

# The elementary entity of society

To show science what everyone already unconsciously skillfully got and applied.

*'You won't see it until you get it' (Johan Cruyff)*

Dear human and social scientists,

The elephant in the room of social sciences is, that they have a tougher job than natural sciences to legitimize themselves as science. With this open letter I hope to bring that elephant up as a manageable topic of discussion. I hope to contribute to the scientific quality of social sciences with a discovery, that has greater consequences than I can work out myself. It is about making and keeping an agreement as the elementary entity of society. While everyone has of course always unconsciously applied this 'discovery'<sup>1</sup>, this has so far been overlooked scientifically.

Each science dissects its object in its constituent parts, until it discovers a generic element that provides vision and grip on its whole. For example, chemistry discovered the elements and the atomic model, physics the elementary particles and biology the cells. But what generic element did the social sciences discover? With what and how do people realize themselves and their social existence? Compared to other sciences, social sciences resemble blind men around an elephant, all claiming something different about the heap of data, which arose in and about their object from 'knowledge economy' and 'information society'. Behind 'theoretical-methodical pluralism' in 'multi paradigmatic' 'schools' or 'currents' as a fig leaf, one can't hide one's failure in other than social sciences<sup>2</sup>.

What escapes social sciences from making and keeping an agreement, as the unconscious way, applied by everyone, in which we (re)create our everyday collaboration? Even if something goes wrong in it, we apparently figured out how to discuss it with each other, to solve the problem and fix it. That would be impossible without regularity to which we apparently all have been referring for millennia, and a knowledge economy would not have arisen.

Unconsciously competent we got how to delineate individual collaborations and point out their beginning, end and (in)completeness. Unconsciously everyone realizes when a collaboration ... not complete. Just like in grammar, which no coincidence. Everyone immediately realizes and hears that this sentence not complete. And everyone refers to the same framework of grammatical rules to argue why this sentence not complete. Isn't it surprising that we already get to know rules of grammar in primary school, but not those of our society? But this discovery finally reveals its rules for humanities and social sciences.

I started writing about this discovery as early as 1998, but the idea that it is an open door, too banal to waste words, inhibited me. And with my limited knowledge, I did not dare to assume that no other social scientist had noticed, elaborated, and described this. Only recently did I realize that it had to be a banal open door, because if not everyone always applied it skillfully but unconsciously competently, it could not be what it is: the elementary regularity of every society. Of course, people, including scientists, apply this daily and talk about it, but only afterwards, if something went wrong. Apparently, this regularity organizes our common frame of thinking. And I think, it's even the basis of what human beings have in common. Now that I had time to figure it out after retirement, I concluded that this fundamental understanding was missed in social sciences, with detrimental consequences for its quality.

A second hesitation that inhibited me to publish about this discovery was a vague realization that this discovery cannot and should not be generalized without critical reflection, because both the moment of the discovery, and its form, does not seem accidental, but historically determined and tainted by special developments of human beings and society in recent decades.

After studying philosophy and social sciences, I lived out my passion for the interface of technology and society outside the university practically, as a business information architect. Then I was introduced to

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<sup>1</sup> The inhabitants of the continent, which Columbus 'discovered', had discovered themselves of course long before.

<sup>2</sup> That confusion was raised to the norm when Gareth Morgan's thesis in *Images of Organization* (1986), that organizations cannot be studied *as organizations, but only as metaphors*, was honored with a prize, but never with critical research!

this discovery at TU-Delft in 1998 by Van Reijswoud and Dietz. With that discovery, I have drawn up hundreds of sketches and dozens of elaborate models of complex collaboration chains for 25 years. Meanwhile, I remained surprised that the scientific potential of this discovery was not noticed anywhere in humanities, social sciences, and philosophy. As far as I could oversee, there it remained a blind spot and deafeningly quiet. That's why I explored the impact of that fascinating discovery on social sciences and philosophy. But there are higher shoulders of more intellectual giants than I can and want to climb. Because I don't want to take this insight into my grave either, I'm already coming out with the embryonic beginning that I present in this letter. In this way I hope to facilitate further elaboration of that discovery to promote scientific progress with it.

## Mental reversals to see what you didn't get yet

To recognize this discovery and give it the place it deserves within scientific and philosophical work six mental reversals are needed to look and see differently. Because as the practical thinker Johan Cruyff said: 'you won't see it until you get it'.

### 1. From blackbox to whitebox

In our daily lives we use all kinds of means to achieve something. First, we must learn to apply every new means by trial and error: practice makes perfect. Usually, our attention is always focused forward on what we want to achieve. Only when a means used by us falters do we first change our use of it, and if that doesn't help either, we open and dissect it as a 'whitebox'. Only then do we focus our attention on restoring the operation and construction of components *in* the means. But as soon as we are no longer hindered by it and achieve again what we wanted, we leave every used means and our handling of it behind as a 'blackbox'. The only thing that still interests us then, is what we must put in it (input) to get out (output) what we expect from it.<sup>3</sup>

This 'blackboxing' is of course useful. If we always opened and dissected all our movements and actions and everything around us as a whitebox, we would lose control of our existence. Without 'blackboxing' we would no longer be able to see the forest for the trees.

The means that we unconsciously apply to achieve something in our daily lives is the elementary collaboration, which I will call 'synaction'. This prevents confusion with complex collaborations, which can consist of chains or networks of multiple synactions. Unconsciously we learned to handle and repair synactions competently if necessary and then immediately we blackboxed them again as soon as a hiccup was resolved. Each synaction consists of negotiating and making and keeping one agreement, proceeds and is restored according to a protocol, has a time lapse, is carried out by human actors, who play two roles (powers and accountabilities for the results to be delivered) in it and it includes (implicit or explicit) agreeing on and realizing one result. Details follow on p 6.

Until we changed our social lives with ICT at the end of the 20th century, only incidentally failing synactions became subject of conversation and whiteboxing. But with ICT entire collections of similar synactions turned out to fail systematically. Design and integration of ICT required to understand the generic construction and operation of synactions to determine for specific synactions: who needs when to register, mutate and retrieve which information about these synactions in data with ICT.

Especially in the COVID pandemic, ICT also reduced the collaboration of many to online interaction. Suddenly they could no longer restore their synactions without ICT because work circles were separated from workplaces. The only thing that turned out to bind people to each other and to their organization were online agreements they made, monitored, and fulfilled with each other to align their collaboration.

The first mental reversal needed, to see what this blind spot hides, is that collaborations in general don't have to be blackboxes only but can be opened and researched as whitebox. Perhaps for the first time, we can research and understand what exactly a separate collaboration or 'synaction' is and is not? How a

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<sup>3</sup> Robert M. Pirsig already pointed to it in 'Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance' (1976). More recently, Bruno Latour pointed to 'blackboxing'. But for both, it was only about our artifacts, outside of us and not about our own collaboration.

single collaboration can be distinguished from the other? Where a synaction begins and ends and where a next one begins and the previous one ends? Whether and when a synaction is finished ('complete'). What basic building blocks ('constituents') and development statuses a synaction includes? And how they relate ('construction') and work (the mechanism of a synaction)? And what makes synactions unique: what its relevant environment (context) and history in it are, in terms of place (in the sense of organizational work circle and not of geographical workplace) and time (from start to completion)? What is the impact of that context on a synaction and what is its impact on that context? About all such questions, ICT is required to register structured data, and therefore ICT-ers had to answer all those questions about synactions exactly. And because humanities and social sciences did not have the answer to those questions, ICT-ers themselves had to make the discovery, which I submit in this letter for further elaboration in your field. Would it not be sensible and useful if every human- and social scientist knew what an elementary social entity is, and could answer all the above questions about it, just like a biologist knows what a cell is?

## 2. From fuss about social damage, to noticing everyday self-recovery.

This letter contains insights from recent developments with ICT for humanities and social sciences. But noticing these insights requires attending banal everyday collaborations, for which scientists usually seclude themselves in laboratories and study rooms. If ever such banal collaborations attract attention, then it is because their failure or destruction provoked distracting fuss i.e., in the form of 'The News'<sup>4</sup>. That is the second mental reversal, which is necessary: from striking incidents to ordinary daily regularity, which was interrupted by them; from fuss about contradictions and conflicts between communities, classes, genders, to awareness of the collaboration or synergy, which made communities possible and kept them up.

In their daily practice, people - around and through all disasters and conflicts - have nevertheless maintained their existence together. Every time and wherever people restore, realize, build, and expand themselves and their existence, they do so together. They live and work together. After every disaster becomes clear again which collaborations arise or return and in what order and form. Conflicts between different communities may have provoked a disaster, but the renewal that occurs afterwards is not the product of the disaster, but of the synergy that (re)arises afterwards. Apparently, people then rediscover that and how they can do it. Apparently, they unconsciously rediscover and use something together that I will work out further down, which I call 'synaction protocol'.

Sociologists did a lot of research and writing about contradictions; conflicts; struggles; power; coercion; inequality and robbery between groups, classes, and communities. But these have only been able to dispute, rob and destroy what had already been built before, in cooperation outside that struggle. Robbery has never been able to produce any means of existence without taking it away from people collaborating before. Collaboration is the unnoticed condition for conflict.

How can one understand the unravelling of social tissues without in-depth insight and understanding of its previous origin and design?

Apparently, people have a common frame of reference in which they talk about failed or destroyed collaboration, to pick up the thread again. This shows that in every collaboration they work methodically in a regular standardized way, but unconsciously competent: targeted (aimed at a concrete goal set in advance explicitly or not); systematic (according to a logically coherent protocol); procedural (in a fixed order because the successive steps are each other's condition); consciously (monitoring whether a set goal is achieved) and adjusting (by evaluating the course of the procedure according to the protocol and restoring if necessary).

So, the question at stake is: what is the regularity in that frame of reference? Which standard protocol do we all apply to structure our collaborations?

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<sup>4</sup> See what I wrote [on journalism \(Dutch only\)](#).

### 3. From individuals to people realizing connections.

In this intentionally ambiguous title, people are both subject and object of the realization of connections. The crucial question of what a society is and constitutes has so far been answered by social scientists as if they were standing around an elephant like blind men. Each emphasized a fragment that stands out to them in the existing society. But no one has been able to designate, delineate and dissect the smallest possible viable social entity, with which and from which a society (re)establishes or recovers itself after a disaster or crisis and thus makes its resurrection possible.

Just like other people, even social scientists know that they are not viable without other people, who want and do everything just like them. Therefore, it seems irresistible to gain insight and grip on society by studying separate individuals or their individual traits; intentions; needs, wishes and desires; choices; behavior; occupations; actions; expressions or labor. But by studying (expressions of) separate individuals, those individuals hinder our view and grip on what a society essentially is, just as trees, though being the first and most noticeable, still block our view of what a forest essentially is. A mass of people is not a society. And any society continues to survive, while individuals are born, immigrate, emigrate, and die in it. And separately, individuals, who survive a disaster, are not viable until they collaborate to repair a society.

Yes, individual people of flesh and blood immediately stand out. Gradual and mutual changes in which they realize themselves, each other and their social existence are more difficult to bring to light. Most of the 'news' and what we learn about 'history' is about striking individuals such as kings and popes who hinder our view on everyday events. Just as the so-called 'Social Contract' takes us the view of the constant implicit understanding and coordination with which people build, maintain, and change their everyday existence with and around each other.

As a business(information)architect, I have dissected and modeled how people together form an organization by making and keeping agreements with each other about roles they divide and play for which they hold each other accountable. As an organizational expert, it amazes me how often social scientists have written about individual, shared, collective or unified 'intentions' and operations, while about roles they write only in terms of abstract 'role patterns' and about responsibilities only as abstract 'moral duties'. Outside organizational science, social scientists do not seem to have explicitly investigated how people in concrete situations, by doing or neglecting something, divide, assume or evade responsibilities for their actions and their effects. By doing so, social scientists do not consider and interpret people as subjects of their own existence, but as the object of observations from their ivory tower. Social science should be about the reality of and between all people, not only in organizational science but also outside it. So not about the individuals that social scientists initially isolate from their social context, as abstractions between their ears, only to then establish or 'understand (Verstehen)' relationships between them. Social science should be about real and concrete connections that people make among themselves about the roles that they themselves divide with each other and with which they themselves collaborating form their common existence.

The third mental reversal is of organizational nature, from people as separate and indivisible 'individuals' and what they do, to that with what they connect themselves, together and with each other, and with which they divide, take, and bear responsibilities that they hold each other accountable of. After all, social existence is not about persons and their intentions, but about roles (tasks, responsibilities, and powers) between people and accountabilities for the effects of their actions.

In organizations, people simultaneously and successively divide and play countless roles, with different tasks, powers, and responsibilities, which they create by making and fulfilling so many concrete agreements. Is not 'society as a whole' also a very large organization and why shouldn't the way in which organizational experts look at it apply to that? Also in organizations, people must take responsibility for things that an unexpected situation demands of them. If they don't, we call it a punctuality action, and we blame them for behaving like machines, only doing what they were explicitly told. And if they don't keep a door open for each other, don't give space in an elevator, or don't bring coffee, we find them a-social, and we hold them accountable for it.

#### 4. From mental agreement to existential realization

The fourth mental reversal is a half: from headstand to the feet; from theory to practice; from (shared) ideas to their realization; from linguistic agreement to real construction and experience; from mental agreement to real fulfillment of it.

In recent decades, an increasing number of initiatives have appeared in social sciences to seek a basic understanding of the social in agreement between individuals such as about: language and meanings; beliefs and intentions; norms and values; order and rules; 'symbolic interaction' and 'communicative action'; shared beliefs or intentions and 'joint pursuit' or 'plural subject'.

An objection already mentioned above is that they still lean on abstractions of presupposed individuals, which are then connected by the agreement. In addition, it is striking that little to no attention has been paid to the practical success or failure of making that agreement come true (and how to deal with the accountabilities for the change). As if that is not part of social reality.

In contrast, in the synaction protocol, which everyone unconsciously applies skillfully, the fulfilling of an agreement is no less important than (the accountabilities for) achieving it.

#### 5. From words *about* deeds to words *as* deeds

Before the synaction protocol can be worked out in detail, another mental reversal is needed, which has only been done yet by a small part of the social scientists.

The aforementioned 'whiteboxing' shows that *incidentally* failing synactions usually are recognized as an impairment of collaboration. However, the role of promising and of the making, monitoring, and fulfilling of agreements has been recognized and researched by few *systematically as the basis for every collaboration*. It turns out that another mental reversal is needed to see and get that.

The fifth mental reversal needed to be able to dissect and understand social collaboration is from words about deeds to speech acts, in which words themselves replace or become deeds, which are indispensable in the collaboration of people living together. Before [J.L. Austin](#) and [J.R. Searle](#) discovered and described speech acts, none of the philosophers and scientists, such as Comte, Marx, Spencer or Weber could adopt a '[Language Action Perspective](#)', or describe '[kommunikatives Handeln](#)'. So, they could not notice, delineate, and dissect the smallest possible organization. But who once discovered and understood speech acts, can no longer 'unsee them' and put them aside as irrelevant<sup>5</sup>.

#### 6. From abstract individual speech acts to real synactions

Even without knowing these theories about speech acts, anyone who ever realized something together with others as a social fact - a situation that two or more people together realize or allow to continue in their existence - knows, that you had to make and fulfill agreements with them, explicitly or implicitly. And before that you (unconsciously skillfully) applied speech acts, such as [the one]: 'Do you want to do x for me?', [the other]: 'I will do x!' ... 'Hereby I deliver x!' And [the one]: 'right, that's the x I asked'. Such speech acts are so banal and self-evident that they often even remain unspoken and are expressed with postures or gestures. Only talking in hindsight when there was reason to do so because something special happened, do we sometimes explain those speech acts with a name such as: request; promise; delivery or acceptance.

Together, those four speech acts form the smallest social system and thus the smallest possible organization or collaboration, in short synaction: making and fulfilling one agreement. All people use the synaction protocol to realize their existence. No larger and more complex social organization can be built without this simplest and smallest collaboration. That's why we open and dissect synactions in the next paragraph.

Speech acts are expressions between speech actors. Like individuals, speech acts individually, without interaction with speech acts of other speech actors, can only exist as an abstraction between the ears of scientists. Because expressions only really become speech acts in and through the social context of implicit and explicit speech acts in which they take on meaning as a speech act, even if a speech act seems to be separate at first glance. After all, even apologies, condolences, and congratulations, offered as

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<sup>5</sup> [Mario Bunge](#) insisted that speech acts have never baked a loaf of bread, and thus showed that he does not get that baking bread is not possible without working together. <Doing Science> p108.

expressions of compassion and therefore as requests for (recovery of) togetherness, are refused or accepted. And even ignoring a speech act already creates a social fact.<sup>6</sup>

A sixth and final mental reversal is therefore to free speech acts from the blind spot behind the individualistic thought frame. Consider them not just individually but as a status in the coherent protocol for the exchange of speech acts in any basic human collaboration or synaction: request, promise, delivery/fulfillment of promise, acceptance.

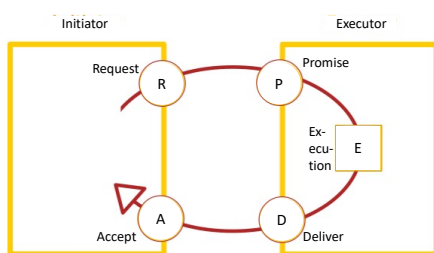
## The Synaction Protocol

Only after our attention shifted from collaborations as blackboxes to collaborations as whiteboxes, we can describe the discovery this is all about: the regularity or the protocol of any human collaboration, that Van Reijswoud and Dietz<sup>7</sup> 25 years ago spotted, analyzed, and described in detail under the name 'transaction(pattern)'.<sup>8</sup>

The protocol is no one's prescript or invention because it was there long before they discovered it and applied it as a coat rack to describe what ICT systems must do to support organizations. People have used the protocol for as long as they exist, competently, but unconsciously, as a framework of mind, to name, understand, untangle, and restore the construction and operation of their collaboration. But only and particularly if something special happened, because something went very well or went wrong: 'that (what you give me) is (not) exactly what I requested... you promised me though... promise (made) is debt (unpaid)...' etc.

This pattern was only discovered when we lacked it: failure to apply it turned out to be a major failure factor for the development and implementation of ICT in late 20th-century companies.

### The main line of the synaction protocol



Speech acts and synactions are real, existing things, so perceptible and factual, that we stumble over them when we skip or forget them because people cannot exist without them.

The synaction protocol is no one's invention or property. It belongs to everyone, and nobody in particular. It is the common of commons, and anyone can and may try to describe the transaction pattern in their own way, but no one can claim to have the only correct or valid description<sup>8</sup>. Here I make my attempt to describe it:

1. The synaction protocol models the way people together realize one (social) change: the synaction-outcome. In their interaction (making, monitoring, and fulfilling an agreement) about it, they describe the change in the 'illocution' as one performance in one place at one time (window).
2. To this end, they divide two roles with accountabilities for the synaction outcome:
  1. The acquirer (initiator) for requesting, obtaining, and accepting.
  2. The provider (executor) for promising, executing, and delivering.
3. They do this in three synaction phases: an order phase, a realization phase, and a result phase.
4. Those synaction-phases are delimited by four consecutive<sup>9</sup> transaction-statuses. From an information point of view, each status only needs to be checked: the transaction outcome (according to the 'illocution') is  $v$ : requested,  $v$ : promised,  $v$ : delivered and  $v$ : accepted.
5. The main line of the synaction protocol includes five procedural steps: request, promise, execute, deliver, and accept.

<sup>6</sup> John Searle and his adepts abstract speech acts between their ears from real synactions as logical-linguistic operations of equally abstract individuals. Thus, it escapes them, that expressives and declarations in themselves cannot lead to social facts, if they have not been requested and accepted by others in synactions, or ignored.

<sup>7</sup> Hans Mulder has contributed more than anyone else to the application and popularization of the transaction pattern.

<sup>8</sup> Dietz has now described a 4<sup>th</sup> version. See: Dietz, J. L. G., & Mulder, J.B.F. (2020) Enterprise Ontology, A Human-Centric Approach to Understanding the Essence of Organisation, Springer. In 2024 a new, amended edition is planned.

<sup>9</sup> Synaction statuses are strictly consecutive: the previous step must be fully completed before the next one can begin. Also in the case of an offer or quote. After all, these are conditional promises, which only become valid after the request has been confirmed, verbally or in writing, but explicitly.

The transaction outcome, which the executor realizes, and the initiator obtains, can be:

- realization and obtaining of ownership, possession and/or right of use of something material such as a cookie, table, vehicle, building or area, or something intangible, such as a patent,
- realization and obtaining of a performance such as cleaning, care, or repair of something,
- realization or continuation of a social relationship such as a job, spouse, association member, friendship, date, patient at a healthcare institution.
- realization and obtaining or continuation of a permission.

## Change and cancelling of synactions and negotiations

To achieve a mutually accepted outcome, all statuses of the main line of the protocol must be completed. And the main line of the protocol only appears to have been followed, after a collaboration has achieved an outcome, which is accepted by all those involved. But collaborations are vulnerable and proceed messier in practice. Any attempt to make and comply to an agreement can change at any time along the way or even break off without result. Before a status is reached, it can - after some consultation<sup>10</sup> - be cancelled (before the other received it) or revoked and every revocation can be allowed or rejected by the other. So, any status can - after negotiation - lead to change or even termination of the agreement.

## ‘Transaction’ as transfer of possession or ‘synaction’ as collaboration

Van Reijswoud and Dietz discovered the synaction protocol as 'transaction pattern' at the end of the 20th century in the context of the design of ICT- systems for companies. They have not proposed application in social sciences in a broader sense.

My proposal to apply the pattern generically as smallest viable social entity named 'synaction' requires thorough reflection of many reservations. To apply this discovery as an analytical tool in humanities and social sciences, and thus to the world and the history of humanity, we must rid it of the special local and historical features of the context of its discovery. I can only give an impetus to this in this letter, which is of course also colored by my own local and historical limitations. I hope for your critical additions and improvements. Therefore, I ask every reader of this open letter to context-critically elaborate and reevaluate this discovery, and my impetus for its historical positioning.

The 'transaction pattern' presupposes transfer or alienation and appropriation of a possession, result or performance by the executing provider to the initiating acquirer. We are born in and live with a body that temporarily and spatially occupies a place and facilities (affordances) of the context<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, from our origin, as a species and individually, we use the transaction pattern to make and fulfill agreements together about which place we get, even in the commons. Here also lies the basis for 'social autopoiesis', which cannot be understood without awareness of this pattern as the smallest social system and elementary entity of human society.

At the same time, living and working of people together i.e., attuned to each other, obviously involves much more than the transfer or alienation and appropriation of possessions<sup>12</sup>. Even in capitalism, a variable, but large part of human coexistence and work proceeds without 'transactions' in which one does something for another and hands over that achievement to the other. After all, people change their existence in countless actions together, spontaneously attuning, purely and only on their own initiative and for their own pleasure such as in eating and drinking together; making music; dancing and chatting. Even on work floors, people coordinate their movements, to realize results together, which they alone would not be able to achieve, because 'many hands make light work', without one handing over property to another. Who finally appropriate those results, based on ownership relationships, is another matter.

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<sup>10</sup> Van Reijswoud worked out that consultation in his dissertation in terms of Habermas as 'discussion' and 'discourse'.

<sup>11</sup> The framework of this letter is far too short for further elaboration of issues about possession of our body (such as in surgery, punishment, or slavery) and the space that someone 'has' with it; occupies and uses.

<sup>12</sup> H. de Soto, <het Mysterie van het Kapitaal> eigendom en de overdracht ervan zijn niet vastgelegd in het menselijk DNA, maar in juridische systemen van eigendom en de registratie ervan.

To replace the aspect of 'transfer' in the prefix 'trans' with 'doing together', I derived the term 'synaction' from Greek (syn) and Latin (actio) to denote 'elementary collaboration' as the smallest social system. With the term 'synaction' for the basis, tool and building block of society, I choose a new word, to avoid confusion with existing more ambiguous terms, such as: cooperation which can consist of multiple synactions, and transaction which involves not only transfer of possession, but is also loaded with other meanings in other contexts. Thus, we must untangle the possible confusion that may arise here to avoid misunderstandings. It concerns successively: a. economic, b. psychological and c. data-'transactions'.

- a. In economy, the term 'transaction' is used for an exchange that includes at least two of the transactions referred to here: one about a primary performance and the second about a counter performance in a payment transaction. Those exchanged transactions are connected by an exchange synaction or quittance, in which and with which both performances are counted, measured, and settled. With that synaction, they mutually 'quitter' their debts.
- b. 'Transactional analysis' is a school in psychology that uses the term 'transaction' for an exchange between two people of communicative expressions, which are called 'strokes'. Those 'strokes' can but do not have to be 'speech acts' about a performance to be delivered by one to the other, such as the transaction referred to in this argument.
- c. A 'transaction' in a database is a coherent set of mutations of data that are first recorded one after the other (but for the time being), and only then when the whole set of mutations is completed, all are agreed and effected at the same time. There is no association with the transactions referred to here.

Transactions in the sense of transferring possession are just a subset of synactions. Not all synactions are transactions, but all transactions are synactions.

In synactions both actors are and remain undiminished and equally liable for the realized change, while in transactions liabilities for the result or product and its realization or production are divided between acquirer and provider.

Animals also arrange the place with each other, which they occupy, and play with each other. But only people make it explicit, in speech acts. Using them, they not just assert the validity of their claim, but even take accountability for it. Too much and too often philosophy, humanities and social sciences have looked blind at rationality and freedom, forgetting, or hiding accountability at the other side of the same coin.

### Explicit or not: changes without agreeing explicitly.

In his thesis<sup>13</sup> Van Reijswoud disregards non-verbal communication for coordination of collaboration. After all, ICT requires explicit text for a-synchronous and online collaboration.

But where people work together in one workplace, words are often superfluous and where silence is a must as during a hunt, non-verbal communication is required.

The protocol is so common, and everyone follows it so unconsciously skillfully that it can usually remain largely unspoken. Synaction statuses then remain implicit and are only explicitly discussed afterwards if something went wrong during the transactions. After such a discussion, a misunderstanding or conflict is either settled with a new explicit agreement or terminated.

And the more implicit, the better the collaboration; in music, dance, sports, play, eroticism, and love, making every detail explicit would hinder good collaboration. But even improvisations are based on an often implicit, only audible, or tangible agreement about a boundary, within which participants improvise. That's why it's so common, ... and of course we overlook it. We already know with half a word that we dance a waltz and not a tango or play in C and not in B-moll.

And... implicitly, much more is assumed than is explicitly pronounced. This is evident in automation, even if only in conventions such as language choice, numbering systems, date-time formats, and many others.

### Agreement or consent

The 'transaction pattern' of Van Reijswoud and Dietz presupposes that the actors autonomously, equally, and explicitly agree to the course and outcome of a business transaction, in freedom and based on

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<sup>13</sup> V.E. van Reijswoud, The Structure of Business Communication: Theory Model and Application. Delft, 1996. H2§1 pg20



rational arguments. That presumption is based on the abstract 'ideal conversation situation' that Habermas made up between his ears. But in everyday reality, real actors are of course entangled in countless types of dependences, inequalities, coercive circumstances, confusion, and power(lessness). That is why we must assume that in real synactions 'consent' is the decisive factor. That means that synaction statuses are often achieved after actors give up their remaining reservations about it because they 'can live with it'<sup>14</sup>. And just because of wage dependency, this applies pre-eminently in business hierarchies.

## Existing applications

Daily, we all apply the synaction protocol or transaction pattern. If I agree with you to meet you today in a week at 11:11 PM under the clock at Time Square, NYC, we can fulfill that appointment by using extremely intertwined and complex networks of synactions: chained agreements, which countless people make and fulfill. And those are not only economic transactions, in which against each performance there is a measuring, counting and settlement with money in a payment transaction, but also countless synactions of all the actors in those economic transactions with their social context such as their children, neighbors, family and friends etc. If something falters in one of those many chains of accountabilities, it could affect the entire network and make our agreement fail. The fact that all of that usually goes well is actually amazing. Actors in those chains apparently do not consciously realize those complex dependencies but improvise to repair the hiccups just to restore their mutual trust. If they would stop with that, everything freezes like in a punctuality action.

Just like in jazz, all improvisation in human collaboration requires a basic pattern: the synaction protocol. Human collaboration, even improvised, is therefore not an inextricably seamless continuous 'process' because 'everything always moves', but also a 'procedural' 'system', which consists of separate, interconnected, and dissectible subsystems (synactions), which people not only distinguish and delimit theoretically from each other, but also practically round off and test for completeness: because justified collaboration is only justified, after it is justified.

A large part of laws and regulations are about (in)completeness of transactions, how they arise and can then be tied off. Think of unfulfilled promises (to default), promises without request (threats), unsolicited deliveries (damage), unpromised acquisitions ('finds', theft, fraud, etc.).

In the Dutch Land- Road and Water Engineering [VISI](#), based on the transaction pattern, is applied as a national standard for project communication between governmental clients and (sub)contractors. An [e-mail application](#), organizes email boxes according to the transaction pattern.

As a Business Information Architect, for 30 years, using the transaction pattern, I made hundreds of sketches and dozens of models of companies and business chains based on analysis of many thousands of pages of text and interviews. I wouldn't be surprised if AI, as software functionality based on pattern recognition from big data, takes over such tasks in the coming years.

## Who benefits from this discovery.

The concept of 'synaction' refers to each concrete individually distinguishable coordinated collaboration, in which people realize a social fact together and at the same time distinguish themselves from each other by recognizing each other as individuals and making a difference for each other, thereby confirming, and strengthening their mutual ties and thus their commonality.

This letter draws the awareness of synactions, as elementary units of collaboration, from the epistemological blind spot of the social sciences<sup>15</sup>. Below I point out some issues that can be solved with it, but once you get it too, you can and will also discover countless more.

Every toddler in his synactions already practically solves all the dualistic dichotomies, which continue to cost headaches to countless study scholars<sup>16</sup>, until they finally get it, such as: structure-agency,

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<sup>14</sup> Think of Hegels' servant, who gives in to the lord to save his life, and of the [Sociocratic Method](#)

<sup>15</sup> NB: This is not ontology. Outside the abstractions between the ears of thinkers, all people, daily, realize their existence.

In the same way, those thinkers themselves prove the absurdity of every ontological question and doctrine.

<sup>16</sup> Kafka's parable of the top (der Kreisel) illustrates this.

materialism-idealism, conflict-consensus, theory-practice, collective-individual, objectivism-subjectivism, determinism-voluntarism, causes-reasons. And already from kindergarten, children could also learn to consciously recognize and apply the synaction protocol as their handle on the world.

## Sociology

Only recently I found an almost unnoticed but interesting [dissertation](#) in this regard, in which Thomas Whalen describes how Dewey and Bentley in the middle of last century already tried to avoid dichotomies with 'negotiations/transactions'. The much more famous Giddens, Bourdieu, Habermas, Bhaskar, and Latour also made more recent attempts, but like Dewey and Bentley, they continued to consider human operations only functional, as blackbox and from the outside. They will only be able to scientifically penetrate in the regularities of the coherence of human operations if they begin to understand them in the context of synactions as a whitebox, and if they learn to delineate, dissect, understand, influence, and change synactions by dissecting their components, operation, and construction.

Synactions provide new clues for insights into power(lessness), dependence, and coercion in relation to roles, transaction statuses, and validity claims and tests as parts of synactions.

The abstract 'ideal conversation situation' between Habermas' ears exists in almost no practical, real synaction. To make and comply with agreements, actors in all those synactions still must tolerate, defy, or overcome countless forms of power(lessness) and dependencies. This synaction theory challenges the humanities and social sciences to concretely link theories about power(lessness) and differences in them with concrete (statuses in) synactions. That is a very extensive and complex issue, which I cannot possibly work out here.

In Sociology 'commons' is usually associated with a commonly used and cared for or unkept area, space, or natural service, such as air or (rain)water. But without collaboration in the form of synactions spaces or areas cannot be commons. Even amongst neighbors, the collaboration itself is so normally at hand, ubiquitous, pervasive, and obvious that it is no longer noticed as the common foundation and condition of existence for all commons. Human beings use synactions unnoticed, like fish use water: an open door in a blind spot. But without that collaboration by the synaction protocol there is no commons. That synaction protocol is the common of commons and has the special feature that, like grammar, it is not and cannot be reified, and therefore it cannot be taken, expropriated, or alienated, in contrast to all those other reified commons and their products.

## Change science.

The synaction protocol explains how people, collaborating, relate to each other and to the world. Once you get it, the astonishment increases, how politicians, social scientists and workers, activists, organizational experts, change experts, ICT-ers, project and change managers could pretend to be able to *professionally* influence, change and improve human operations, without explicitly and transparently handling this synaction protocol; without being able to delineate and distinguish one from the other synaction; without being able to distinguish social actions (as speech acts in synactions) from each other and from other operations; without being able to relate them to each other and without being able to distinguish parts, arrangement, coherence and structure of a synaction, or their mechanism.

## Language(development)

Language (development) theories have investigated all kinds of assumptions as a basis for the emergence of language (skills), but the synaction protocol of course remained a blind spot for them as well.

As a child, every person unconsciously learns to competently make, comply with, and fulfill agreements, and to discuss afterwards whether those rules were applied correctly. At the same time, in synactions, people learn to distinguish themselves as individuals from the other and from all other beings and things and then discuss that: 'I' asked 'you' to realize change in/to 'him/her/them'. Do they this way unconsciously learn grammatical distinctions between and the application of grammatical notions as a subject, predicate, direct object, pronouns, verbs?

## Philosophy

Dietz broadly defended the transaction pattern on the basis of existing theories and philosophies. As an astronomer defending heliocentrism with geocentric theories.

Much more interesting seems to me to investigate the *consequences* of the discovery of the transaction pattern *for those existing theories and philosophy*. Can the discovered synaction protocol serve as a 'syn-active' or 'synergetic' philosophy, as a basis for humanities, epistemology, morality and linguistics? Or do traditional philosophical answers to dualistic questions dissolve in this practical discovery, as they often did after scientific discoveries? Some have sought an end to the philosophical dichotomies, such as Marxists, who then got lost in philosophy about 'Praxis'. And Dewey and Bentley alluded to it, as Thomas Whalen described in his dissertation.

## Conclusion

Despite secularization, social sciences limited their modernization to methods, following the example of the natural sciences. They lacked a valid and shared concept of the proper character of their studied subject based on an elementary entity - such as the cell in biology, or the atom in chemistry – fragmenting social sciences into 'theoretical-methodical pluralism' of 'schools' or 'movements'.

This letter introduced the discovery by Van Reijswoud and Dietz as a Copernican turn for social ontology. It concerns the construction and operation of the 'transaction pattern' in every making and keeping an agreement as the structural and functional unit of society.

Every human being always applied this pattern skillfully but unconsciously as our handle to the world. But (ontology of) social sciences have, at best, woven their theories tightly around it. By consciously using this open door in our blind spot, we might all enter modernity together.

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