

we look at the phenomenon of suicide beyond the narrow context that Durkheim examined, for example, young rural women in modern China, we see that there are numerous examples of both fatalistic and altruistic suicides. The main difficulty with the concepts of fatalistic and altruistic suicide as Durkheim constructed them, Davies and Neal contend, is that the social tendency toward either will vary among groups with similar levels of regulation or integration depending on factors that lie outside Durkheim's original model. Their argument implies that, by bringing some of these additional variables to bear on analyses of suicide rates, opportunities for modernizing Durkheim's arguments remain.

A second contribution of the book is that several of the chapters cover less common themes in debates about *Le Suicide*. One example is Mike Gane's chapter on the puzzle of Durkheim's methodology as applied to the problem of suicide, particularly in how it stands relative to the precepts he set out in *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (1895), published two years earlier. Gane suggests that Durkheim himself may have unintentionally set up a conundrum by reversing the order of analysis prescribed in *The Rules*. Instead of beginning with observation and then seeking to determine cause or causes, Durkheim began with a set of causes (extremes of integration and regulation) and from these deduced forms of suicide. Somewhat surprisingly, Gane concludes that, rather than being a fatal flaw of either *Le Suicide* or Durkheim's sociology, the reversal represents Durkheim's conception of the inventive, flexible, undogmatic role of methodology" (p. 3). Whether by accident or design, perhaps it is his lack of dogmatic application that has hampered our ability to draw a singular conclusion about the nature of Durkheim's sociology.

The final chapter, though it does not address a theme in the debates on *Le Suicide*, presents interesting commentary by several of the authors on reasons for and methods of teaching *Le Suicide* to undergraduate and graduate students. In courses such as introductory sociology, social theory, and research methods classes, the first-hand observations provide a more informal opportunity for the authors to describe the essentials of why they link Durkheim in general and *Le Suicide* in

particular continue to have appeal, relevance, and resonance for students today.

Ultimately, this collection of essays will provide little closure for those who want a definitive declaration as to whether Durkheim was right or wrong about the impact of social integration and regulation, marriage, family, and religion on suicide rates. The book's relevance for a broader sociological audience is somewhat limited by occasionally esoteric themes as well as the uneven quality of writing across the chapters. For those who are already intrigued by the larger debates about *Le Suicide*, however, the book provides an opportunity to consider some of the less common paths of inquiry and discussion.

### Reference

Durkheim, Emile. [1895] 1938. *The Rules of the Sociological Method*. New York: Free Press.

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*Social Theory and Communication Technology*, by Terje Rasmussen. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000. 221 pp. \$69.95 cloth. ISBN: 0-7547-1448-4.

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Despite its unassuming title, *Social Theory and Communication Technology* is an ambitious book. It brings major insights from contemporary social theory, particularly those of Anthony Giddens and Jürgen Habermas, to bear on the social relationships and contexts associated with the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The author builds on overviews of this previous work to propose a theory that incorporates social action and context. He also discusses its implications in two key arenas of contemporary society that are widely thought to have been fundamentally affected by the spread of ICTs: the shifting boundaries between the public and private sphere, and the changing nature of social differentiation and integration.

Like many other current social theorists, Terje Rasmussen seeks to build a balanced social theory that accounts for both micro and macro perspectives, social structure and individual action, social and technological determinism, and how social institutions are "reproduced and transformed" (p. 13; empha-

sis in the original). Following the lead of Giddens, Bourdieu, and Latour, he attempts to situate communication technologies (which he contrasts with traditional mass media) within a structure/agency framework, where—as he quotes Giddens—“structure is the medium and outcome of action” (p. 38). Rasmussen argues that such a framework is necessary: “Communication technologies are increasingly located strategically in the *terrain vague* between action and language, between the material and the symbolic, between the private and public spheres, and historically, perhaps even between industrial capitalism and its transcendence” (pp. 7–8).

Generally, the author’s strategy is to begin with detailed expositions of social theories with the greatest pertinence to ICTs, notably, Giddens’ structuration theory, Habermas’ theories of communicative action and the public sphere, and Calhoun’s theories of indirect social relations. Rasmussen critiques their weaknesses and adapts key concepts into a new framework for theorizing the influence of communication technologies in society. Rasmussen’s overviews are interesting and instructive, though he tends to overlook related work by others, for example, Marshall Scott Poole’s development of “adaptive structuration,” based in studies of decision support systems.

Chapters 4 and 5 move on to the two main aspects of Rasmussen’s own theory—social action and social context. At the risk of oversimplification, the main outline is that three main forms of social action are involved in the use of media technologies: practical action, reflexive action, and communicative action. Each of these generates a corresponding form of “meaning-generating processes,” operation, information, and communication. Because communication technologies are bi- or multidirectional and involve interpersonal interaction, they entail all three types of action and meaning-generating processes. On the other hand, Rasmussen argues, mass media involve only practical action (and operation) and reflexive action (and the creation of information). Only the use of communication technologies allows people to “translate knowledge into information *and* communication in time and space” (p. 111; emphasis added).

Rasmussen then frames this account of action within social context. Unlike other ana-

lysts who claim that mediation “decontextualizes” communication, he argues that in fact communication technologies help produce and reproduce social context and allow people to recontextualize their communication in a variety of ways. (He explores the concepts of “disembedding” and “reembedding” more fully in the chapter on the public and private spheres). Context takes three forms: locale (the material, physical surroundings or conditions of action); dual contexts (the “here and there” sense generated by conventional mass media); and virtual contexts (which transcend both locales and dual contexts to mediate and merge agents’ meanings). Virtual contexts may eventually “tie agents into groups with certain features” (p. 136). Crucially, and echoing Harrison White’s CATNET framework, Rasmussen notes that groups that evolve in virtual contexts through the use of communication technologies are tied by virtue of their patterns or networks of shared relations. Collectivities based on the use of mass media, in contrast, tend to be associated or tied by virtue of their shared traits or categories.

A major strength of the book is its focus on social differentiation and integration, which have tended to be overlooked by most scholars exploring the social consequences of ICTs. Because of their association with functionalist social theory, differentiation and integration have suffered a similar fall from conceptual grace in recent decades, despite the continuing concerns about the implications of ICTs for social solidarity and community voiced by observers from a range of disciplines (e.g., Cass Sunstein, Robert Putnam, Alain Touraine, Manuel Castells). Rasmussen’s typology of social integration brings the issue to center stage for new media research and deserves a broad audience.

There are a few problems as well, for example, Rasmussen’s tendency to draw a bright, clear line between communication channels on the basis of whether they support content delivery or interpersonal interaction. Here, some uses of the Internet, such as database searching or accessing World Wide Web pages, are associated more with “mass” media-type content delivery processes, while email and chat are cast as “dialogic” and therefore more properly called “communication technology.” This approach implies that systems like the telephone, cable, or satellites are somehow content-neutral and thus do not

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have the cultural importance of movies, books, television, or recorded music, for example. But one of the most challenging characteristics of new media systems is precisely that they cloud the boundaries between conversation, information seeking and retrieval, and entertainment, for example. Any or all of these can be carried on at once, via the same channels, which poses a problem for any theory that relies on clear-cut distinctions between one-way and n-way channels. Certainly, these differences are contested today, for example as a handful of major entertainment and media firms struggle to derail socio-technical innovations like peer-to-peer networks, and to extend traditional intellectual property claims beyond any historical or practical precedent, in order to preserve their traditional markets and business methods.

Rasmussen concludes the book with a discussion of social integration and proposes that in social contexts characterized by the extensive use of ICTs, it is no longer possible to distinguish clearly between direct, face-to-face interaction as the primary mechanism of social integration, and mediated, indirect interaction as the mechanism of system integration. Instead, and building on Craig Calhoun's typology of indirect social relations, Rasmussen suggests that social integration can take four forms—unmediated, dialogical, hermeneutic, and panoptic—depending on whether communication is mediated or unmediated, and whether it is interpersonal or not.

On the whole, the book succeeds in identifying gaps in major social theories and proposing new ways of thinking about action and context that do not treat new media use as an exceptional or extraordinary form of communication. Rather, Rasmussen argues persuasively that mass media and communication technologies—indeed mediated and unmediated communication—must be theorized together as part of the whole fabric of routine everyday life and practice.

Finally, as a last note, the book would have benefited from some attention to copyediting and better production. Every page contains typographical and minor grammatical errors, and the typesetting and page compositions are sloppy and inconsistent. Rasmussen has written a thoughtful and challenging book, and it deserved a more careful publisher.

## METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

*Fieldwork Dilemmas: Anthropologists in Postsocialist States*, edited by **Hermine G. De Soto** and **Nora Dudwick**. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000. 250 pp. \$55.00 cloth. ISBN: 0-299-16370-9. \$22.95 paper. ISBN: 0-299-16374-1.

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It is hardly astonishing that research in and on socialist European states took a right turn, given the transformations around 1990. Previous to that time, political constraints precluded most true ethnography. After that time, however, ethnography was scarcely unfettered, being constrained from above by layers of bureaucracy and laterally by waves of nostalgia, suspicion, resentment, and fear, which presented unique challenges for outsiders and insiders alike. *Fieldwork Dilemmas* amounts to an ethnology, a cross-cultural comparison, of 10 recent ethnographic enterprises along the eastern edges of Europe, specifically in Armenia, Bulgaria, Eastern Germany, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Russia, Serbia, and Uzbekistan. These chapters fall into three categories: Part One, fieldwork in disintegrating and reintegrating nations and states; Part Two, fieldworkers in the postsocialist field; and Part Three, negotiating personal relationships in the postsocialist field.

In Part One, Nora Dudwick deals with the reconstruction of Armenian identity in a crucible of violence, even war. In juxtaposing foreign and native-born ethnographers, she suggests that the latter do not necessarily have an advantage, especially given the delicate accommodations that must be made between the personal, the professional, and the pragmatic. K.S. Brown also interrogates a new nationalism, pointing out antagonistic views of ethnic origins and authenticity in Macedonia. Brown suggests that Macedonian culture may be performed self-consciously as much as practiced unconsciously, and notes that pit-