environment, we cannot determine if this type of process is sometimes useful or not.

Q9: Two arguments seemed to be mixed together in the discussion of how to limit the solidification of vanguards: one, referring to Clastres, connects legitimacy and a certain scale-threshold (to abdicate growth is to remain legitimate), and another referring to effective capacities (to abdicate growth is to remain capable of functioning as a vanguard) - are these the same? Furthermore, these seem to be ethical directives (suggestions for action when vanguards are becoming too stable) than possible constraints (mechanisms that might block this growth). (asked)

Q10: Platforms seems to be model a sort of minimal structure for political transition, since a platform starts to invert the logic of systems and environments (ecologies become spaces that constrain new systems).

Q11: Perhaps a useful distinction can be made between defeat and failure? Defeat being uninformative - you lose the battle and also lose at the cognitive level - while failures imply some gain might be had at least in selecting new future paths.

Q12: The theory of informational tension helps us to ask under which condition is a signal information - but it treats this in quantitative sense (a range between too much and too little) - Isn't there a qualitative sense as well which distinguishes signals from social information?

