

# Cultural evolution models and the extended synthesis

## Symbiogenesis and punctuated equilibria theory in the study of cultural transmission

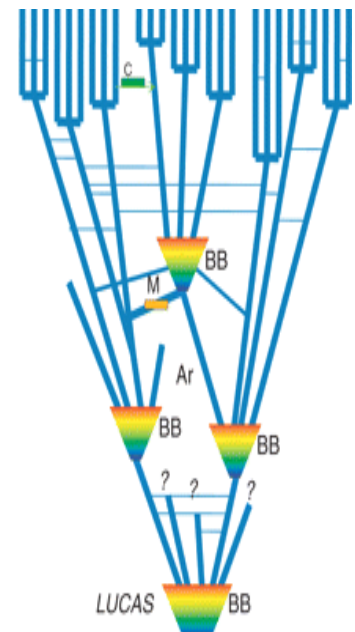
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Thursday, May 10, 12:00pm  
Room U6/367

### Abstract

Reticulate evolution, symbiogenesis and punctuated equilibria theory are fast-rising areas of research in evolutionary biology that are part of what is today sometimes called the “Evolutionary Extended Synthesis”. These theories have major consequences for how we study and define the evolution of life as well as how we depict the tree of life. From an evolutionary epistemological point of view, they also have possible applications in studies on human culture. Scholars who are currently engaged in “evolutionizing” the sociocultural sciences, however, tend to work from within selectionist frameworks. These approaches definitely have their merits, but the application of selectionist theory to sociocultural phenomena has also brought to light that horizontal cultural transmission processes, and fast cultural evolutionary processes prove to be quite difficult to model from within a selectionist framework. I will focus on how biological horizontal evolutionary theories can provide the theoretical framework and methodological toolkit to model horizontal cultural evolution processes; and how punctuated equilibria and drift theory can be implemented in the sociocultural domain.



The seminar is part of the CISEPS project “**The diffusion of cultural traits**”, aiming to trigger interdisciplinary debates, emphasizing common problems and peculiarities among economics, philosophy, anthropology, geography, history, biology and many more fields. Thinking in terms of cultural traits – i.e., characters depending in some way on social learning – doesn’t imply exhaustion of cultural processes; rather, it means thinking critically to scientific models and metaphors for studying culture.

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