CAN SOCIAL COMPLEXITY THEORY HELP WHEN POLITICAL ARGUMENTS TURN STRIDENT?
RESEARCH SPONSORS
“Knowledge is not a matter of getting reality right, ... but rather a matter of acquiring habits of action for coping with reality”

Richard Rorty
This Room Is Equipped With Edison Electric Light.

Do not attempt to light with match. Simply turn key on wall by the door.

The use of Electricity for lighting is in no way harmful to health, nor does it affect the soundness of sleep.
"There aren’t any icons to click. It’s a chalk board."
Everything should be made as simple as possible.

... But not simpler.

Albert Einstein
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

cognitive systems have an inside and outside
organisms map external objects to internal state
nervous system stores information
truth exists in the world
intelligence resides in manipulation of information

contrasted with

representation
memory
reality
epistemology

CYBERNETICS

cognitive systems are autonomous
organisms map through an environment back onto themselves
nervous system reproduces adaptive relationships
social agreement is primary objectivity
intelligence resides in observed conversations
This relationship is going nowhere until you stop running away from your problems!!!
EXAMPLE ISSUES OF POLITICAL STRIDENCY

- abortion
- immigration
- flat tax
- gay marriage
- gun control
- the right of public workers to unionize
- legalization of marijuana
- does God exist
- SOPA
- taxing the 1%
Hypothesis: The stridency problem may be a direct result of our reliance on label/category methods of explanation. These explanatory methods are efficient reductive tools – but that efficient reduction has come at a price.

Approach: The study of complex systems tends to offset the use of reduction with an equally powerful force: emergence. Emergence is the recognition of new attributes of organization by a shift in levels (person to family, family to group, group to town etc.). Emergence techniques have rarely been applied to political debate. This proposal aims to change that.
SOCIAL COMPLEXITY THEORY OFTEN SUFFERS FROM IMPREGNABLE VOCABULARY

Here We Will Attempt to use “More Approachable” Words
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Ascribed Coherence</th>
<th>Emergent Coherence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reaction to “Many”</td>
<td>Complicated - unfold</td>
<td>Complex - observe weave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See Pattern</td>
<td>Provide a Label</td>
<td>Observe Affordance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjacent Possibles</td>
<td>Predict</td>
<td>Explore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Signals</td>
<td>Reject as Noise</td>
<td>Investigate for Resonance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Signals</td>
<td>Frame/ Bracket</td>
<td>Dialogue Amongst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple tasks/ roles</td>
<td>Compartmentalize/deny</td>
<td>Awareness of active role playing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role in a Conversation</td>
<td>Speak</td>
<td>Listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone in Conversation</td>
<td>State Facts</td>
<td>Ask Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus of Efforts</td>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>Resilience, Creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiration</td>
<td>Machine</td>
<td>Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Speech Act</td>
<td>Monologue</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Through the context in which we find ourselves, the actions we take, the observations we make about those actions, and the ideas about the observation/action cycle which we use to reference it to ourselves and others.
In Social Complexity Theory, Context is viewed as both an enabler and a constraint.
Our actions are constrained by the context in which we operate and the learning cycle we occupy regarding prior actions.
Our observations are in a feedback loop with our actions: that feedback loop is in its own feedback loops with both the ideations we use for reference and the context in which we find ourselves.
Ideations can be representations (labels, categories) or compressions (narrative models)
Ideations can be determinate or not; Observations: Clear or Ambiguous; Actions: Certain or Not (when one is unwilling to act, actions are uncertain)
Ideations can be determinate or not; Observations: Clear or Ambiguous; Actions: Certain or Not
Ideations can be determinate or not; Observations: Clear or Ambiguous; Actions: Certain or Not
Ideations can be determinate or not; Observations: Clear or Ambiguous; Actions: Certain or Not
Ideations can be determinate or not; Observations: Clear or Ambiguous; Actions: Certain or Not
Single accounts, ascribed labels, adherence to categories and to coding, are all in accordance with the acceptance of context and possibilities for action as being pre-given and unchangeable.
SO WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THERE ARE MULTIPLE CLAIMED REPRESENTATIONS?

Determinate Representation #1

Determinate Representation #2

Determinate Representation #3

Ambiguous/Multiple Observations

Act as if Certain

Context
MULTIPLE CLAIMED REPRESENTATIONS -
OPTION 1: CODE FOR CONTEXT

IF Context = A then Representation #1; B then #2, C then #3
MULTIPLE CLAIMED REPRESENTATIONS -
OPTION 2: DECLARE OBSERVATIONS TO BE CLEAR

If the Observations are Unambiguous then CODE for Observations just as One could Code for Context
MULTIPLE CLAIMED REPRESENTATIONS –
OPTION 3: IGNORE CONTEXT PROCLAIM IDEOLOGY

Determinate Representation #1

Determinate Representation #2

Determinate Representation #3

Ambiguous/Multiple Observations

Act as if Certain

Context

Ideology will Dictate which Representation Governs
Political Stridency is often the product of Option 3

Ideology will Dictate which Representation Governs
BUT THE STRIDENT OPPONENTS WILL ARGUE AS IF OPTIONS 1 OR 2 GOVERNED

The Representation Will Dictate Observations and “attended to” Context
BUT THE STRIDENT OPPONENTS WILL ARGUE AS IF OPTIONS 1 OR 2 GOVERNED

The Representation Will Dictate Observations and “attended to” Context
BUT THE STRIDENT OPPONENTS WILL ARGUE AS IF OPTIONS 1 OR 2 GOVERNED

The Representation Will Dictate Observations and “attended to” Context
SO WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

WHEN PROCLAIMED REPRESENTATIONS CONFLICT?
TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION APPROACHES RECOGNIZE THE PROBLEM
THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH IS TO SEARCH FOR COMMONALITIES

In this figure commonalities are shown as “C”
Boundary objects are objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites. They are weakly structured in common use, and become strongly structured in individual-site use. They may be abstract or concrete. They have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation. The creation and management of boundary objects is key in developing and maintaining coherence across intersecting social worlds. (Star & Griesemer, 1989)
THE THEORY IS THAT AS THE BOUNDARY OBJECTS ARE IDENTIFIED AND EXPANDED CONFLICT WILL DECREASE
I know she likes me, but she’s playing hard to get.
BUT THE COGNITIVE DISSONANCE THEORIES OF FESTINGER AND MORI SUGGEST OTHERWISE
BUT THE COGNITIVE DISSONANCE THEORIES OF FESTINGER AND MORI SUGGEST OTHERWISE
SIMILARITY ABOVE A GIVEN POINT CAN TRIGGER DISSONANCE
Through the context in which we find ourselves, the actions we take, the observations we make about those actions, and the ideas about the observation/action cycle which we use to reference it to ourselves and others.
Conflicts which raise identity questions are met with "defenses"
CONFLICTS WHICH RAISE IDENTITY QUESTIONS ARE MET WITH “DEFENSES”
The presence or absence of dissonance in some particular content area will have important effects on the degree of information seeking and on the selectivity of such information seeking. If dissonance exists between two cognitive elements or between two clusters of cognitive elements, this dissonance may be reduced, as has been stated previously, by adding new cognitive elements which produce new consonant relationships. One would then expect that in the presence of dissonance, one would observe the seeking out of information which might reduce the existing dissonance.

(Festinger, 1957)
"We are ruined by our own biases. When making decisions, we see what we want, ignore probabilities, and minimize risks that uproot our hopes."

By making assumptions (and in so doing restricting ourselves to a set of labels and a model) we predetermine what might be learned, which will limit the options that appear to be open to us.

"We often fail to allow for the possibility that evidence that should be critical to our judgment is missing. What we see is all there is." (Kahneman, 2011)
 WHICH IS A STRATEGY WE WELL RECOGNIZE

Determinate Representation #1

Clear Unambiguous Observations

Act as if Certain

Context
And in a complex world, degrees of freedom are needed to deal with emergence. e.g. Ross Ashby’s Law of Requisite Variety
WHICH VIOLATES REQUISITE VARIETY

The Law of Requisite Variety: A control system must have as many possible states as the system it wants to control.
THUS: INCREASING ATTENTION TO “BOUNDARY OBJECTS” MAY BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE
INSTEAD WE NEED NARRATIVE
BUT WHAT NARRATIVE?

Political Position #1

Political Position #2

Conflict

Issue at Hand

Political Position #3
SOCIAL COMPLEXITY THEORY:
Narratives are stories which allow the listener to place him/her self into the story and which allow for answers to questions of “what if”
The key element is the situated production of understanding: through narration… They do not know where they are going to find the information they need to understand and solve .... In their search for inspiration, they tell stories. (Orr, 1990)

The context set out by the storyteller will conjure up a new set of "related ideas" in the minds of each listener. Meaning emerges from the combination of what the storyteller supplies and what the listener's mind now adds. Stories suggest new images, combinations of old and new ideas, and allow the listener to place him/herself in a simulacrum of related action. (Letiche & Lissack, 2012)

What is necessary? The answer is, something that preserves plausibility and coherence, something that is reasonable and memorable, something that embodies past experience and expectations, something which resonates with other people, something that can be constructed retrospectively but also can be used prospectively, something that captures both feeling and thought, .... In short, what is necessary in sense making is a good story. (Weick, 1995)
SOCIAL COMPLEXITY THEORY:
We Need to Conduct Experiments and Test This Theory
1. Engage protagonists in a “Buberian Dialogue.” The technique calls for two discussants, a moderator and an audience. The discussants each say their initial piece. It is the role of the audience to listen for what the two discussants have said or implied which might be in common. The audience is called upon to inform the discussants of these commonalities (which the moderator captures on a white board) and then for the discussion to turn to the revealed items. This occurs through three or more rounds.

2. By starting with explicit recognition of the Uncanny Valley, it is hoped that the use of many outside listeners (bounded crowdsourcing) will allow the articulation of relevant variables.

3. Then (as with some applications of Soft Systems) call on method experts (not potentially biased or predisposed subject experts) to study the revealed commonalities and develop a mechanism based “formal model” on which to craft narratives.

4. The aim is for a transformational experience. There is no effort to reach consensus or conclusion. Rather, the goal is for a transformation to take place in how the discussants view each other in the context of the debate. If a more human based respect emerges, the technique can be viewed as successful.
ISSUES OF POLITICAL STRIDENCY TO RUN THE EXPERIMENTS ON:

- abortion
- immigration
- flat tax
- gay marriage
- gun control
- the right of public workers to unionize
- legalization of marijuana
- does God exist
- SOPA
- taxing the 1%
OUTCOME NARRATIVE

New Narrative

Political Position #1

Conflict

Political Position #2

Issue at Hand

Political Position #3
Our ultimate device for dealing with complexity and the other is narrative. We use narrative to rise above the local constraints of models. A narrative is not about the reality of a situation. Rather, the point of a story is to lay out in the open what the narrator suggests is important. Narratives are not about being objective, but are instead displays of subjectivity. A narrative is the representation of a compression, which is integrated at a higher level of analysis. Powerful narratives, like great pieces of music, feel as if they were inevitable when they are over, and we seem to agree on that. But note, even in a compelling story, the next line cannot be predicted. It is that feeling of inevitability that endows the great story with its ability to generate commensurate experience amongst independent listeners.

(Zellmer, Allen, & Kesseboehmer, 2007)
SOCIAL COMPLEXITY THEORY ALTERNATIVE:
Embrace the Certainty/Ambiguity Dissonance of Stridency through Narrative
“WHAT IF NARRATIVES”
Derived from Crowd Sourced Observed Commonalities To Climb the Discourse Out of the Uncanny Valley
Martin Buber – Buberian Dialogue
Generating The Crowd Sourced Observed Commonalities
Generating The Crowd Sourced Observed Commonalities
NEW NARRATIVES
MORE CONSTRUCTIVE DISCOURSE
REFERENCES

• Ashby, W. (1956) "Cybernetics and Requisite Variety"
• Kahneman, D. (2011). Thinking Fast and Slow
• Letiche, Lissack & Schultz (2012). Coherence in the Midst of Complexity
• Mori, M (1970). Bukimi no tani The uncanny valley
• Moscovici, S (2000). Social Representations