

## Beyond the Manifesto: Mustafa Emirbayer and Relational Sociology

*Lily Liang and Sida Liu*

Mustafa Emirbayer (1997) penned his “Manifesto for a Relational Sociology” (hereinafter “the Manifesto”) as fighting words against substantial perspectives “that failed to think in dialogical or field-theoretic terms” (Emirbayer 2013: 209). In this groundbreaking essay, he offered the ceaselessly changing “transaction” between dynamic actors, entities, or processes as the proper unit of analysis for sociological research, or what he termed “relational sociology.” Emirbayer’s early relational theorizing was deeply influenced by American pragmatism, especially John Dewey’s (1958 [1925], 1966 [1916]) work on human experience and action. Since writing the Manifesto, Emirbayer also incorporated Pierre Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) into his relational approach. Since the early 2000s, he has made persistent efforts to compare Bourdieu and various aspects of pragmatism and call

---

Lily Liang is a PhD candidate in sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison; Sida Liu is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Toronto and Faculty Fellow at the American Bar Foundation. The authors thank François Dépelteau, Chad Goldberg, and Erik Schneiderhan for their helpful comments on earlier drafts. Please direct correspondence to Lily Liang, Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 8128 William H. Sewell Social Sciences Building, 1180 Observatory Drive, Madison, WI 53706, U.S.A.; E-mail: lliang@ssc.wisc.edu or Sida Liu, Department of Sociology, University of Toronto, 725 Spadina Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2J4, Canada; E-mail: sd.liu@utoronto.ca.

L. Liang (✉)  
University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI, USA

S. Liu  
University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada

for their rapprochement in contemporary social theory (e.g., Emirbayer and Goldberg 2005; Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012; Emirbayer and Desmond 2015; Liu and Emirbayer 2016).

In this chapter, we examine how the creative exchange between Dewey and Bourdieu that Emirbayer mines in his writings has enabled him to effectively problematize substantialist assumptions that continue to lurk in our sociological inquiry. First, we consider the theoretical and practical implications in adopting a trans-actional approach to sociology as it is outlined in the Manifesto. Next, we elaborate how the sustained Dewey-Bourdieu dialogue found in Emirbayer's later writings solidifies his vision for a pragmatism-influenced relational sociology. Last, we discuss Emirbayer and Desmond's research agenda for studying race and the racial order in America as a prototype of Emirbayerian relational sociology in practice. As Emirbayer's contribution to sociological theory is an ongoing project, we do not intend to make any premature assessment on its efficacy in this chapter. Instead, we focus on how his work develops over time and how it spans across and integrates the insights of other social theorists.

## 1 RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY: A TRANS-ACTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

After completing his PhD at Harvard and a postdoctoral fellowship at Berkeley, Emirbayer arrived at the New School for Social Research as an assistant professor in 1991, when "the New York area ... was a rich hub of conversation that contributed to a reformulation of the link between networks, culture, and social interaction ... [that] helps to mediate (if not resolve) the tension between structure and agency" (Mische 2011: 84). At the New School, Charles Tilly was rethinking the "cultural processes of identity formation, storytelling, and boundary construction ... in dynamic, relational terms" (ibid.: 83). Uptown at Columbia, Harrison White was grappling with the "link between temporality, language, and social relations" in network analysis (ibid.: 82) and organized a series of mini-conferences around these themes. Emirbayer's participation in these mini-conferences inspired him to write a programmatic statement on why he believed sociology needed a "relational turn." The Manifesto became a rallying cry for a relational approach in sociology.

Emirbayer (1997: 281) opened the Manifesto with a divide that he believed confronts sociologists today: they study the social world as made up either of static "things" or of "dynamic, unfolding relations." Based on this fundamental distinction between substantialist and relational thinking, he proceeded to develop a "trans-actional" perspective in contradistinction to the "self-actional" and "inter-actional" perspectives. Emirbayer argued that both varieties of substantialist thinking assume that social entities come preformed into the world and, as such, substances are not affected by the processes and changes that they effect. The perspective of self-action conceives action taking place *within* preformed entities. "The relational matrices within which substances act provide ... no more than empty media for their self-generating, self-moving activity" (ibid.: 283). The perspective of inter-action conceives action taking place

*among* substances. “[A]ll of the relevant action takes place *among* them—they provide merely the empty settings within which causation occurs—rather than being generated *by* them” (ibid.: 286; original emphasis).

In contrast to these two perspectives, the perspective of trans-action conceives action taking place where relations among the entities and among their elements move “within fields of mutual determination and flux” (ibid.: 288). A transactional perspective does not maintain a sharp separation between things of action (i.e., self-action) or between elements of action (i.e., inter-action). Rather, it treats dynamic relations between actors, entities, or processes as the proper object of sociological inquiry. Some relational sociologists misinterpret Emirbayer’s trans-actional approach as one that “reduces the category of relation to a mere transaction” (Donati 2011: 10) and “denied the emergent character of social relations” (Donati and Archer 2015: 20), but this misinterpretation is largely based on a plain-text reading of the word “transactional” in the economic sense. In fact, Emirbayer drew his “transactional” concept from Dewey and Bentley (1949: 137), “transaction assumes no pre-knowledge of either organism or environment alone as adequate ... but requires their primary acceptance in common system, with full freedom reserved for their developing examination.” Or, as Dépelteau (2008: 65) put it, “The principle of trans-action is founded on the idea that the production of the social world happens through social relations and in a physical environment.” Trans-action implies precisely an emergent ontology in which social entities are not preformed substances, but situated “within fields of mutual determination and flux” (Emirbayer 1997: 288).

Emirbayer’s call for sociologists to focus on relations that transcend individual actors is partly Durkheimian (Emirbayer 1996), but it is more deeply influenced by pragmatist philosophy (Dewey 1958 [1925], 1966 [1916], 2002 [1922]; Dewey and Bentley 1949; Joas 1993, 1996). Drawing on pragmatist insights concerning the creativity of human action and the temporality of human experience, he maintained that “individual persons, whether strategic or norm following, are inseparable from the transactional contexts within which they are embedded” (Emirbayer 1997: 287). The ends and means of their actions are not prescribed but are problematized, deliberated, and carried out within the relational and temporal contexts in which they are situated. Actors can transform themselves and the social structures in which they are embedded when they reconstruct the contexts of their relations to those structures.

To understand Emirbayer’s early research program for a relational sociology that foregrounds the relationality and temporality of social action, we consider the Manifesto in conjunction with two articles that he co-authored with Jeff Goodwin on network analysis (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994) and with Ann Mische on agency (Emirbayer and Mische 1998), both of which were published in the same period. This trinity of work nicely illustrates how Emirbayer’s theoretical agenda reworks the relationship among structure, culture, and agency.

Emirbayer (1997: 298) emphasized that all social action unfolds in “three transpersonal, relational contexts”: social structure, culture, and social psychology. He conceived actors as embedded in overlapping relational “environments” of

social and cultural formation, or what he called “the temporal-relational contexts of action” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). Social and cultural relations so thoroughly interpenetrate and mutually condition that, to paraphrase Charles Tilly, culture constitutes the “very ‘sinews’ of social reality” (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994: 1438). The “sheer multiplicity of structures” in which actors are embedded makes human agency tenable: “Not only is autonomy linked to location within overlapping and intersecting networks of social ties ... but it is also made possible by actors’ location among a multiplicity of cultural structures” (ibid.: 1444–1445). The relationality of structure, culture, and agency in conditioning and contextualizing social action “guarantees that empirical social action will never be completely determined or structured. On the other hand, there is no hypothetical moment in which agency actually gets ‘free’ of structure” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 1004). Meanwhile, Emirbayer (1997: 298) argued that the mutual constitution among structure, culture, and agency should not prevent us from investigating each of these temporal-relational contexts of social action on its own terms, for each context “operates according to its own partially autonomous logic, intersecting with the others in varied and interesting ways.”

In terms of social structure, Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994) saw a promising approach in network analysis for moving the sociological enterprise beyond the divide between structure and agency. Network models “transform a merely metaphorical understanding of the embeddedness of actors in networks of social relationships into a more precise and usable tool for social analysis” (ibid.: 1446). Specifically, the “anticategorical imperative” of network analysis “rejects all attempts to explain human behavior or social processes solely in terms of the categorical attributes of actors, whether individual or collective” (ibid.: 1414). Instead, network models focus on “how resources, goods, and even positions flow through particular figurations of social ties” (Emirbayer 1997: 298). They explain changes in actions and processes over time by directing attention to the patterns of relations that link social actors in the overall social structure. When social structures are reconfigured from preformed, static substances to patterned relations among actors within a network of ties, concepts such as power are also transformed from “an entity or a possession” (ibid.: 291) to a relationship between actors in different positions of a network. In Tilly’s words that Emirbayer (1997: 292) quoted, “bonds, and not essences, provide the bases of durable inequality.”

Nevertheless, Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994: 1436) maintained that network analysts have gained insights on the relationality of social structures at the expense of neglecting “the potential causal significance of symbolic and discursive formations” in reproducing or transforming social action and relations. “[C]ultural discourses, narratives, and idioms” (ibid.: 1438) have an autonomous inner logic of their own. Yet, network analysis as a relational approach “has neglected the cultural and symbolic moments in the very determination of social action” (ibid.: 1446). Cultural structures can constrain actors by making certain courses of action unthinkable. They can also enable actors “by ordering their understandings of the social world and of themselves, by

constructing their identities, goals, and aspirations, and by rendering certain issues significant or salient and others not" (ibid.: 1441). Emirbayer (1997) made the case for using relational methodologies to study meaning structures that maintain durable inequality by reifying social categories. Cultural meaning is what makes social categories appear "real" and taken-for-granted; classification struggle is "one of the most important dimensions of social conflict" (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994: 1441). The trans-actional perspective challenges the "reified nature of all categories" by showing how totalizing identities "are in fact often multidimensional and contradictory"; and how supposedly autonomous categories are in effect "embedded in complex relational networks that are both intersubjective and public" (Emirbayer 1997: 309, 300).

Furthermore, actors exercise agency when they reconstruct the relational contexts in which they are embedded (Emirbayer 1997: 309–310). Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 970) argued that actors can use their "habit, imagination, and judgment" to reproduce or transform their relationship to the overlapping social and cultural environments in which they are situated. They drew on Mead's insights into the human experience of temporality and conceived agency as "a temporally embedded process of social engagement" (ibid.: 962). Emirbayer and Mische claimed that, "as actors respond to changing environments, they must continually reconstruct their view of the past in an attempt to understand the causal conditioning of the emergent present, while using this understanding to control and shape their responses in the arising future" (ibid.: 968–969). In analytically disaggregating the concept of agency into three agentic dimensions (i.e., iterational, projective, and practical-evaluative) that loosely correspond with the progression of time, they advanced that "the ways in which people understand their own relationship to the past, future, and present make a difference to their actions" (ibid.: 973). For instance, actors use their "past patterns of thought and action" to give order and stability to their places and roles in society (ibid.: 971); they imagine future trajectories that can reconfigure their relationship to social structures; and they select a solution among possible alternatives to resolve the problem at hand. By engaging with different temporal contexts in their course of action, Emirbayer and Mische suggested actors also practice what Dewey calls reflective intelligence (ibid.: 967–968).

In sum, Emirbayer's trans-actional perspective is "relational all the way down" (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 974). Not only does it beseech us to see "relations between terms or units as preeminently dynamic in nature, as unfolding, ongoing processes rather than as static ties among inert substances" (Emirbayer 1997: 289), but it also urges us to recognize that the social, cultural, and agentic dimensions of human action work together, as well as on their own, to transform or reproduce the patterned relationships among actors within a web of social ties. Furthermore, the trans-actional perspective directs our attention to how the dynamic interplay among structure, culture, and agency unfolds at different levels of sociological analysis. At the most macroscopic level, we can investigate how institutions and societies are shaped and transformed by "a diversity of intersecting networks of social interaction"

(*ibid.*: 295). At the interactional level, we can identify and examine the “recurrent mechanisms, patterns, and sequences” that create and maintain regularities in the interaction order (*ibid.*: 296). At the microscopic level, we can analyze how interests, identities, and lines of action grow out of actors’ different positions in “circles of recognition” (*ibid.*: 296). Finally, at the intra-personal level, we can focus on how the psychology of the “relational individual” (*ibid.*: 297) is reconstructed through transactions with others.

## 2 WHEN DEWEY MEETS BOURDIEU: PRAGMATISM AND REFLEXIVITY

After moving from the New School to the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1999, Emirbayer started to study systematically Pierre Bourdieu’s writings and incorporate Bourdieu’s field-theoretic approach to his relational sociology. He offered a series of graduate seminars on Bourdieu. Among the enrollees of the very first seminar were Erik Schneiderhan, Shamus Khan, and Matthew Desmond; the influences of that seminar were evident in their first books and co-authored articles with Emirbayer. Hans Joas, a major contemporary pragmatist theorist, also arrived in Madison as a visiting professor in the late 1990s and interacted with Emirbayer. Undoubtedly these intellectual engagements further shaped Emirbayer’s relational thinking. But to better appreciate the development of Emirbayer’s relational sociology, we must begin at its roots in American pragmatism, particularly the influence of Dewey.

Emirbayer’s trans-actional perspective recognizes that social actors are neither cold-calculating machines nor cultural dupes; their practical action is non-teleological and sometimes “directed towards certain ends without being consciously directed to these ends, or determined by them” (Bourdieu 1990 [1980]: 10; quoted in Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012: 137). His pragmatist roots have inspired him to investigate how our practical action can reproduce social inequality and, more importantly, how the reconstruction of our habitual practices can transform relations of power and domination. Dewey asserted that the knower and what she knows are inseparable from the act of knowing, which unfolds “as processes of the full situation of organism-environment” (Dewey and Bentley 1949: 131). Knowledge emerges from the trans-actional experience between the actor and the social environment in which she is embedded. Accordingly, Dewey (1958 [1925], 1980 [1929]) called for a return to the world of experience where elements of the solution emerge when old habits cannot solve new problems. We suspend what we know to work in the past and imagine new ways of using our old routines to solve the problem at hand. These insights informed Emirbayer’s early understanding that social action and its potential for reproduction and reconstruction are all “located” (Abbott 1997) in the world of experience. This notion that experience encapsulates the creative exchange between actors and their environments was embodied in Emirbayer’s proposition in the Manifesto that relations and not things should be the proper object of sociological inquiry.

Emirbayer advocated for all inquiries of social action to begin and end in the world of experience because “humans could intervene in the stream of events or affairs of experience and redirect their course” (Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012: 135). According to early American pragmatists such as Peirce (1992 [1877]), Addams (2002 [1902]), and Dewey (2002 [1922]), most of the time social actors navigate the world with their habits, which enable them “to react in real time to the changing vicissitudes of social situation” without resorting “to conscious planning or deliberate following of instructions” (Emirbayer and Maynard 2011: 227). But sometimes dilemmas arise and habits do not point to a clear way to proceed—a situation that Dewey referred to as a “fork in the road” (ibid.: 227). When such ruptures generate perplexity, social actors engage in a purposeful thought process. They apply their reflective intelligence to creative problem solving and reconstructing their habits in relations to the ever-changing environments. In this process they transform these very relations. Optimistic about the transformative potential of human agency, Emirbayer and Goldberg (2005: 483) observed, “It is precisely this poor fit between habits and their environments that opens the door to the reconstruction of habits, adjustment ... and social change.”

Dewey’s faith in human intelligence and creativity fostered “a pragmatism-inspired theory of agency [that] would reconceptualize human agency as temporally embedded processes of social engagement, one that simultaneously entails agentic orientations toward the past, the future, and the present” (Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012: 150). Mead’s (1983 [1932]) writings on the human experience of temporality also showed how social actors think about past and future events from the perspective of the present in a process he called “reconstruction.” However, Emirbayer and Schneiderhan (2012: 144) argued that such a pragmatic theory of action does not adequately address “how dispositions and habits could give rise to new patterns of action in response to unforeseen or novel situations.” Dewey said little about how exactly a social actor’s relation to the social and cultural structures in which she is embedded constrain and enable her action. “[W]hen speaking of the social space,” they noted, “Dewey placed primarily analytic weight upon divisions based on class, very broadly defined, and did so in a loose, unsystematic fashion” (ibid.: 139). Yet, as discussed above, a core tenet of Emirbayer’s trans-actional perspective is that the relationality of structure, culture, and agency conditions and contextualizes social action. The dynamic element of agency never “gets ‘free’ of structure” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 1004).

Not unlike the pragmatists, Bourdieu (1990 [1980]) conceived practice as what social actors do without consciously following certain rules or conforming to certain norms, but what they nonetheless consider “logical” and reasonable. Most of the time, they rely on their habits and past experiences in devising a course of action to meet and manage emergent problems. *Habitus* as a generative system of dispositions is a product of history. “[History] ensures the active presence of past experience, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and

explicit norms” (ibid.: 54). Unlike the pragmatists, however, Bourdieu squarely situated practice in social “fields” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Emirbayer and Johnson 2008; Liu and Emirbayer 2016). Emirbayer understood “fields ... are structured of relations not between concrete substances or entities, but rather, between the nodes those entities happen to occupy, the point being that one must analyze those entities not in isolation ... but as occupants of positions within broader relational configurations” (Emirbayer 2010: 406).

Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology captured for Emirbayer a full picture of how practical action forms and reproduces itself in the relation of habitus to the field. Habitus is both structured by the field and structuring it through practice (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]). This spatial and relational view of practice is what differentiates it from instrumental action. Emirbayer believed that Bourdieu overcame important but false divisions in social inquiry with his insights on the field-habitus relations and it showed a close theoretical affinity to Dewey’s pragmatic approach to social action. Namely, Bourdieu’s “great obsession” with time “further developed and radicalized the Deweyan notion that experience is fundamentally about eventfulness and process rather than fixity, stability, or permanence” (Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012: 146). It spoke to Emirbayer’s core concerns about how a social actor’s past experience and her orientation toward the future shapes how she evaluates and resolves the problem at hand. Field analysis is both synchronic and diachronic in that “it maps out an array of positions, the occupants of those positions, and the pattern of their relations with one another” and, in the meantime, “it helps one to gauge the strategies of action that actors within a field are likely to pursue, depending upon their respective positions within that space” (Emirbayer and Williams 2005: 717).

Nevertheless, Emirbayer admitted that Bourdieu was predominately preoccupied with the reproductive mechanisms of habitus rather than its potential for change, reconstruction, and transformation. Bourdieu maintained that, in times of great social transformation, people may experience a temporal lag between the logic of their practices and that of the social world in which they now live. In his ethnographies on the Kabyle people in colonial Algeria (Bourdieu 1979) and the bachelor farmers from his native place Béarn, Bourdieu (2008: 188) spoke poignantly about how transition from a pre-capitalist to capitalist society in the first case and encroachment of the urban world upon the peasant world in the second destroyed the respective community’s “means of biological and social reproduction.” Kabyle peasant-workers who saw the future as in God’s hands rather than in “a field of possibles to be explored and mastered by calculation” could not help but “convert all their wages, as soon as they get them, into real goods, food, clothing, furniture,” leaving them impoverished in the long run (Bourdieu 1979: 8, 13). As marriage in Béarn required more individual initiative and as its younger daughters left the land and entered the labor force, its eldest sons slipped from their privileged position in the peasant hierarchy. Their “time-lag in styles of dress” and their awkward shyness in talking to women, dancing with them, and talking to them while dancing further sealed their fate of “condemned bachelorhood” (Bourdieu 2008: 171).

In this respect, Bourdieu's focus on the iterational moment of agency frustrates the Deweyan conception of human agency as "a temporally embedded process of social engagement" (Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012: 150). Bourdieu's "overriding concerns to uncover the workings of power and domination" made it impossible for him "to appreciate fully the possibilities of creative and democratic action" (ibid.: 133). The enduring pragmatist in Emirbayer believed that "habits can themselves be made more intelligent. And the social conditions of the production and reproduction of those habits can also be reconstructed" (Emirbayer and Maynard 2011: 228). To some extent, the difference in orientation between Bourdieu and pragmatism reflects a difference between the two societies from which the theories emerged: "French society is hierarchical and full of historical legacies, whereas American society is mobile and full of possibilities (or at least understands itself as such)" (Liu and Emirbayer 2016: 70). This difference presents a cultural hurdle for Emirbayer's theoretical effort to synthesize and reconstruct the two traditions.

In addition to the extensive discussions on field and habitus, in his more recent writings Emirbayer sought to develop Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence to its full potential and in the pragmatist spirit (Desmond and Emirbayer 2009; Emirbayer and Desmond 2012, 2015; Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012). Emirbayer and Schneiderhan (2012: 145) considered the concept of symbolic violence "perhaps the lynchpin of [Bourdieu's] entire sociology." It embodies "the relation of complicity that the victims of symbolic domination grant to the dominant" (Emirbayer and Goldberg 2005: 484). Emirbayer's concern with symbolic violence harkens back to his earlier work (Emirbayer and Mische 1998) on the autonomous effects that culture may have on social action. Culture can reproduce relations of symbolic violence by rendering certain courses of action unthinkable for the dominated. Conversely, the dominated can also transform their relation to the structures in which they are embedded by exercising reflexivity on the categorical relationships between groups that marks one group as more competent and therefore more deserving of distinction than the other. Emirbayer and Schneiderhan (2012) advanced that, by exercising reflexive intelligence, we can disrupt the relation of symbolic violence and retrain our habits to be more conducive to democratic action. Emirbayer and Desmond's (2015) book on race is another example of this adaptation of Bourdieu in the spirit of pragmatism (see the section below).

Besides retraining habits, Emirbayer argued that we also need to transform the very social conditions that reproduce the dominated habitus. For social science researchers in particular, he had in mind the "scholastic unconscious" (Emirbayer and Desmond 2015: 33), or "conditions of leisure and separation from the practical necessities of life" that lead researchers to believe they are studying the social world from an objective point of view when, in fact, their perspective has been "shaped by life experiences marked by distance from practical necessities (*skhole*)" (Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012: 135–136, 147). It is by using our reflexive intelligence that both scholars and ordinary citizens

can “gain limited but very real control over the inclinations of habitus, transforming us from the agents of action into something more like the true subject of action” (ibid.: 146).

### 3 THE RACIAL ORDER: A PROTOTYPE OF EMIRBAYERIAN RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY

While writing extensively on the theoretical comparison between Bourdieu and pragmatism-influenced sociology, Emirbayer also applied this relational approach to race, arguably one of the most significant research topics in contemporary American sociology. Collaborating with his former student Matthew Desmond, in their recent book, *The Racial Order*, Emirbayer proposed what they considered to be “a comprehensive and rigorous approach to theorizing race ... one that avoids the pitfalls of grand theorizing and middle-range theorizing alike and that pursues creative problem solving in a pragmatist spirit” (Emirbayer and Desmond 2015: 25). The book certainly makes a provocative contribution to the race scholarship; also, it represents Emirbayer’s most systematic effort of integrating the insights of American pragmatism and Bourdieu (and, to a less extent, Durkheim) into a coherent relational sociology of his own.

Emirbayer and Desmond (2015: 51) defined race as “a symbolic category based on phenotype or ancestry and constructed according to specific social and historical contexts, a category that is misrecognized as natural.” Like other symbolic categories, race marks “differences between grouped people or things, and, in so doing, actually help to bring those people or things into existence” (ibid.: 52). This definition emphasizes the relational nature of race, as a social entity both structuring and structured by boundaries between people and groups. Throughout the book, Emirbayer and Desmond engaged with Bourdieu and Dewey extensively, which even led to a critique that “long stretches of the manuscript serve only as primers on Bourdieu and Dewey” (Monk 2016: 620). Indeed, for students of relational sociology, these “long stretches” are of the most interest and thus our discussions in this section focus on them.

Emirbayer and Desmond divided the book into three parts: reflexivity, relationality, and reconstruction. Following Bourdieu (2000 [1997]), they developed a “three-tiered typology of racial reflexivity” (Emirbayer and Desmond 2015: 33), a reflexivity that challenges the social, disciplinary, and scholastic unconscious. Reflexivity on the social unconscious generates recognition that an individual’s position in the racial order, either privileged or disadvantaged, affects her position-takings. Furthermore, every academic discipline has its *doxa* and, for sociology in particular, “works or theories tend to become foils for *political*, not intellectual, reasons” (ibid.: 41). Finally, the pure and disinterested scholastic life itself might conduce to biases in the cognitive, moral, and aesthetic realms of social thought. To overcome these three types of unconscious biases, sociologists must reflect on their own positions and position-takings and move toward a critical and reflexive analysis of the racial object (or any other object)—an argument consistent with Emirbayer’s earlier argument on democratic action (Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012).

In the part on relationality, “the heart and soul of this work,” Emirbayer and Desmond (2015: 335, 129) provided a relational-temporal framework for understanding the racial order that encompasses studying two sets of triadic relations. Their relational approach addressed shortcomings in Dewey’s and Bourdieu’s theories of practical action by synthesizing their strengths to show that structure and agency are mutually constitutive. According to the authors, “All racial action ... is a concrete synthesis shaped and conditioned, on the one hand, by the temporal-relational contexts of action, on the other hand, by the ineliminable moment of racial agency itself” (ibid.: 185). In the chapter “The Structures of the Racial Order,” they presented the racial order in a synchronic moment as a Bourdieuan field comprises “a configuration of objective social relations ... between the nodes [that specific racial groups] happen to occupy within the given configuration” (ibid.: 84). Emirbayer and Desmond took a page straight out of the Manifesto when they insisted that the relation of the racial habitus to the racial field (e.g., dominant vs. dominated) and the relation between racial habitus (e.g., black vs. white habitus) in the field are not only structured by social but also by cultural and collective-emotional contexts in which the relevant racial groups are embedded. Each of these structuring contexts constitute their own distinct analytical domain in the racial field; while they are mutually constitutive, they are also internally autonomous.

By situating racial action in a racial field, Emirbayer and Desmond (2015) addressed a persistent concern with Dewey’s theory of action. Dewey and other pragmatists were right to reject the means-end, teleological explanation of social action because judgment is improvisational and continuous (ibid.: 170). But they, and those who follow them, have not adequately explained *why* social actors would judge one course of action as more “reasonable” than another when they come upon that “fork in the road” (ibid.: 171). Following Bourdieu, Emirbayer and Desmond argued that racial actors must enter the racial game to master it. They become competent when they have developed an embodied feel for the game. “One has to have a feel for the racial game in order to play it well, a capacity to make practical and normative judgment among alternative possible trajectories of action in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations” (ibid.: 167). In other words, the world of experience in which racial actors encounter the means and ends of practical action is not an unstructured social space. It is a racial field structured by relations of power (social, cultural, and collective-emotional), all of which schematize their judgment of what is a “reasonable” course of action.

In the meantime, Emirbayer and Desmond (2015) insisted that racial actors have agency. In the chapter “The Dynamics of the Racial Order,” they presented racial agency in a diachronic moment as “composed of variable and changing orientations within the flow of time” (ibid.: 179). Emirbayer (1997: 305) acknowledged at the end of the Manifesto that, in spite of its many promises, the trans-actional approach also has its own challenges and limitations, one of which being that relational studies “too often privilege spatiality ... over temporality and narrative unfolding.” Emirbayer and Mische (1998) first set to

right the imbalanced attention paid to space and time, as they analytically disaggregated social agency into three temporal moments: iteration, projectivity, and practical evaluation. Emirbayer and Desmond (2015) elaborated on this triad of agentic orientations and, in the process, addressed a primary concern that many have with Bourdieu's theory of action, namely, he prioritized reproduction over reconstruction. "If racial actors are to be seen fundamentally oriented in their actions by past patterns of thought, perception, and feeling, as in Bourdieu's sociology," observed the authors, "then it becomes difficult for race scholarship satisfactorily to analyze more forward-looking, not to mention also reflexively present-centered, instances of transformative agency" (ibid.: 133).

Emirbayer and Desmond (2015: 134) contended that transformation becomes possible, when racial actors are conceived as "mov[ing] in and among different unfolding horizons, they switch between (or recompose) their temporal orientations ... thus are capable of changing their modes of relation to structure." Depending on the situation, racial actors may prioritize one agentic orientation of their experience over the other two in how they manage their changing relationship to the overlapping social, cultural, and collective-emotional structures in which they are embedded. The iterational moment enables racial actors to schematize their racial experience by selectively reactivating past patterns of practices and thoughts (ibid.: 136). The projective moment allows racial actors to imagine alternative possible trajectories when "they distance themselves ... from the habits and traditions that constrain them" (ibid.: 147). Meanwhile, the practical-evaluative moment motivates racial actors to contextualize their experience by using their "situationally based judgment" to meet the contingencies at hand (ibid.: 167). Emirbayer and Desmond's relational framework as outlined in these chapters affirms their commitment in taking "an inclusive, pragmatic, really open, cross-fertilizing approach" (ibid.: 13–14) to studying the racial order.

However, this commitment softens somewhat in their discussion of racial interactions—"the very stuff ... of which the racial order is made" (ibid.: 192). When discussing interactions, Emirbayer and Desmond (2015: 188–203) pitted Bourdieu and the Chicago School against each other, highlighting Bourdieu's insistence on the priority of structure over interaction while drawing heavily on Peirce, Dewey, and Goffman in developing their theory of racial interactions. They maintained that Bourdieu's "critiques of interactionist sociology were problematic because structure and agency actually stand in dialectical relations to, and presuppose, one another" (ibid.: 192). Yet even in doing so, they still sought the possibility of a fusion between the two intellectual traditions. For example, using Bourdieu's vocabulary, they argued that "[a] hallmark of Chicago-style work was the recognition that its ethnographic subjects interact not only in their concreteness but also as occupants of positions in a structure of relations" and "thereby as bearers of different habitus from within a space of dispositions" (ibid.: 195). The engagement with Bourdieu in this book is not limited to Dewey or the first Chicago School (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918–1920; Park and Burgess 1969 [1921]; Bulmer 1984; Abbott

1999), but extended to symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology, particularly the writings of Goffman and Garfinkel (see also Emirbayer and Maynard 2011).

The part on reconstruction, like the two previous parts, begins with a theoretical comparison between Dewey and Bourdieu, with the emphasis on Dewey's reflections on "nonideal theorizing," that is, "one cannot ever hope to know with absolute certainty the proper ends and, accordingly, the appropriate means of (personal as well as societal) reconstruction" (Emirbayer and Desmond 2015: 286). This is contrasted with Bourdieu's notion of "relational utopianism," a utopian thought that is scientifically sound in both its means and ends and based on the collective work of intellectuals. Reconstruction, accordingly, aims at the creation of a new habitus that "would enjoy greater control over the unacknowledged forces otherwise working behind its back and gain, at least to some degree, freedom from determination" (ibid.: 289). This, in the context of race, means the transformation of the racial order "in the direction of greater justice and equity" (ibid.: 339), toward ideals such as color blindness, multiculturalism, and racial democracy. The pragmatist pursuit of social transformation is the strongest in this part of the book.

Scholars of race will have to assess the usefulness of this theory in empirical research but, for our purpose, a prototype of Emirbayerian relational sociology has already taken shape in *The Racial Order*. Although the generous adoption of Bourdieu's vocabulary gives the impression that Emirbayer and Desmond merely applied the Bourdieuan field-theoretic approach to race, the persistent comparison with Dewey and other pragmatists throughout the book suggests a more syncretic approach between structure and interaction, between domination and habitual action. Compared to Emirbayer's earlier writings on Bourdieu and pragmatism, in this book he went beyond his decade-long theoretical contrasts and presented an integrated analytical framework for doing relational sociology, a pragmatism-influenced field theory. It is Emirbayer's provisional answer to his own call for relational sociology in the Manifesto.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

When Emirbayer penned the Manifesto in 1997, a specter was haunting American sociology—the specter of relational thinking. In the next two decades, this specter has grown into a prominent theoretical tradition and attracted a large number of followers in sociology and beyond. Together with his students and collaborators, Emirbayer has greatly elevated Bourdieu's status in American sociology and contributed to a pragmatism revival (Joas 1993, 1996; Gross 2009; Martin 2011; Abbott 2016). More importantly, his persistent and dynamic engagement of the two traditions has facilitated their rapprochement into a more inclusive relational sociology. It is surely too early to make any assessment on this ongoing theoretical project but, in this conclusion, we hope to present a few thoughts on the prospects of Emirbayer's pragmatism-influenced field theory as a model of relational sociology.

Emirbayer is a “total sociologist” (Desmond 2016: 337) whose pragmatist soul believes “[t]otal sociology is our motto: by all means necessary” (Emirbayer and Desmond 2015: 14), regardless of the methods of inquiry. His encyclopedic knowledge of social theory provides him not only a large toolkit for research and writing but also a balanced taste for various authors and theoretical traditions. Although his fondness of Dewey, Durkheim, Elias, and Bourdieu is evident, he rarely gives any author a superior status over others in his writings. Even at the height of his intellectual engagement with Bourdieu, Emirbayer never gave up his Deweyan roots but made extraordinary efforts to compare and integrate the two. This scholarly syncretism, however, can be a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it enables Emirbayer to move adeptly between authors and traditions under the wide umbrella of relational sociology; on the other hand, it dampens the distinction and innovations found in his own relational sociology, which are often obscured by the foregrounding of earlier theorists.

In this sense, Emirbayer’s call for a trans-actional perspective in the Manifesto remains a work in progress. Even in his most recent work, *The Racial Order*, the integration between Dewey and Bourdieu is incomplete, with the spirit of Durkheim haunting in the background. As he acknowledged in the Manifesto (1997: 282): “What I have done here is merely to bring together the various lines of reasoning in this perspective ... and to seek thereby to prevent the sort of eclecticism, the easy mixing together of substantialist and relational assumptions.” Two decades later, relational sociology has successfully distinguished itself from what Emirbayer calls “substantialist thinking” that once dominated sociology, yet his own syncretism within relational sociology has prevented Emirbayer from fully answering his call for “internal debates” as well as “theoretical clarity and reflexivity” (ibid.: 312) in the last pages of the Manifesto. To borrow from his own comment on Bourdieu (Emirbayer and Schneiderhan 2012: 133), Emirbayer’s overriding concerns to uncover the affinities among other relational theorists make it difficult for him to appreciate fully the possibilities of creative action in relational theorizing.

With the enduring popularity of Bourdieu in today’s sociology (for which Emirbayer deserves many credits), an interesting question is whether Emirbayer will continue to follow a largely Bourdieuan framework as he did in *The Racial Order*, or to turn more reflexive and critical toward Bourdieu’s relational sociology in his future writings. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Emirbayer has offered a series of seminars on pragmatism and the Chicago School of sociology, including not only Dewey but also other theorists such as W.I. Thomas, Robert E. Park, Erving Goffman, and Andrew Abbott. To what extent will he bring insights from these Chicago School sociologists into his relational sociology in dialogue with Bourdieu, as he did in a recent essay “Field and Ecology” (Liu and Emirbayer 2016), remains to be seen.

In this chapter, we have focused on Emirbayer’s intellectual engagement with Dewey and Bourdieu, the two most prominent figures in his relational sociology. However, it would be remiss of us to suggest that the two are his only intellectual inspirations. Social theorists such as Nibert Elias and Charles

Tilly have also influenced his relational thinking in significant ways. Emirbayer sees “deep-seated affinities and compatibilities” between Elias and Bourdieu, both of whom deploy “three important concepts: habitus, field, and power” and “reacted strongly against substantialist tendencies pervasive in sociological theorizing and research” (Paulle et al. 2012: 70, 86). Perhaps because of those close affinities, after Emirbayer began his decade-long engagement with Bourdieu, Elias, who appeared repeatedly in the Manifesto, has become less prominent in his recent writings. Similarly, Tilly was certainly an influential figure in Emirbayer’s early career, but his impact was gradually eclipsed by Bourdieu in later years. In his only essay comparing the two authors, Emirbayer (2010: 409–410) suggests that “Tilly’s relationalism is as much about transactions as about structured patterns of relations”, whereas “Bourdieu never tired of stressing the priority of structure over interaction.” Emirbayer’s own syncretism is probably closer to Tilly than to Bourdieu, yet he finds Bourdieu’s vocabulary more appealing and useful. The progression of Emirbayer’s intellectual trajectory since the Manifesto is a living witness to the rise of relational sociology in the US and beyond.

## REFERENCES

- Abbott, Andrew. 1997. Of Time and Space: The Contemporary Relevance of the Chicago School. *Social Forces* 75: 1149–1182.
- . 1999. *Department and Discipline: Chicago Sociology at One Hundred*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2016. *Processual Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Addams, Jane. 2002 [1902]. *Democracy and Social Ethics*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1979. *Algeria 1960: The Disenchantment of the World; the Sense of Honor: The Kabyle House or the World Reversed*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1984 [1979]. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 1990 [1980]. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity.
- . 2000 [1997]. *Pascalian Meditations*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- . 2008. *The Bachelors’ Ball: The Crisis of Peasant Society in Béarn*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, and Loïc J.D. Wacquant. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bulmer, Martin. 1984. *The Chicago School of Sociology: Institutionalization, Diversity, and the Rise of Sociological Research*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Dépelteau, François. 2008. Relational Thinking: A Critique of Co-deterministic Theories of Structure and Agency. *Sociological Theory* 26: 51–73.
- Desmond, Matthew. 2016. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Desmond, Matthew, and Mustafa Emirbayer. 2009. What Is Racial Domination? *Du Bois Review* 6: 335–355.
- Dewey, John. 1958 [1925]. *Experience and Nature*. New York: Dover Publications.

- . 1966 [1916]. *Democracy and Education*. New York: Free Press.
- . 1980 [1929]. *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action*. New York: Perigee Books.
- . 2002 [1922]. *Human Nature and Conduct*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Dewey, John, and Arthur F. Bentley. 1949. *Knowing and the Known*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Donati, Pierpaolo. 2011. *Relational Sociology: A New Paradigm for the Social Sciences*. New York: Routledge.
- Donati, Pierpaolo, and Margaret S. Archer. 2015. *The Relational Subject*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa. 1996. Useful Durkheim. *Sociological Theory* 14: 109–130.
- . 1997. Manifesto for a Relational Sociology. *American Journal of Sociology* 103: 281–317.
- . 2010. Tilly and Bourdieu. *The American Sociologist* 41: 400–422.
- . 2013. Relational Sociology as Fighting Words. In *Conceptualizing Relational Sociology: Ontological and Theoretical Issues*, ed. C. Powell and F. Dépelteau, 209–211. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Matthew Desmond. 2012. Race and Reflexivity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35: 574–599.
- . 2015. *The Racial Order*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Chad Alan Goldberg. 2005. Pragmatism, Bourdieu, and Collective Emotions in Contentious Politics. *Theory and Society* 34: 469–518.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Jeff Goodwin. 1994. Network Analysis, Culture, and the Problem of Agency. *American Journal of Sociology* 99: 1411–1454.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Victoria Johnson. 2008. Bourdieu and Organization Analysis. *Theory and Society* 37: 1–44.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Douglas W. Maynard. 2011. Pragmatism and Ethnomethodology. *Qualitative Sociology* 34: 221–261.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Ann Mische. 1998. What Is Agency? *American Journal of Sociology* 103: 962–1023.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Eric Schneiderhan. 2012. Dewey and Bourdieu on Democracy. In *Bourdieu and Historical Analysis*, ed. P.S. Gorski, 131–157. Durham, SC: Duke University Press.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Eva M. Williams. 2005. Bourdieu and Social Work. *Social Service Review* 79: 689–724.
- Gross, Neil. 2009. A Pragmatist Theory of Social Mechanisms. *American Sociological Review* 74: 358–379.
- Joas, Hans. 1993. *Pragmatism and Social Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1996. *The Creativity of Action*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Liu, Sida, and Mustafa Emirbayer. 2016. Field and Ecology. *Sociological Theory* 34: 62–79.
- Martin, John Levi. 2011. *The Explanation of Social Action*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mead, George Herbert. 1983 [1932]. *The Philosophy of the Present*. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co.
- Mische, Ann. 2011. Relational Sociology, Culture, and Agency. In *The SAGE Handbook of Social Network Analysis*, ed. J. Scott and P.J. Carrington, 80–97. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

- Monk, Ellis. 2016. Book Review of the Racial Order. *American Journal of Sociology* 122: 620–622.
- Park, Robert, and Ernest W. Burgess. 1969 [1921]. *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Paulle, Bowen, Bart van Herrikuizen, and Mustafa Emirbayer. 2012. Elias and Bourdieu. *Journal of Classical Sociology* 12: 69–93.
- Peirce, Charles S. 1992. The Fixation of Belief. In *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, Volume 1: 1867–1893*, ed. N. Houser and C. Kloesel, 109–123. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Thomas, William I., and Florian Znaniecki. 1918–1920. *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America: Monograph of an Immigrant Group*. Boston: Gorham Press.

**Lily Liang** is a doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her work looks at the emergence of middle-class practices in education, family life, and the gendered division of labor in China today. Her master's thesis explores how college women manage their respectability in the co-presence of women with less than a college education at a Shanghai rental. Her PhD dissertation examines the relational contexts and strategies for raising Chinese middle-class children.

**Sida Liu** is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Toronto and Faculty Fellow at the American Bar Foundation. He has conducted extensive empirical research on China's legal reform and legal profession. In addition to Chinese law, he also writes on socio-legal theory and general social theory, particularly theories of social space and social process following the sociological tradition of Georg Simmel and the Chicago School.