26 Constructing the Public Good: Social Movements and Cultural Resources

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Introduction

Consider the following statements:

What we can work for...is a nation where once again the Judeo-Christian ethic is the foundation for our politics, our judicial system, and our public morality; a nation not floating in the uncertain sea of humanism, but a country whose unmoving bedrock is Higher Laws. (Randall Terry, founder of Operation Rescue, 1988: 178)

[W]e take the position that the decision to bear a child...is a private decision – an ethical private decision – and the state has no [legitimate] interest in regulating it. [I]f your beliefs are contrary to abortion, then of course you can decide not to have an abortion. (pro-choice activist quoted in Luker 1984: 184)

"Life" includes the whole biosphere with its 30 million or so species. Only those who subscribe to a biocentric world view are entitled to call themselves a "right to life" movement...What is objectionable is the pronatalist spin put on...human reproduction, with no mention of the problems caused by too many people and by unwanted children. (R. Wills Flowers, *The EarthFirst! Reader* 1991: 145)

These quotes are examples of political claims related to a particular public political issue, legalized abortion. Each claim has clear policy implications, familiar to those who have followed the issue. However, each claim is also undergirded by a particular notion of how life would be ordered in an ideal society. The claims are justified on these visions of the good society; they claim to speak to and for the "public good."

But the public good in each example is clearly different. The good society referred to by these different perspectives rests on different assumptions about societal order, the individual-community relationship, and human nature. Everyone is in favor of the public good, but just what constitutes that public good – or more accurately, *whose* public good is to be promoted – is a matter of political contention. The "good society," so often advocated by activists and scholars alike, is a stirring symbol of consensus, but its actual meaning is "essentially contested."

Rhetoric of the public good is used by members of the political establishment and challenger movements alike in the jockeying for political position. In the contemporary U.S. political climate, the charge of representing "special interests" is commonly hurled at political opponents (see Madsen 1991) – "we" represent the public good while "they" represent particularistic special interests. Challenger social movements are particularly vulnerable to such portrayals, as they lack the status quo's

symbols of legitimacy – symbols expressly designed to associate establishment members with the idea of the "whole." Movements thus have an acute need for a plausible "public good" rhetoric.

This essay uses a particular substantive example – the rhetorical construction of the public good – to illustrate a theoretical point: the need to take culture and ideology seriously when studying social movements. Movement scholarship has begun to complement studies of resource mobilization with a focus on social movement culture (e.g., Buechler 1993; Morris and Mueller 1992). Recent concerns with culture have particularly related to the development of internal movement solidarity. I argue for pushing the concern with movement culture beyond its "internal" roles to its strategic and "external" uses. Movement rhetoric and ideology can be thought of as "cultural resources" and analyzed in many of the same ways as are the more conventional "structural" resources of money, members, and organizations. I make a brief conceptual case for considering cultural resources as part of movement "strategy" as well as "identity;" I then consider the "character" of cultural resources; and finally, I explore a specific cultural resource – the rhetoric of the "public good" – and the connections between collective action frames and the wider cultural repertoire.

Social Movements and Cultural Resources

Partly in response to the so-called "new social movements" (NSMs) in the United States and Western Europe, and partly in response to the pendulum-style inclinations in social research, resource mobilization theory's tendency to minimize the roles of ideology and culture has come under attack. Most attempts at reintegrating culture have centered on the production of solidarity within movements and the motivations for collective action. Included in this agenda is recognition of the expressive dimensions of many social movements' goals – that is, NSMs in particular have expressive and identity issues as explicit movement goals alongside the instrumental, power-oriented goals associated with conventional politics. Internal movement dynamics are a natural place for the study of movement culture, but cultural resources also have an external, strategic dimension. The important concept of "framing" (e.g., Edelman 1977; Goffman 1974; Snow et al. 1986) helps illuminate both processes....

[M]any "constructionist" approaches continue to leave the field of the strategic or "external" dimensions of social movement activity to the analyses of structural resources such as money, member networks, and organizational power. Analyses of collective identity and empowerment have generally remained distinct from concerns with structural resources and organizational strategy – the stuff of political struggles. Thus Jean Cohen (1985) poses the theoretical challenge of NSMs as one that contrasts "strategy" with "identity." ...

The "external" uses of a movement's cultural resources entail an understanding of movement culture not just as the *expressive* dimensions of action, but also as tools that groups wield more or less self-consciously in their social and political struggles....

I view social movements as engaging in more or less rational pursuits of goals; in Swidler's (1986) terms I view movement culture primarily as a "tool kit" to be used by actors as situations warrant. Particular ways of talking about the public good are "tools" drawn from American political culture. And yet, the choice among strategies and the use of particular resources are not completely at the discretion of movement actors. Choice is also shaped by availability within historically situated social contexts....

The Character of Cultural Resources

"Cultural resources" are the symbolic tools that movements wield in their efforts at social change, be they formal ideologies or symbolic-expressive actions. Cultural resources must be "carried" by social actors but are not merely passive reflections of deeper "interests." Because the symbols and ideologies that form cultural resources have an internal logic of their own they help construct interests and actions; culture shapes political contests even as it expresses them. Culture "holds" (or perhaps "molds") its social carriers even as those carriers hold and use cultural meanings (see Swidler 1986).

Cultural resources are analytically distinct from structural resources in two important ways: They are *contextual* and *public*.... The distinctive features of context and publicness offer both political efficacy and constraint. Due to their intense relationship to their contexts, cultural resources are volatile and must be constantly created and recreated. Due to their publicness, cultural resources are always liable to "get away from" the actors that first enter them into a debate. Publicness reinforces the contextual aspects of cultural resources. They cannot be bargained or traded as can capital, votes, or official positions....

Social movements' rhetorical strategies have both internal and external consequences for the movement. Movement organizations must find ideological appeals that can mobilize action. Simultaneously, entrance into public political arenas requires legitimate cultural resources as a medium for power. Understanding movements' cultural resources requires an examination of the relationships among broad cultural contexts, strategically effective collective action frames, and the meso-level interpretive meaning-work done by specific movements....

The versions of the public good presented here are drawn from the public accounts of movement activities – they are movements' attempts at presenting themselves and their cause to the body politic. While I focus on several specific movement organizations, due to the rich public material available about them, I emphasize that my interest at this point is on the construction of their visions of the good society, not the specific movement organizations themselves. Thus the media-based presentations of the movements are arguably the most important source of data.

I posit three ideal-types of the public/common good: the "covenant," "contract," and "stewardship" models. These are "theory-driven" categories developed out of my reading of U.S. cultural history and analysis of movement rhetorics. It is misleading to equate the rhetorical models with categories of movement "types." I present these three models as types of rhetorical strategy. It is the constructions of

the public good – the cultural resource – not the movements themselves, that are covenantal, contractual, or stewardship based.

The Covenant Model

The first model of the public good is built on the traditional U.S. religious conception of the "moral community." This perspective views the nation as connected in a covenantal relationship with God – political reform becomes a necessary part of, and occasionally equivalent to, moral reform in accord with God's law (Platt and Williams 1988; Wald 1992). The common good is those social arrangements that are in accord with transcendent authority, corporately as well as in terms of individual action. In the main, individual preferences, wants, and choices are subordinated to the health of the moral community. The community stands before judgment as a collective, and thus there is an imperative to confront and repair injustice whether individuals are personally perpetrators or not. The root image of the good society is a version of the storied New England Covenant community.

Certainly there is variation within the covenant model of the common good. While this argument is often associated with the conservative groups of the so-called New Christian Right, political conservatism is not inherently connected to this model. Its defining feature is its reliance on transcendent authority for the model of human affairs, not the explicit content of its theology or ethics. For example, Epstein (1991: 195) notes that a significant wing of the nonviolent direct action movement was "religious, primarily Christian," and formed "a distinct community with its own organizations." They led protests against nuclear weapons in Connecticut and Washington State, and were the backbone of the Sanctuary movement for Central American refugees in California and Texas. The religious wing articulated a leftward politics built on "self-transformation through sacrifice" for a higher cause (Epstein 1991: 197). Whereas many factions of the direct action movement were focused on an exemplary politics that used self-realization as a political strategy, the religious community in the movement focused on "self-abnegation," the submission of personal interests to duties to a moral community (1991: 195–7; 210–26)....

The covenantal model of the public good is apparent in the rationale behind the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue. Founder Randall Terry's writings present a rationale for action built on a version of the covenanted community. Terry views stopping abortions as a necessary step in restoring the entire nation to a state of grace and thus avoiding God's wrath:

> Our once great nation...was born because of and founded on the concept of Higher Law; the belief that God, not man, was the Judge of the world, and that governments were accountable to Him, and that when they usurped His authority, they were no longer legitimate but tyrannical... (Terry 1988: 283)

Terry calls abortion a "national sin" (1988: 142) for which the "entire nation suffers" (1988: 155). The nation as a whole is guilty, not only those directly involved. As a result, the entire nation is morally culpable....

Practical guides to organizing "rescues" are filled with the necessity for obedience to movement leadership. Only designated spokespersons are to talk with the press;

only demonstration leaders should know the location of the blockade before departure for it; participants are told what the proper motivations for acting should be, what to bring (and what not to bring) to a blockade, how to behave when there and when arrested, even how to dress. Orderliness is stressed: "obedience to leadership is very important" (Terry 1988: 234); "follow every detail of the instructions given you by the rescue leadership" (1988: 236); "the attitude [should be] submissive, yet military and obligatory...we followed orders" (1988: 243). Military metaphors abound.

And yet, Operation Rescue is not organized very tightly at the national level. Affiliated chapters vary widely in their activities and coordination. In a sense, it is a mode of organization very much in keeping with the conservative Protestantism it now embodies. There is wide homogeneity in religious and social beliefs; attitudes toward what constitutes right behavior are exacting and stress uniformity. And yet there is a significant degree of "congregational" autonomy in the actual operations. Many local chapters run largely independently, led by a charismatic authority figure. The covenant model of the public good that supports Operation Rescue's ideology has its sense of corporate morality and its tendency to give priority to the community over individual rights reflected in organizational characteristics of the movements and its activities.

The Contract Model

The second rhetorical model is a view of the public good built on ideas of rights, and justice defined as inclusion and participation in society. Expanding from the idea of society formed through a "social contract," the public good is the creation of an inclusive public through extension of full citizenship, political and economic, to all community members. "[J]ustice [is] a form of active participation in social life, while injustice is...a kind of exclusion from human community" (Hollenbach 1988: 218). Like the covenantal model, the contractual definition of the public good has a long and honored past in U.S. political culture, but several of its grounding assumptions differ from the covenant model....

The "shared conception" of the public good in the contractual model has changed from the covenant's religious-based sense of "duty" to the idea of individually held "rights." Society is a set of freely chosen relationships of formal equality. And the only truly authentic forms of community are those marked by voluntarism. If there is a root image for the contractual model of the good society it may well be a version of Jefferson's – and later the Populists' – yeoman farmer: rugged, neighborly, self-reliant, virtuous.

The contractual model's language of rights varies between the notion of liberty (the right to be left alone) and the notion of entitlement (the right to the means for achieving inclusion). Movements that have been most prone to this ideological strategy have been groups of the disenfranchised. From the colonial period forward, the notion of rights accruing to individuals that are unabridgeable by societal authorities has been a wedge into political life (see Rodgers 1987).

A contemporary example of the use of the rhetoric of citizenship rights justifying inclusion is the "environmental justice" ideology used by many local grassroots groups mobilizing against toxic contamination. Such groups are predominantly composed of ethnic minorities (due to the placement of toxic dumps and other

ecological hazards) and have easily adapted the "rhetoric of dignity and full citizenship...preeminent in a range of 'rights' movements in the twentieth century" (Capek 1993:8). Inclusion into full status within the political community – symbolized here by the "American dream" of autonomy through home ownership – is the de facto vision of the good society.

Perhaps the most obvious example of the contract model of the public good is the "reproductive rights" ideology of the pro-choice movement. As Staggenborg (1991) notes, the pro-choice movement is composed of a variety of groups with differing interests. Indeed, much of the early agitation for the reform of abortion laws came from the population control movement. But as activists from the women's movement began to construct abortion as a "feminist" issue, the emphasis on reproductive rights came to dominate the public rhetoric:

> The National Women's Health Network opposes the...analysis which suggests that population control is an element in the movement for reproductive rights.... The NWHN does not support the population control analysis. It takes its stand on the inalienable right of each woman to control her body and her life. (NWHN Position Paper quoted in Staggenborg 1991: 113–14)

As this statement makes clear, the population control movement and the reproductive rights movement held different visions of the good society. The state control implicit in the population control movement's concerns with welfare and resource consumption was anathema to the civil liberties and individual rights thinking that formed the basis for a contractual model of society. Currently, groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) call for a legal situation that leaves individual women unfettered in making their decisions whether to bear children: "Who Decides – You or Them?" is a phrase seen frequently on NARAL literature.

The "right to reproduce" is portrayed as a right accrued to women as individuals and it may not be abridged by any external group or institution. It considers the body as a person's property, and combines the defense of "property rights" with the more recent "right to privacy" (Glendon 1991). The popular slogans "keep your laws off my body," and "if you're against abortion, don't have one," represent the importance attached to individual independence from coercive external authority and the freedom of choice that goes with it; it is a call for an absolute guarantee of privacy (Wolfe 1992). The language of "duty" that animates Operation Rescue's construction of the relations between the individual and the community is countered with a rhetoric of "rights."...

However, for all the language about autonomy the contractual model's assumptions about individual rights assume such rights exist within a community context that makes the resulting choices meaningful. Rights without the means for exercising them are empty at best. For example, the organizations that Staggenborg terms the "reproductive rights" wing of the pro-choice movement focus on women's health care issues in addition to abortion in order to produce a "comprehensive notion of 'choice'" (1991: 114)....

The Stewardship Model

Finally, there is a conception of the public good as "stewardship." Contemporary society is charged with the careful management of its resources and gifts for future benefit as well as current advantage. This is a common theme in many religious approaches to the world, and the root metaphor of the steward is alive in many U.S. churches and denominations. But it is not limited to religious organizations, per se, as its wide use in approaches to trusteeship and nonprofit organization management indicates.

The stewardship and covenant models of the public good are related due to their common focus on "duty," although this is manifested differently. The most distinctive differences in the two conceptions are found in the writings of one segment of the environmentalist movement – particularly those writing from what is often called a "deep ecology" perspective. Much of the deep ecology discourse is imbued with spiritual significance and often incorporates elements of non-Western (Nash 1989), or indigenous American (Albanese 1990) religious systems. However, the perspective stands apart from the predominant received traditions in U.S. Judeo-Christian thinking, as the latter have emphasized human dominion over nature....

I am not claiming that the environmental *movement* is confined to a stewardship model of the public good; I am asserting that a common ideological theme used by certain movement factions or organizations is not shared with either the covenantal or contractual rhetorics. That is, their common good is not a religiously-based moral community, nor a society that nurtures individual rights and privileges. Nonetheless, stewardship rhetoric plays on a chord that is deep within U.S. culture, even if it has mostly been a minor chord. Both Nash (1989) and Albanese (1990) show that a form of "nature religion" is part of the U.S. cultural repertoire. The root societal image of the stewardship model is something of an organic rural commune, where harmony with nature is a necessary precondition for harmony among people.

The stewardship approach to the public good is apparent in some versions of the "biocentrism" that animates groups such as EarthFirst! and Trans-Species Unlimited. Central to stewardship thinking is the idea that humankind is not "privileged" vis-à-vis other life forms. Non-human life has intrinsic value unconnected to its human usefulness, and humans have no right to reduce non-human richness (Sessions and Naess 1991). Far from being granted dominion over nature and its products, humankind's only responsible and moral course of action is to consider first what is best for the planet, protecting ecosystems and bio-diversity as ends in themselves.

This is clearly illustrated by continuing an example used in the rhetorical models presented above: commentary on abortion as a political issue. "Stewardship" rhetoric focuses neither on the covenantal and religious question of when life begins nor on the contractual and political question of the balance of formal and substantive rights. Rather, abortion is discussed in connection with other forms of birth control and framed as an issue of population control – exactly what the ideology of reproductive rights has rejected:

[L]iberals . . . have made a critical error in tactics: they have rested their entire defense of legal abortion on the issue of a woman's right to choose – "pro-choice." (Flowers 1991: 146)

The stewardship model's approach to abortion is to stress the burden on the planet of uncontrolled human reproduction. Controlling reproduction is both a personal and social responsibility as well as a political problem (Lyon 1991). Session and Naess (1991) put it programmatically:

> The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease. (1991: 157)

The anti-abortion forces are called "the Spawning Lobby" and their holocaust imagery is turned around: "the real holocaust is what excess human breeding is doing to the rest of life" (Flowers 1991: 147). . . .

Thus, humans are not a privileged species; the good society will live in harmony with nature, not dominate it for its own purposes. Individual humans and *communities* must subordinate their wants to a common good that is planet-wide. Rhetorics along these lines are not concerned with bettering society as an end in itself; human society must change so that the biosphere, as an inherent value itself, can prosper. While this rhetoric expands radically the notion of community, it still embodies communalist arguments. It is a language of *communal* duties, distinct from the two rhetorical models offered above. . . .

By offering a movement a positive evaluation of its own internal processes and purposes (it is "building community"), and by providing the movement with an ideologically potent symbol with which to organize its public rhetoric, "community" – or the "public good" – ties together the internal and the external dimensions of movement activity. The construction of community among movement members is a crucial part of collective action, whether done self-consciously or not. For many movements, it *is* their claim to a better way of organizing society. It is both strategy and identity.

And yet, simultaneously, a vision of the good society is a useful rhetorical tool in public politics. It gives the movement a claim to a moral high ground and it defuses questions of self-interest when the movement meets opposition. Further, public good rhetoric implicates bystanders in the movement's agenda, even if they are not directly involved in the issue at hand. That is, if a movement manages to create a "definitive" (meaning "effective") claim to the public good, bystander publics can only oppose the movement at the risk of a charge of "self-interest." The symbolic construction of community can thus mobilize movement members, help neutralize opponents, and elicit a general sympathy from neutral onlookers. Claims to embody community internally *and* calls for creating true community – or at least better community – in the wider society bring together a movement's most idealistic vision of itself with one of its most potent external ideological resources.

The relatively open content of the public good as a political symbol is an important macro condition in contemporary politics. Conceptual ambiguity means that as movements draw from the available cultural repertoire the resources for supplying

specific content they must do considerable interpretive work. And the resulting "collective action frames" can vary considerably, even though their grounding symbols are drawn from a common societal "mentality" (Tarrow 1992). Effective rhetoric draws familiar elements from a common repertoire and uses them in new combinations or with innovative interpretations. Movements are "both consumers of existing cultural meanings and producers of new meanings" (Tarrow 1992: 189). Neither dimension alone is sufficient to produce a social movement culture.

Klandermans (1992) notes that movements do this meaning-work within a "multiorganizational field" of collective actors with varying alliances and conflicts. Thus in addition to negotiating the interplay of public discourse and interpersonal interactions, movements must operate within a competing field of rival meanings. Movements and their frames are shaped by "field dynamics" and must negotiate the macro–micro nexus at both the rhetorical and organizational levels. Movements must "maintain a delicate balance between the resonance of the movement's message with existing political culture and its promise of new departures" (Tarrow 1992: 197).

The cultural resources for constructing the common good are considerable, if not limitless. They provide an aura of legitimacy to the public purposes of a movement's agenda and provide part of the rationale for the movement's existence. These ideological resources are rooted in a cultural history that has generally moralized its political language (see, for example, Hollenbach 1988; Platt and Williams 1988; Wald 1992) and give movements the means for discussing the problems of the present within plans for a better future.

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Editor's Notes on Further Reading

Williams on Ideals of the Public Good

Movements for social change require many practical resources, and as Rhys Williams argues, cultural resources like rhetorical frames must be counted among them. Analyzing accounts of a number of different social movements, he finds three distinct views of the ideal society which are used in movement arguments. The complete article also provides an overview of cultural analysis of social movements and further developments and illustrations from a variety of different movements across the political spectrum.

For more on the rhetoric of public debates see James Jasper, "The Politics of Abstractions: Instrumental and Moralist Rhetorics in Public Debates," *Social Research* 59 (1992): 315–44. For more on culture and social movements see Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans, eds., *Social Movements and Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), and excerpts from Eliasoph, Lichterman, and Swidler this volume. On the influential notion of cultural framing in protest see David Snow and Robert Benford, "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization," *International Social Movement Research* 1 (1988): 197–217 and Sydney Tarrow, "Mentalities, Political Cultures, and Collective Action Frames: Constructing Meanings Through Action," pp. 174–202 in Aldon Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller, eds., *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992). For analysis, critique, and extension of framing theory see Rhys Williams and Robert Benford, "Two Faces of Collective Action Frames: A Theoretical Consideration," *Current Perspectives in Social Theory* 20 (2000): 127–51; Marc Steinberg, "The Talk and Back Talk of Collective Action: A Dialogic Analysis of Repertoires of Discourse Among Nineteenth-Century English Cotton Spinners," *American Journal of Sociology* 105 (1999): 736–80; Rhys Williams and Timothy Kubal, "Movement Frames and the Cultural Environment: Resonance, Failure, and the Boundaries of the Legitimate," *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change* 21 (1999): 225–48; Richard Wood, "Religious Culture and Political Action," *Sociological Theory* 17 (1999): 307–32; Marc Steinberg, "Tilting the Frame: Considerations on Collective Action Framing From a Discursive Turn," *Theory and Society* 27 (1998): 845–72; Mabel Berezin, "Politics and Culture: A Less Fissured Terrain," *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997): 361–83; James Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Anne Kane, "Theorizing Meaning Construction in Social Movements: Symbolic Structures and Interpretation During the Irish Land War, 1879–1882," *Sociological Theory* 15 (1997): 249–76; Stephen Hart, "The Cultural Dimension of Social Movements: A Theoretical Reassessment and Literature Review," *Sociology of Religion* 57 (1996): 87–100; and Steven Ellingson, "Understanding the Dialectic of Discourse and Collective Action: Public Debate and Rioting in Antebellum Cincinnati," *American Journal of Sociology* 101 (1995): 100–44.

On cultural frames more generally see Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), and on the influential idea of culture as toolkit see Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 273–86.

27 The Search for Political Community: American Activists Reinventing Commitment

Paul Lichterman

Personalism and Political Commitment

A Common Complaint

Critics often say that too few Americans get politically involved. Active political commitment is declining, goes one familiar complaint, because people have become too concerned with their own personal fulfillment. Critics fear that the widespread emphasis on self-fulfillment is destroying traditional community ties that are necessary for active citizenship and the sacrifices that may accompany it. Calls to reestablish "a sense of community" continue to resound in academic criticism, political leaders' rhetoric, and everyday talk about what is wrong with contemporary US culture.

This book addresses the complaint about self-fulfillment and political commitment by exploring how different environmental activists practice their commitments to activism. Critics of the self-fulfillment ethos would not question that people can and do enter the political arena to win attention for their personal needs. The question is whether the self-fulfillment ethos necessarily detracts from a public-spirited politics, a politics that aims to secure a common, public good such as a safer environment for a wide community of citizens. Critics of modern US culture have often assumed that it takes certain kinds of communal bonds between people to nurture public-spirited commitments: they have advocated the kinds of ties that Americans in the past developed in local or perhaps national communities with shared civic or religious traditions that obligated community members to one another. People who grow up within such ties would find it easier, more natural to commit themselves to the public good than those who don't. These critics argue that the self-fulfillment ethos has weakened these communal ties. Modern society needs to reestablish the kind of community that will produce citizens with a sense of public obligation who stand up for standards and work for the common good.

Committed citizens have not completely disappeared, and some do belong to communities whose members share traditions and a sense of communal belonging. A good example is Mrs. Davis of Hillviewers Against Toxics. Toxic hazards from industrial plants ringing Hillview menaced largely low-income neighborhoods like Mrs. Davis' with the threat – occasionally realized – of a toxic fire or a slow, poisonous leak. Mrs. Davis did not, however, join her toxics group out of simple self-interest: she did not express concern about her neighborhood property values,

and had so far escaped the chronic health problems that plagued some Hillview residents. Davis was new to grassroots activism, and looking for an organization to join when she attended her first Hillviewers Against Toxics (HAT) meeting. Conversations with her neighbors and the HAT staffperson made the anti-toxics struggle compelling to her.

An African-American woman in her forties, Mrs. Davis drew on communal traditions, a sense of belonging to the black Hillview community and to a broader community of African-American Christians, when she "went public" as an activist. When she ran for city council three years after joining HAT, several of her endorsement speakers, including her pastor and a member of a religious broadcasters association, spoke at length about her virtues as a Christian woman. Mrs. Davis did not often articulate a religious basis for her activism, and she did not always define her work as service to a specifically black community; she did not need to. She could take for granted a local moral universe of Christian charity and African-American communal service in which public-spirited good deeds made sense, were worthwhile. Of course, her community did not always live up to the standards its spokespersons set for it. HAT's staff-person asserted several times that his organization did what local churches should have been doing, had they not been worried about endangering the occasional economic or political support they received from Petrox, Hillview's largest taxpayer and a major target of HAT's anti-toxics efforts. Neither did Mrs. Davis' community-minded dedication keep her from eventually voicing dissatisfactions with the level of individual involvement that the HAT leadership allowed for members. The point is that Mrs. Davis lived within the kind of community ties that many critics of American individualism see as essential for public-spirited commitment, and threatened by the widespread quest for personal fulfillment.

Compare Carl of the Ridge Greens, an activist organization based about a half hour's drive from Hillview. Carl, like Mrs. Davis, had little experience with activism before getting involved with his organization. He had thought seriously about environmental and political issues, though, to the point of quitting his well-paying job in genetic engineering because of qualms about its moral and political implications. Carl followed political issues in the news with a passion and did not like most of what he learned. He figured, in fact, that conventional electoral politics would probably never raise the fundamental questions about corporate interests and environmental priorities that he found at the root of so much policy-making. The movement organizations he was familiar with went about "putting out fires" with single-issue political campaigns. He envisioned a popular movement that would publicize the fundamental questions about environmental priorities and social justice that smoldered behind any single issue. He wanted to be part of a movement that would let ordinary citizens voice alternatives to the usual answers given by big interests and single-issue agitators. He became more and more involved in community educating and occasional protests with the small US Green movement in hopes that it would provide one of those alternative voices, and was one of the key organizers in the successful effort to get the fledgling California Green Party on to the ballot in 1991.

Carl did not tap into the kinds of communal tradition that sustained Mrs. Davis. A white man in his thirties, son of liberal-minded and non-churchgoing college instructors, he did not nurture his political commitments with the sense of obligation

to a particular people, community, or faith that Mrs. Davis had. No ready answer came to mind when I asked Carl what made him committed to activism; he supposed, after mulling it over, that his parents' fight against a color bar at their college may have inspired him. Carl's practice of political commitment grew out of a very personalized sense of political responsibility. A man who quit his job over its larger political implications – and screened future opportunities with a critical, political imagination – was one who assumed that individuals could and should exercise a great deal of political commitment in their own lives. Grassroots politics for Carl meant a highly participatory politics in which individuals could realize themselves, actualize themselves, as personal agents of social change both in activist organizations and in everyday life. Carl would have agreed with a former member of the Ridge Greens who declared that he "couldn't just be a little bit involved." Activism had to be self-fulfilling. Carl did not ease himself into political involvement by talking to local neighbors or accepting the tutelage of an organization staffperson. He practiced a self-propelled sense of social responsibility.

The terms of complaint about self-fulfillment make it hard to understand someone like Carl. Cultural analysts and critics have often argued that a widespread emphasis on personal fulfillment is incompatible with public, political commitments. This study challenges that argument. Rather than always weakening commitment, the culture of self-fulfillment has made possible in some settings a form of public-spirited political commitment that Carl and many others like him have practiced in a personalized, self-expressive way. In other words, some people's individualism supports rather than sabotages their political commitments. A culture of self-fulfillment may well have encouraged some Americans to turn away from political engagement and toward apolitical self-exploration or consumerism. But a strain of this culture has also enabled some activists to practice political commitments that include a strong critique of selfishness and acquistiveness. This study examines those activists' personalized form of commitment, and contrasts it with the more "community"-centered commitments that critics of individualism have upheld....

"[P]ersonalism" refers to ways of speaking or acting which highlight a unique, personal self. Personalism supposes that one's own individuality has inherent value, apart from one's material or social achievements, no matter what connections to specific communities or institutions the individual maintains. Personalism upholds a personal self that lives with ambivalence towards, and often in tension with, the institutional or communal standards that surround it (Taylor 1991, 1989; Bellah *et al.* 1985; MacIntyre 1981; Rieff 1966). But we should not reduce personalism to its most selfish or privatizing manifestations: personalism does not necessarily deny the existence of communities surrounding and shaping the self, but it accentuates an individualized relationship to any such communities. In contrast with a political identity that is defined by membership in a local, national, or global polity, a traditional religious identity that gets realized in a fellowship of believers, or a communal identity that develops in relation to a specific community, the personal self gets developed by reflecting on individual biography, by establishing one's own individuality amidst an array of cultural, religious, or political authorities.

It is easy to assume that personalism is simply human nature. Isn't it just natural to want to develop one's individuality? Hasn't the main achievement of modern culture been a freeing of this natural, universal inclination from the constraints of tradition?

It is easy for many Americans to counterpose "natural" or "real" selves to social "constraints" outside the self because of a popular version of personalism that is widespread in the US cultural mainstream. Cross-cultural study makes clear that not all cultures place the emphasis on personal development and personalized initiative that many Americans now take for granted. Personalism is not a simple reflection of nature, but a way of defining and presenting the self. Developing individuality depends on interaction. There are norms for "expressing oneself," for being an individualist who can converse with others about personal feelings and experiences. Individuality does not pre-exist culture; it is a cultural accomplishment. Personalism develops in a kind of community in fact, one in which people create and practice norms of highly individualized expression....

Speaking Out in Suburbia

Taking Risks

The Greens put on public education campaigns and attended demonstrations without worrying about whether they were sullying their reputations as respectable citizens. Going public was not nearly so easy for members of Airdale Citizens for Environmental Sanity (ACES). ACES had dedicated itself to sparking a critical public debate about environmental safety at a local firm, Microtechnologies Ltd. ("Microtech," or ML). The firm was a frequent military contractor, and secured a number of contracts for work related to upgrading US weapons systems. Work at Microtech resulted in highly toxic wastes, some of which had seeped into local groundwater, and the firm proposed to build an incinerator for disposing of them. A group of roughly six core members of the Airdale Citizens for Environmental Sanity (ACES) started a campaign to alert Airdale about the hazards of burning the wastes in the proposed incinerator. Most of Airdale did not care to listen, let alone debate the issue.

For ACES members, going public meant braving the withering stare of public opinion in Airdale, a small town of suburban-style neighborhoods about an hour's drive north of Ridgeville. The activists liked to tell newcomers the story of how someone at a public hearing on the incinerator had remarked, "There goes that crazy lady again," as the group's leading spokesperson, Laura, walked up to the microphone. Laura's son feared Laura would get arrested for her activism, leading to embarrassing consequences for him: "I have to go to school in this town." Other members thought they had paid with their local reputations for their association with ACES. One got dismissed by a neighboring city council as a mere anti-military "faddist" when he spoke on the incinerator issue. Another discovered that a few of her friendships may not survive her involvement in ACES. Another, finding herself on a dark street after an evening of door-to-door petitioning, flashed through her head spooky images of industry "whistle-blowers" who get stalked by company henchmen.

The chilly civic climate of suburban Airdale made activism feel risky if not scary for ACES members. As the largest single employer of Airdale residents, the Microtech plant helped keep criticism of its policies on ice. Yet with a core of seven

members and a mailing list of other volunteers and supporters, ACES broke through the chill and became the regularly quoted local voice of dissent regarding Microtech policies. Environmentalists and local media too regarded them as a significant force behind the contractor's eventual decision to shelve plans for its proposed incinerator. The group moved on to confront other environmental hazards related to Microtech, and had existed for seven years by the end of my field research with them. How did these activists sustain their group and their commitment to the cause in a risky civic climate? Part of the answer involves understanding how personalism can sustain political commitment.

The culture of commitment in ACES was a hybrid of personalism and more communitarian practices and idioms ... Personalism, especially through the leader's strong influence, shaped the ways ACES organized itself and reached out to Airdale. At the same time ACES members rooted themselves in their local community milieu and defined their activism as in the "community interest," even when other Airdalers showed little interest in their project. Greens carried their commitments as individual political agents applying general Green principles to their locales and to national politics. ACES members situated themselves more in a specific community to begin with. Greens addressed cultural radicals in their locales, while ACES members addressed Airdale residents in general. Most members of ACES did not practice their commitments as highly individualized responsibilities. They acted much more *as group members* than as individual political actors who apply the precepts of a loose, national movement to their locale. ...

"Suburban" Culture in Airdale

Baumgartner characterized suburban culture in terms of a "moral minimalism" that keeps suburbanites out of each other's way and focused on their private affairs. The "weak" suburban moral order relies on few overt sanctions, and yet produces the much-criticized "controlled" feeling of suburban life that Baumgartner found in her own field site. ACES members saw themselves as having to deal with a lot of privatism and conflict avoidance in the course of publicizing environmental issues in Airdale. The relative lack of public, political engagement in Airdale, as much as the contractor's influence, shaped the way residents became activists in ACES. ACES members and supporters criticized the privatism in Airdale, but lived within it all the same.

It is important to establish first that ACES members did speak of Airdale as a kind of "suburb" rather than either an independent urban area or a self-sufficient community. On the first day that I volunteered for petitioning, I drove with Liz from one shopping mall to another to find shoppers that had not already been "saturated" by earlier petitioning efforts. Liz joked that I was getting a "tour of suburbia." "We don't have any fancy houses so we'll show you our shopping centers." John remarked that ACES had to "go to the people" in Airdale, which he and Liz both explained meant going to suburban-style shopping centers with large outdoor parking lots. Laura joked about a benefit concert for activist groups in metropolitan Ridgeville as "a chance to get out of Airdale for a night."

Both the politically radical and the more conservative members of ACES feared the consequences of being seen as bearers of public controversy. Every member I met imagined Airdalers would tag them with a wide variety of derogatory labels. Fend-

ing off expected derision was a regular part of being involved in ACES. One member, Rochelle, suggested that ACES not endorse a county nuclear-free zone initiative because she did not want them to look like "anti-nuke, peace kind of people." On another occasion she took pains to distance herself from Microtech's description of its opposition as a "nut fringe" based outside of Airdale. Jennie, another member who had become active in the incinerator campaign, told me "we are perceived as being these radical anarchists, but we are all concerned about our families." She insisted at a public hearing: "We're not flaky; we're people raising families and trying to live responsible lives." Liz argued the benefits of carefully crafted flyers for ACES: "We should hand out flyers that would really tell about what ACES is ... more people would join our group if they don't think it's some radical-leftist organization." And Laura once said that flyer distributing was a good exercise because then Airdalers would see real people and not think ACES members were "monsters with two heads."

The activists did not seem worried that Airdalers attributed to them specific "anti-nuke" or "anarchist" or "radical-leftist" ideologies. Rather, these tags functioned to stigmatize people who, like monsters with two heads, disrupt routine public order with irrational controversy. In a "company town" situation like Gaventa's Appalachian valley, the stigmatizing tag "communist" might actually reflect, in however distorted a fashion, a threat to a company's specific economic interests. In Airdale, the tags "radical" or "leftist" or "communist" signified threats not just to economic or political interests but to a local civic milieu that prizes polite, circumspect comportment. "Making a scene" would challenge local morality almost as much as questioning the employer that helped to underwrite economic security in Airdale. This is the best way to understand Jennie's ambiguous couplet "radical anarchists"/ "concerned about our families." Jennie wanted to put across that it was possible to oppose the contractor without opposing "family values," the private bedrock of collective life in Airdale. Liz and Jack's frequent jokes and comments about "radical leftists" make sense in this light too. ...

No doubt the apprehensions in ACES did reflect real contacts between ACES and Airdale residents. But in a different "company town," resident activists might have found the strength to buck common opinion through a communal institution like a church, or a shared local culture that could inspire dissent. But in suburban Airdale, what residents shared most was privatism and an avoidance of public controversy. Of course suburbanites in Baumgartner's study or in Airdale might attend various churches or volunteer in service groups. But there are relatively few *publicly shared* cultural affiliations in a private-oriented suburban locale. Whether or not ACES activists personally upheld suburban civility norms, they lived in a situation with few widely shared bodies of folk wisdom or cultural authority that they could bring to ACES. Members found diverse sources for their activist identity. And as Laura summed up about the whole group:

> ACES is made up of what we have in common ... Carrie is the society and religion coordinator at her church but doesn't come on with Christianity [at meetings], and I have certain spiritual commitments to peace, justice and the environment, but I don't come on strong with them at meetings. Sam has other things going on – everyone has other things going on too.

Without common, institutionalized cultural authorities to draw upon, ACES needed another basis of togetherness for individuals who all had "other things going on." So ACES drew on personalized notions of commitment that encouraged community members to speak out as empowered individuals.

Personalism and Leadership Among Suburban Activists

PERSONAL EXPRESSION AS AN OPTION, NOT A MANDATE

The ACES group culture combined an openness to personalized expression with a shared rootedness in Airdale. As the leading influence on the group, Laura structured ACES as a Green-style democracy of equal selves. For their part, other members considered ACES a group in which they could try out risky opinions in a safe atmosphere. But they did not assume the way Greens did that each individual carries an elaborately developed, individual political will. They "did their bit" for ACES and for Airdale with the good of the local community as their arbiter of worthwhile activism. Commitments made *as Airdale residents* did not require the special activist identity and lifestyle that Greens created in the absence of a shared sense of communal belonging. Personalism in ACES did not result in expectations about individual political virtuosity. Instead it created acceptance for different levels of individual engagement, including Laura's highly personalized – and time-consuming – engagement. ACES members were willing to let each other define different limits for involvement, and they were happy to let Laura lead them.

A shared respect for personal opinions enabled members to sustain disagreements. More than once, Laura interceded in a disagreement with an appeal to the equal validity of any sincerely held viewpoints. At one meeting, for instance, Margo and John sparred over how confrontational a stance the group should take towards the contractor:

JOHN insisted that ACES was not growing because members were so used to technical talk that "we don't talk about people." He concluded that it would be best if ACES was blunt and said that people working at the contractor were, in effect, "killers." Margo objected.

MARGO: "Well I do think . . . that you can polarize people, and the words you use are very important."

JOHN: "You hate the place!"

MARGO: "Well, I can say that here – I would never say that in public . . . I think there are many ways to approach this and they all need to be looked at."

LAURA (broadening on Margo's statement): "All the voices need to be heard, everything needs to be said . . . It's a tapestry – you're not wrong and your way isn't the only right way. There is no one right way."

MARGO conceded that John "always brings up the moral issue" and "the moral issue is the basic issue."

No one offered a different moral argument than John's on how to frame the environmental hazards of work at Microtech. Laura's resolution was, in effect, definitive. Her resolution appealed to the intrinsic worth of all contributions and all contributors, rejecting a standard for judging between them.

A "tapestry" of self-expression was a suitable metaphor for external as well as internal relations. When the ACES agreed to help a metropolitan peace group plan a Peace Day rally for the Airdale area, Laura told ACES how different groups attending might engage in different activities. There were, for example, the "anarcho-punks" who might want to do civil disobedience and get arrested. "I want to validate that that's OK . . . (because) that's what they do." Laura wanted to "validate" different people's conceptions of political action as intrinsically worthy – coming from within the person. There could be different activities, so that people whose idea of participation in the rally was "sitting" (she gestured a stiff pose with hands folded) could go to the event and so could people who intended to risk arrest for direct action.

Laura wanted to do more than create liberal tolerance for individual preferences in ACES. She assumed that group participation ought to include a lot of personalized expression. It surprised her, for instance, that I had characterized ACES after one of the general meetings as a "friendly" group:

LAURA: "I think we're not friendly enough. We should have more time for process."

PL: "What should people talk about?"

LAURA: "We should talk about *ourselves* . . . how we feel about things." She gave an example of a man new to ACES who had previously worked in the weapons industry, saying that he must have feelings about the work but that there's so much business to get through, there is not enough time to talk about his feelings. "We mean to support him – we really are a supportive group – but there isn't enough time."

Like that of the Greens, Laura's everyday definition of participation included both political and personal expression without a strong division between the two. I commented once that I was struck at how a short, spontaneous exchange about American democracy and the cold war had erupted amid one of the general meetings. The meeting had included a lot of technical information about work at the contractor. Laura said "that kind of thing" needed to happen more often, because "that's what ACES exists for – to empower people." She continued, wondering whether meetings sometimes suffered from "fact overload" and suggested that meetings might strike a different balance between "facts" (technical presentations) and "emotional support." Talk about American democracy and emotional support were interchangeable in this definition of participation and "empowerment."

Personalist language certainly was not foreign to other members. Stacy, a newer member, conceived her own participation in ACES-related activity in terms of an inner, intuitive self. Carrie entered peace and environmental activism from experience in a church-based social action group that encouraged a very personalized way of adopting issues: her commitment to a "peaceable world" included family relations maintained through "conflict resolution" and "affirmation techniques" at home. Even John, steeped in both Catholic and union organizing traditions, was able to trade on notions from popular psychology – the idea of being "centered" as a person, for instance. He taught his catechism students that making the sign of the cross was also a symbolic way of "centering" oneself. Showing me how he crossed himself, he

named the different hand positions: "Here, left, right – you're centered. See, Jesus was a Zen Buddhist." He said the kids really got it....

Empowerment as a Cultural Dilemma

ACES faced a predicament in trying to mobilize Airdale residents without simply scaring them off. Their predicament resulted not from a failure of commitment on their own part, then, but from a lack of shared bases for public-spirited, critical citizenship in their suburban culture. Members of ACES, like many residents of US suburbs perhaps, could not invoke publicly shared religious or communal sources of authority for undertaking collective action. In this milieu, personalist notions of community involvement sustained ACES in a number of ways. They enabled suburban activists to take risks in a group that was loose and welcoming enough of diverse individuals to make risk-taking more comfortable. One did not need to sever ties with the prevailing culture of privatism to join ACES. Prospective members would be welcomed into ACES on the basis of whatever (privately held) commitments had motivated them.

It would have been difficult at best for ACES members to recruit more aggressively than the personal "empowerment" theory would suggest. Aggressive mobilization for any controversial issue would have run the risk of seeming irrational to people whose shared culture consisted foremost in a dedication to private life. Appeals to economic self-interest or family health would not goad many local residents out of their privatism if these appeals could not be accompanied by well-publicized accounts of some toxic disaster already having taken a toll on local residents. ACES and other activists knew of "accidents" at Microtech over the years, but the effects of these accidents on residents' health could not be easily substantiated. On what basis, then, could an ACES neighborhood canvasser convince the person at the door to become involved in ACES?

"Empowerment" gave activists a way to talk about breaking suburban civility norms. Contesting suburban civility would mean awakening politically quiescent selves to a better, or more real, practice of selfhood. It meant contesting one kind of (privatized) individualism with another kind of individualism that actually enabled suburban residents to go public, each on an individual schedule, one by one. This kind of individualism empowered but also limited activism in Airdale: for people who believed that Airdalers suffered from individual, disempowered "mind-sets," a well-established organization with strong recruiting practices would not be part of the solution. For example, Laura once explained to me the ambivalence in ACES about getting an office front. On the one hand, the office would lend the group a "veneer of credibility." On the other hand, maintaining an office front would send the message that "ACES can do things" and detract from the goal of getting Airdalers to feel empowered, to "feel *they* can do things." She compared her preferred image of ACES with the Sierra Club's image, which to her said that "Sierra Club can do it." Attributing efficacy and responsibility to the organization would, in this view, only perpetuate the individual powerlessness and quiescence that ACES saw itself as challenging. So the empowerment theory directed attention toward awakening individual consciousness rather than expanding an organization.

Communitarian theorists might argue that ACES ought to have nurtured a political culture of "citizenship," avoiding notions of personal "empowerment" that limited the group's own growth and public visibility. For if everyone agreed on the goodness of good citizenship, then no one would fault ACES for aggressive recruiting and organization-building. The problem is that going public in ACES implied dissent from taken-for-granted notions of good citizenship in Airdale. "Good" local residents were "concerned about our families" as Jennie put it, and did not get involved in "flaky" or "radical" causes. The usual categories for talking about responsible citizenship in Airdale did not make much room for activists publicizing controversial issues in even the sincerest public interst. ACES could not simply neutralize skepticism about its efforts by claiming a moral high ground of citizenship. This is all the more the case when Microtech could already claim unimpeachable good citizenship by contributing to the national defense with its military contracts. ACES would, at least, need to make clear it was advocating a *different* or more "real" practice of good citizenship. This is in fact the route ACES took, legitimating itself by appealing to the "reality" of personal empowerment that breaks through constraining social conventions.

Further, the "good citizenship" of Liz, Rochelle, and Mrs. Starkey motivated them to get involved as helpful volunteers, but not as leaders in formulating strategy, confronting Microtech's management, or building ties to other activist groups. The empowerment theory limited the ACES' recruitment and its breadth of appeal, but it also gave Laura the means for making lasting, risky commitments that challenged local conceptions of (quiescent) good citizenship. Laura could sustain her leadership of ACES partly because she identified her commitments more strongly with a specific locale than did most Greens, but also because she had made her politics an ongoing part of her whole identity the way Greens did.

Communitarians held that personalism was inimical to pursuit of a common, public good. Yet, personalism allowed Laura and some other ACES members the freedom to contest privatism, in the public interest. In Airdale, personalist notions of empowerment and commitment gave at least some members of ACES the means to advocate for a new communal good – safety from military-related toxic wastes – a good that ACES claimed should concern everyone in Airdale, regardless of their employment. Rather than privatizing public issues, personalist culture gave activists a basis for working together and for trying to reach other Airdalers within local cultural constraints....

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Editor's Notes on Further Reading

Lichterman on Activist Cultures

Although individualism and community-mindedness are often thought to be contradictory, Lichterman's study identifies "personalized politics" as a type of public commitment which melds both in a way more appropriate to modern life (cf. Simmel, this volume) than either nostalgia for idealized community or simple self-absorption. Lichterman's extensive ethnographic observation of four environmental organizations compares groups like the Greens, which are grounded on a highly personalized sense of commitment, with more community-oriented groups grounded in neighborhood and church; the suburban group discussed in this excerpt combines both personalized and community-oriented commitments. The extended study also discusses the historical origins and class basis of personalized political commitment, and the significance of personalized politics for democratic theory and for social movements.

Other discussions of the opposition between individualism and commitment in American culture include, for example, Robert Wuthnow, *Acts of Compassion: Caring for Others and Helping Ourselves* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) and Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steve Tipton, *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) and *The Good Society* (New York: Vintage, 1991). See also Charles Reynolds and Ralph Norman, eds., *Community in America: The Challenge of Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). Different approaches to broadly related issues include Chantal Mouffe, ed., *Dimensions of Radical Democracy* (London: Verso, 1992), Amitai Etzioni, ed., *The Essential Communitarian Reader* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), and Orville Lee, "Culture and Democratic Theory: Toward a Theory of Symbolic Democracy," *Constellations* 5 (1998): 433–55.

Lichterman's emphasis on mundane practices as key to activist cultures differs somewhat from approaches (like Rhys Williams, this volume) which emphasize cultural frames in social movements: for more on movement culture as practice see Eliasoph, this volume, and accompanying editor's note, as well as Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); Lichterman, "Piecing Together Multicultural Community: Cultural Differences in Community Building Among Grass-Roots Environmentalists," *Social Problems* 42 (1995): 513–34; "Beyond the Seesaw Model: Public Commitment in a Culture of Self-Fulfillment," *Sociological Theory* 13 (1995): 275–300; "Talking Identity in the Public Sphere: Broad Visions and Small Spaces in Sexual Identity Politics," *Theory and Society* 28 (1999): 101–41; Mary Patillo-McCoy, "Church Culture as a Strategy of Action in the Black Community," *American Sociological Review* 63 (1998): 767–84; and Richard Wood, "Religious Culture and Political Action," *Sociological Theory* 17 (1999): 307–32. For methodological reflections see Michael Burawoy, "The Extended Case Method," *Sociological Theory* 16 (1998): 4–33, and Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman, "'We Begin With Our Favorite Theory': Reconstructing the Extended Case Method," *Sociological Theory* 17 (1999): 228–34.

28 Cultural Power and Social Movements

Ann Swidler

Culture has always been important for the kinds of processes students of social movements study. But as culture moves to the forefront of social movement research, it is important to address directly the theories, methods, and assumptions different approaches to the sociology of culture carry with them.

I begin by reviewing the basic theoretical approaches in the sociology of culture and go on to suggest that traditional Weberian approaches, which focus on powerful, internalized beliefs and values held by individual actors (what I call culture from the "inside out") may ultimately provide less explanatory leverage than newer approaches that see culture as operating in the contexts that surround individuals, influencing action from the "outside in."

The sociology of culture contains two basic traditions, one deriving from Max Weber and the other from Emile Durkheim. Weber focused on meaningful action, and for him the fundamental unit of analysis was always the individual actor. Ideas, developed and promoted by self-interested actors (rulers seeking to legitimate their rule, elites attempting to justify their privileges, religious entrepreneurs seeking followers), come to have an independent influence on social action. People find themselves constrained by ideas that describe the world and specify what one can seek from it. Thus culture shapes action by defining what people want and how they imagine they can get it. Cultural analysis focuses on the complex systems of ideas that shape individuals' motives for action. In Weber's famous "switchman" metaphor:

> Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the 'world images' that have been created by 'ideas' have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest. 'From what' and 'for what' one wished to be redeemed and, let us not forget, 'could be' redeemed, depended on one's image of the world.   (1946a: 280)

Weber (1968, 1958) analyzed culture by trying to understand typical worldviews, like the Protestant one, that had shaped the motives of historically important groups. Identifying how a worldview motivates action – how one committed to it would act under its sway – is explanation in Weberian terms.

The second crucial strand in the sociology of culture comes from Durkheim. For Durkheim (1933, 1965), culture is constituted by "collective representations." These are not "ideas" in the Weberian sense. Collective representations may range from the vivid totemic symbol to moral beliefs to modern society's commitment to reason and individual autonomy (Durkheim 1973). Collective representations are not ideas developed by individuals or groups pursuing their interests. Rather, they are the vehicles of a fundamental process in which publicly shared symbols constitute social groups while they constrain and give form to individual consciousness (Durkheim

1965; Bellah 1973). Durkheim writes not of "ideas" and "world images" but of representations, rituals, and symbols. Symbols concretize "collective consciousness," making the animating power of group life palpable for its members. Symbols do not reflect group life; they constitute it.[1]

Talcott Parsons (1937) made a heroic attempt to synthesize Weber and Durkheim, taking from Weber the image of action as guided by culturally determined ends and from Durkheim the notion of culture as a shared, collective product. The end result was the Parsonian theory of "values," a term that played no important role for either Weber or Durkheim. For Parsons (1951, 1961), "values" are collectively shared ultimate ends of action. "Norms" are shared cultural rules that define appropriate means to attain valued ends. Parsons sees shared values as defining societies, making them what they are, just as Durkheim saw the totem as constituting the Aboriginal clan, making it a society. At the same time, Parsons sees values as governing action in very much the way Weber saw ideas as switchmen. But unlike Weber's concept of "ideas," Parsonian values are very general, abstract orientations of action, rather than the specific, historically grounded doctrines and worldviews that Weber thought shaped action (see Swidler 1986).

Despite its logical appeal and distinguished theoretical ancestry, the Parsonian theory of values was never very successful as a guide to research.[2] Renewed interest in culture emerged from the Parsonian legacy but moved in a different direction. Clifford Geertz (1973), a student of Parsons, followed Weber in much of his substantive work but broke with the Weberian foundations of Parsons's theory of action.[3] He did so by altering both the question and the methods of cultural studies. Influenced by semiotic approaches to language and symbols, Geertz argued that culture should be studied for its meanings and not for its effects on action. He also shifted methodological focus, arguing that the proper object of cultural study is not meanings in people's heads but publicly available symbols – rituals, aesthetic objects, and other "texts."

Despite Geertz's debt to Weber, the effect of the Geertzian revolution in anthropology, history, and literary studies has been to break with the Weberian problematic. Rather than looking at the ideas that motivate individual actors (or even collections of individual actors), Geertz's followers examine public symbols and ritual experiences (see Keesing 1974). Culture cannot be used to explain individual action or even group differences in behavior. Attention does not focus primarily on ideas, belief systems, or dogmas, but on other properties of culture, especially the mood or tone that a "cultural system" gives to daily life through its symbolic vocabulary and through the ritual experiences it makes available (Geertz 1973, 1976). Culture constitutes "humanness" itself as well as the social world: "Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" (Geertz 1973: 5). If culture influences action, then, it is not by providing the ends people seek, but by giving them the vocabulary of meanings, the expressive symbols, and the emotional repertoire with which they can seek anything at all.

The Revolution in Cultural Studies

Since the mid-1960s, when Geertz's influence began to be felt (with the original publication of "Religion as a Cultural System" in 1966), three dramatic develop-

ments have transformed cultural studies. They can best be summarized as publicness, practices, and power.

Culture as Public Symbols

Geertz's work fundamentally redefined the object of cultural analysis, revitalizing the practice of cultural studies.[4] Geertz shifted attention from a question that cultural analysts could rarely answer satisfactorily – How does a person's culture actually influence his or her actions – to one that was guaranteed to produce satisfying and even dazzling results: What does this cultural text, ritual, or practice mean to the people who use, perform, or live it? From Geertz's (1973) unpacking of the multistranded meanings of a Balinese cockfight to a historian unraveling the meaning of a ritual or folk tale (Davis 1975; Darnton 1984) to a literary critic finding deeper cultural patterns that animated Shakespeare's plays (Greenblatt 1980), the technique is similar. Identify a cultural text and then situate it in the rich web of associated cultural practices, beliefs, social structural realities, folk experiences, and so forth that allow its hearers, practitioners, or devotees to find it meaningful. Meaning itself is defined as context, as the other practices in which a text or ritual is embedded. This redefinition of the object of cultural analysis subtly altered what culture was understood to be. The focus on public vehicles of meaning reduced the need to investigate what any given individual or group actually felt or thought. Indeed, public symbols displayed a system of meanings, what some would call a semiotic code, rather than ideas that were in any person's head. The semiotic code was in some sense external to, or at least independent of, the minds of particular individuals. No longer the study of an ineffable subjectivity, the study of culture could now be grounded in accessible public objects.

The focus on public symbols also avoided the question of whether culture is necessarily shared or consensual. Durkheim and Parsons had been forced by the logic of their arguments to claim that cultural meanings were universally shared. But this claim did not hold up empirically. Public symbols, on the other hand, are clearly shared by the people who use them or form around them, and the question of whether these symbols' wider context of meaning is really shared seems unimportant. The analyst's task is to understand a formerly opaque ritual or practice through its context, and that exercise itself seemingly confirms that the context that has made its meaning comprehensible to the analyst also accounts for the ritual's ability to animate its practitioners or devotees.

Focusing on public ideas or texts also reshapes how one describes culture's influence on history. Rather than looking, as Weber did, for the ideas that motivated particular historical actors, the analyst traces changes in the cultural context within which all actors operated. Weber looked for ideas that directed the operation of "material and ideal interests." Contemporary culture analysts trace shifts in "discourses," the larger contexts of meanings within which any particular ideas or interests can be formulated (see Wuthnow 1987, 1989).

Practices

Cultural analysts have externalized the locus of culture in another way, by moving it from the mind's interior (ideas and mental representations) to social practices. The focus on practice has been widespread, from the attempt to revise the Marxian model of culture as "superstructure" (Williams 1973) to the efforts of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault to locate culture in embodied and institutionalized practices. Indeed, along with the terms *text* and *discourse*, the concept of "practice" is the hallmark of the new approaches in the sociology of culture.[5]

The concept of practice or practices differs from older conceptions of culture in two important ways. First, in reaction against the Durkheimian tradition, it emphasizes human agency. Pierre Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) conceives of culture not as a set of rules, but as deeply internalized habits, styles, and skills (the "habitus") that allow human beings to continually produce innovative actions that are nonetheless meaningful to others around them. For Bourdieu, active human beings continually recreate culture. They do not dutifully follow cultural rules, but energetically seek strategic advantage by using culturally encoded skills. Because access to those skills is differentially distributed, people's strategic efforts reproduce the structure of inequality (even if the players of the game are slightly rearranged).

Second, locating culture in social practices ties the study of culture to the analysis of institutions. Here the most important innovator is Michel Foucault. Foucault analyzes how systems of categories and distinctions are enacted and made real in institutional practices. For example, the practices that, after the sixteenth century, came to differentiate the sane from the mad – exclusion and confinement in asylums, or the diagnostic criteria later used by psychologists and others in the human sciences – are sets of cultural rules made real by being used to categorize and control human beings (Foucault 1965, 1978).

Foucault's arguments resemble Durkheim's insistence that rituals demarcate cultural boundaries and make symbolic truths real. But Foucault does not emphasize exotic ritual and symbol, nor the shared mental representations that unify a society's members. Rather, Foucault shifts attention to institutions, which use power to enact rules that construct human beings ("the subject") and the social world (Foucault 1983).

Power

The third important element in rethinking culture is a focus on power and inequality (Lamont and Wuthnow 1990). Max Weber (1968) always noted how the struggle for power shaped ideas, arguing that the interests of powerful groups had lasting influence on the shape of a culture. But he was interested in how ideas originally created to serve the powerful came to have a life of their own, constraining rulers as well as those they ruled, forcing elites to preserve their legitimacy by making good on their status claims and leading religious specialists to become preoccupied with distinctively religious problems.

Contemporary theorists instead see culture as itself a form of power. Foucault (1980), for example, analyzes how new kinds of knowledge and associated practices

(such as measuring, categorizing, or describing objects of knowledge) in effect construct new sites where power can be deployed. New disciplines, such as psychoanalysis, construct new loci such as the unconscious, new subjectivities, where power can be exercised (and also where resistance can emerge). Foucault (1977, 1983) eliminates the question of who has power, leaving aside the role of interested agents, to emphasize instead that each cultural formation, each technique of power, has a history of its own, and that different actors adopt these techniques for different purposes. Since cultural practices, categories, and rules are enactments of power, Foucault does not think of culture as being used by the powerful to maintain their power. Rather, he thinks of power itself as practices that deploy knowledge to constitute human beings as the subjects of that knowledge.

Pierre Bourdieu focuses less on power than on inequality. He emphasizes that people differ not only in their cultural resources but also in the skill with which they deploy those resources. Bourdieu's (1984) special contribution is to show how deeply inequalities between the more and less privileged penetrate persons, constituting the fundamental capacities for judgment, aesthetic response, social ease, or political confidence with which they act in the world. Actors use culture in creative ways to forward their own interests in a system of unequal power, but the effect of that struggle is to reproduce the basic structure of the system....

Culture and Social Movements

Turning Culture Inside Out

There is now an abundance of work – that of Foucault and Bourdieu, but also many others (Wuthnow 1987; Sewell 1985, 1990, 1992) – arguing that culture constitutes social experience and social structure, that culture should be seen as socially organized practices rather than individual ideas or values, that culture can be located in public symbols and rituals rather than in ephemeral subjectivities, and that culture and power are fundamentally linked. Yet these more global approaches to the study of culture can also be difficult to grasp firmly, either theoretically or empirically. It would be ideal to marry Weber's concrete, grounded style of causal argument to Durkheim's understanding of the irreducibly collective, encompassing nature of culture.[6]

One new approach to understanding how culture shapes social movements involves rethinking how culture works. Most culture theory assumes that culture has more powerful effects where it is deeper – deeply internalized in individual psyches, deeply integrated into bodies and habits of action, or deeply embedded in taken-for-granted "mentalities." But at least some of the time, culture may have more powerful effects when it is on the "outside," not deeply internalized or even deeply meaningful. Variations in the ways social contexts bring culture to bear on action may do more to determine culture's power than variations in how deeply culture is held. And study of these social contexts may prove a fruitful direction for integrating culture into social movement research.

For Weber's actor-based sociology of ideas, culture has more influence when it is clearer, more coherent, and more deeply held. Protestantism had more influence on economic action than any other faith because its rationalized doctrine cut off

"magical paths" to salvation, because it held that salvation was demonstrated in worldly action, and because it demanded that the intensely believing faithful rigorously regulate every aspect of daily life. Although Durkheim's model of culture was different from Weber's, he also held that culture had its greatest effects when it was most deeply part of the collective consciousness. Only universally shared, actively practiced, vivid symbols could constrain individual passions and impose a social reality on individual consciousness.

To analyze culture's power to affect action, independent of whether it is deeply held (either in the sense of deeply internalized, taken-for-granted practices like the habitus or in the sense of deeply held beliefs like those of Weber's Protestant saints), we may focus on three sources of cultural power: codes, contexts, and institutions. In each case we will see how the culture's effects on action can operate from the outside in, as social processes organize and focus culture's effects on action.

CODES

The notion of culture as a semiotic code has been one of the hallmarks of the new cultural studies. But the notion of semiotic code, by analogy with the deep structures that organize language, usually refers to deeply held, inescapable relationships of meaning that define the possibilities of utterance in a cultural universe. Deep, unspoken, and pervasive equals powerful.

Some codes are not deep, however, and not in the least invisible. A perfect example is provided by Theodore Caplow's (1982, 1984) study of Christmas gift giving in Middletown. In an article with the compelling title "Rule Enforcement without Visible Means," Caplow (1984) makes the point precisely. Caplow finds that middle-class Americans do not "believe in" Christmas gift giving. They criticize the commercialization of Christmas; they consider buying Christmas gifts an unpleasant burden; they think most gifts are a waste of money; they often do not like the gifts they receive; and they are unhappy with much of what they buy for others. Thus, Caplow asks, why do they give Christmas gifts, spending a considerable share of their disposable income, if they do not believe in it? Why does the practice persist without normative support and even in the face of widespread criticism?

Caplow uses data on actual gift giving to argue that Christmas gift giving constitutes a semiotic code (that is, a set of relationally defined meanings) in which the relative value of the gifts a person gives others signals the relative importance with which she or he holds those others. Not to give a gift would, independent of the intentions of the giver, be interpretable as a sign that one did not value the (non) recipient. What governs action in this case, then, is not individuals' internalized beliefs, but their knowledge of what meanings their actions have for others.[7]

Speaking of semiotic codes may seem to take us right back into the thickets of French structuralist theories or into a search for the deep underlying meanings that animate Geertzian "cultural systems." But semiotic codes can be much more discrete, more superficial, and sometimes more contested or political than semioticians usually imply. For example, when florists and confectioners try to increase their business by announcing National Secretaries' Week, few are presumably moved by deep belief in the principles that lie behind the announcement. But if every newspaper in the country is for weeks blanketed with advertisements implying that bosses who appreciate their

secretaries will give them flowers and take them out to lunch, both secretaries and their employers may be, at the least, uncomfortable about what signals their actions will send. An employer may well think that for twenty-five dollars it is not worth the risk of hurting the secretary's feelings; and even a secretary who has disdain for the occasion may feel offended, or at least ambivalent, if it is ignored.

Much of our cultural politics is fought out on precisely such terrain. Let us imagine that a national secretaries' union launches a "Bread Not Roses" campaign, so that for employers to offer flowers without a raise is redefined as a sign of contempt. This would be a direct use of culture to influence action, not so much by shaping beliefs as by shaping the external codes through which action is interpreted. These are cultural power struggles, in which publicity can be a potent weapon even if no deeper persuasion occurs.

Even without conscious efforts at publicity, one of the most important effects social movements have is publicly enacting images that confound existing cultural codings. From the punk subculture's deliberate embrace of "ugly" style (meant to muddle standard status codings [Hebdige 1979]) to the Black Panthers' display of militant, disciplined, armed black revolutionaries to the New Left spectacle of middle-class college students being beaten by police (Gitlin 1980), altering cultural codings is one of the most powerful ways social movements actually bring about change.

Recent American gender politics exhibit similar redefinitions of the cultural codes that signal masculinity and femininity. Increasingly in films (a perfect example is *Working Girl*) toughness and ambition are coded as part of earthy, sexy femininity, while classical feminine weakness, lace, and fluffy pillows are identified with a manipulative, dishonest antifemininity. In the same spirit, the very word *macho* makes the traditional hallmarks of masculinity seem suspect – signs of insecurity or weakness. The recent Disney classic *Beauty and the Beast* offers a wonderfully muscled, powerful, handsome antihero, Gaston, who is made utterly ridiculous as he carefully examines his appearance in every mirror he passes. In contrast, the Beast wins Beauty's love through his gentle awkwardness, his eagerness to please her, his love of books, and his distaste for violence. These cultural reworkings may sometimes change people's values or give them new role models. But more important, such cultural recodings change understandings of how behavior will be interpreted by others. If traditional feminine helplessness starts to look manipulative and controlling, and if masculine dominance starts to look pathetically self-absorbed, then men and women do not have to convert to find themselves meeting a new standard. Men may continue to aspire to masculinity and women to femininity, but the content those ideals encode has changed. . . .

CONTEXTS

One of the persistent difficulties in the sociology of culture is that culture influences action much more powerfully at some moments than at others. I have argued elsewhere (Swidler 1986), for example, that explicit cultural ideologies emerge during "unsettled" historical periods when such coherent, systematic worldviews can powerfully influence their adherents. But sometimes even fully articulated ideologies do not predict how people will act (as the many examples of co-optation, of movements that sell out their principles, or of leaders who betray revolutions

attest). And at other times, even inchoate or contradictory worldviews powerfully affect action. To better understand such variations in culture's influence, we need to think more carefully about the specific contexts in which culture is brought to bear.

The contexts in which ideas operate can give them coherence and cultural power. "Context" in the first instance means the immediate, face-to-face situation – whether actors are meeting in public forums such as mass meetings or legislatures where issues are debated and decided. In such settings, the dynamics of the meeting itself can give ideas a coherent, systematic influence, even when the individual participants are confused and ambivalent. Second, context can mean the more general situation of conflict or accommodation, polarization and alliance formation, crisis or politics as usual.

The effect of context is evident in many ordinary political and work activities. In academia, for example, one may be confused or ambivalent about an issue – how good a job candidate's work is, whether a colleague merits tenure, whether a departmental decision is genuinely feminist. But in a meeting where sides polarize, where one group defines the issue one way and their antagonists define it in another, these ambiguities fall by the wayside. When politics polarize and alliances are at stake, the public culture crystallizes. Ideas that may have had only loose associations become part of a unified position; other ideas, which may originally have been intermingled with the first set, become clearly opposed. To back the side one supports comes to mean holding a particular ideological line, casting one's lot with a given framing of the situation. It is the conflict itself, the need to separate allies from foes and the need to turn general predispositions into specific decisions, that structures ideological debate.

Certain contexts, particularly those that are important in many social movements, give culture a coherent organization and consistent influence that it normally lacks in the minds of most individuals. This accounts for some of the difficulty in trying to pin down just where and why culture makes a difference in social action (see, for an example, the revealing debate between Sewell [1985] and Skocpol [1985] on the role of culture in the French revolution). If we think of culture either in the Weberian sense, as ideas deeply internalized in individual psyches, or in the more recent semiotic sense as broad, encompassing discourses that shape all social discussion in a given historical era, we will miss the more specific ways cultural power varies by context....

Social movements play out in contexts such as revolutionary committees, public meetings, and constituent assemblies, where stakes are high, risks are great, and political alliances are both essential and uncertain....[S]pecific political contexts lead actors to draw lines of ideological division sharply, to develop the action implications of their ideological stances, and to make adherence to one side or another of a debate an important sign of alliance or opposition. As the song says, "Which side are you on?"

INSTITUTIONS

To explain how culture can have consistent effects on action even when people's beliefs are inconsistent, ambiguous, or lightly held, I have suggested that semiotic codes and political contexts can make ideas and symbols culturally constraining,

irrespective of whether people believe them. Institutions can have similar effects, by another route.

Institutions are well-established, stable sets of purposes and rules backed by sanctions. One example is legally structured marriage. Others, less formal but no less powerful, are the employment relationship and the established norms about buying and selling that define consumer transactions.[9]

Institutions create obdurate structures that are both constraints and opportunities for individuals. For sociologists of culture, what is interesting about institutions is that individuals create culture around their rules. Individuals can then come to act in culturally uniform ways, not because their experiences are shared, but because they must negotiate the same institutional hurdles.[10]

For example, in a college where students must have a major in order to graduate, they need to be able to answer the question, What do you plan to major in? They may also ask themselves and each other, What am I interested in? because the institution contains the presumption that focused interests guide the choice of major. Moreover, students may develop cultural lore about how to select a major, identities based around the choice of major, and categorizations of others ("techies" versus "fuzzies") on the basis of their majors. In a similar way, the American institution of voting presumes that citizens have ideas or opinions about public issues. Those who do not have opinions or ideas may feel that they are missing some crucial ingredient of self-hood. The tasks an institution requires make sense only if people have or can develop corresponding orientations. Widely shared cultural accounts for those orientations ensue, creating collective consistencies and resonances that the actors might not possess otherwise.

Similarly, the cultures of social movements are shaped by the institutions the movements confront. Different regime types and different forms of repression generate different kinds of social movements with differing tactics and internal cultures. Dominant institutions also shape the movements' deeper values. The most obvious case is the institution of suffrage itself. From Chartism to women's suffrage to civil rights movement, Western democracies have witnessed the drama of people denied suffrage organizing extra-legal protest to batter their way into the system, making claims for equal dignity and equal moral personhood. In such systems, to be a legitimate political actor is to be one who can vote....

[P]erhaps [the] search for a popular culture that could support activism starts in the wrong place. How people organize the cultural resources at their disposal depends very much on the kinds of institutional challenges they face.

Conclusion

I began this essay by stressing the two great wellsprings from which much of contemporary culture theory derives. In a sense Weber and Durkheim still define the range of alternatives available to sociologists who want to use culture to explain things. I have suggested that while the Weberian image of culture as belief carried by committed individual actors seems easier to work with, recent developments in cultural studies have moved in a more Durkheimian direction, seeing culture as constitutive, inherently collective, imbedded in symbols and practices, and necessar-

ily infused with power (see Alexander 1988). But culture in this sense – public practices infused with power – can also be extremely hard to grasp concretely. Indeed, too-easy embrace of the notion that culture is ubiquitous and constitutive can undermine any explanatory claims for culture. Then emphasis on culture becomes a species of intellectual hand waving, creating a warm and cozy atmosphere, while other factors continue to carry the real explanatory weight.

I have tried to offer four concrete suggestions about how culture might be conceived as a global, collective property without becoming only a diffused mist within which social action occurs. I have argued first that, to think more powerfully about culture, we must entertain the possibility that culture's power is independent of whether or not people believe in it. I have then gone on to suggest that culture can have powerful influence if it shapes not individuals' own beliefs and aspirations, but their knowledge of how others will interpret their actions.

My third suggestion is that students of culture in general, and social movement scholars in particular, need to pay close attention to the public contexts in which cultural understandings are brought to bear. Reminding ourselves of the power that meetings and other group forums have to crystallize ideological splits and recode public speech and action, I suggest that culture can have consistent, coherent effects on action in particular contexts even if individuals and groups are divided and inconsistent in their beliefs.

Finally, I have suggested that institutions structure culture by systematically patterning channels for social action. In a sense this simply reinforces the insights of the "political process" model of social movements, which notes that movements respond to the wider structure of political constraints and opportunities (McAdam 1982). But I have tried to push the cultural dimension of such processes, arguing that even cultural patterns that appear to be independent inventions (or innate needs) of individuals or groups can be produced or reproduced by the challenges with which institutions confront actors. Thus many movements may invent simultaneously what seem to be common cultural frames (like the many rights movements of the 1960s or the identity movements of the 1980s). But these need not be matters either of independent discovery or of cultural contagion. Rather, they may be common responses to the same institutional constraints and opportunities.

Rethinking how culture might work from the outside in is a large task. I do not think the suggestions I have made here about codes, contexts, and institutions are the only ways the issue might be approached. But I am convinced that if interest in culture is restricted to studying the inner meaning systems of deeply committed activists, or if culture is relegated to a vague – if "constitutive" – penumbra, we will sacrifice more incisive ways of thinking about its power.

Notes

1   See the analysis of Durkheim's view of symbols as constitutive in Bellah 1973.
2   The two major lines of empirical work on values are the anthropological, comparing values of different social groups (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961), and the social-psychological, comparing the values of individuals (Rokeach 1973).

3   Geertz's early classic, *The Religion of Java* (1960), is overtly Weberian in inspiration and execution, tracing the influence of differing religious ethics on economic action. Geertz (1966) also emphasizes the problem of theodicy (explaining suffering and injustice in the world God controls), which was central to Weber's analysis of the dynamics of religious change. And Geertz has returned repeatedly to the problem of rationalization in non-Western religious traditions (1968, 1973).
4   See Keesing 1974 for a detailed treatment of this issue.
5   See Sherry Ortner's (1984) insightful and entertaining analysis of shifts in culture theory, "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties."
6   This is the theoretical strategy Randall Collins (1981, 1988) has called "microtranslation." The theorist attempts to provide concrete, individual-level causal imagery even for macro or global causal processes, without making the micro reductionist claim that the underlying causal dynamics operate at the micro level.
7   Careful readers of Weber will note that such an explanation of action is perfectly compatible with his theoretical orientation. "Social action" is, after all, action whose "subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course" (Weber 1968: 4). Weber (1946b) also argued clearly that the Protestant sects continued to influence action long after intense belief had faded because members knew that sect membership gave visible social testimony to their worthiness. Nonetheless, Weber and most of his followers have been preoccupied with the inner workings of the religious psyche rather than with more external forms of cultural power.
8   William Sewell Jr. (1985, 1990) analyzes how dramatic social movements shift an entire pattern of public discourse and thus remake future forms of collective action.
9   See Jepperson 1991 and Scott 1992 for fuller treatments of institutions and problems of institutional analysis.
10 I develop this argument more fully for the case of marriage in *Talk of Love: How Americans Use Their Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

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Editor's Notes on Further Reading

Swidler on How Culture Works

Culture is often thought to influence action through internalized individual beliefs and norms. Against this, Swidler makes the important and sometimes counterintuitive argument that culture is influential through mechanisms external to the individual: interactional and institutional contexts carry expectations about others' beliefs which influence action. In the full article she argues that social movements may influence social change by recoding traditional symbols and by creating contexts which sharpen inchoate beliefs.

For the general theoretical context of this argument see excerpts from work by Geertz, Bourdieu, Alexander and Smith, Sewell, and Wuthnow, and related editor's notes, this volume; for an alternative view of how culture affects individual beliefs and norms, see excerpt from Schudson, this volume. For an influential argument against the impact of cultural values and in favor of cultural repertoires of strategies of action, and arguing for different mechanisms of cultural influence in settled and unsettled times, see Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 273–86. On long-term cultural persistence see Ann Swidler, "Inequality and American Culture: The Persistence of Voluntarism," pp. 294–314 in Gary Marks and Larry Diamond, eds., *Reexamining Democracy: Essays in Honor of Seymour Martin Lipset* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992).

Swidler's approach emerges from her investigations of American culture and society; see, for instance, Ann Swidler, *Organization Without Authority: Dilemmas of Social Control in Free Schools* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steve Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) and *The Good Society* (New York: Vintage, 1991); Ann Swidler and Jorge Arditi, "The New Sociology of Knowledge," *Annual Review of Sociology* 20 (1994): 305–29; Claude Fischer, Michael Hout, Martin Sanchez Jankowski, Samuel Lucas, Ann Swidler, and Kim Voss, *Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); and Ann Swidler, *Talk of Love: How Americans Use Their Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

29 A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation

William H. Sewell, Jr.

Why Structural Change Is Possible

It is, of course, entirely proper for Bourdieu to insist on the strong reproductive bias built into structures – that is the whole point of the structure concept and part of what makes the concept so essential for theorizing social change. After all, as Renato Rosaldo (1980) and Marshall Sahlins (1981, 1985) have brilliantly demonstrated, the same reproductive biases of structures that explain the powerful continuities of social relations also make it possible to explain the paths followed in episodes of social change. What gets Bourdieu off the track is his unrealistically unified and totalized concept of habitus, which he conceptualizes as a vast series of strictly homologous structures encompassing all of social experience. Such a conceptualization, which Bourdieu in fact shares roughly with many structurally inclined theorists, cannot explain change as arising from within the operation of structures. It is characteristic that many structural accounts of social transformation tend to introduce change from outside the system and then trace out the ensuing structurally shaped changes, rather than showing how change is generated by the operation of structures internal to a society. In this respect, Marshall Sahlins's (1981) analysis of how Captain Cook's voyages affected the Hawaiians is emblematic. It is my conviction that a theory of change cannot be built into a theory of structure unless we adopt a far more multiple, contingent, and fractured conception of society – and of structure. What is needed is a conceptual vocabulary that makes it possible to show how the ordinary operations of structures can generate transformations. To this end, I propose five key axioms: the multiplicity of structures, the transposability of schemas, the unpredictability of resource accumulation, the polysemy of resources, and the intersection of structures.

The multiplicity of structures. – Societies are based on practices that derive from many distinct structures, which exist at different levels, operate in different modalities, and are themselves based on widely varying types and quantities of resources. While it is common for a certain range of these structures to be homologous, like those described by Bourdieu in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, it is never true that all of them are homologous. Structures tend to vary significantly between different institutional spheres, so that kinship structures will have different logics and dynamics than those possessed by religious structures, productive structures, aesthetic structures, educational structures, and so on. There is, moreover, important variation even within a given sphere. For example, the structures that shape and constrain religion in Christian societies include authoritarian, prophetic, ritual, and theoretical modes. These may sometimes operate in harmony, but they can also lead

to sharply conflicting claims and empowerments. The multiplicity of structures means that the knowledgeable social actors whose practices constitute a society are far more versatile than Bourdieu's account of a universally homologous habitus would imply: social actors are capable of applying a wide range of different and even incompatible schemas and have access to heterogeneous arrays of resources.

The transposability of schemas. – Moreover, the schemas to which actors have access can be applied across a wide range of circumstances. This is actually recognized by Bourdieu, but he has not, in my opinion, drawn the correct conclusions from his insight. Schemas were defined above as generalizable or transposable procedures applied in the enactment of social life. The term "generalizable" is taken from Giddens; the term "transposable," which I prefer, is taken from Bourdieu.[1] At one point Bourdieu defines habitus as "a system of lasting transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems" (1977, p. 83; emphasis in original).

The slippage in this passage occurs in the final phrase, "permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems." Whether a given problem is similarly shaped enough to be solved by analogical transfers of schemes cannot be decided in advance by social scientific analysts, but must be determined case by the actors, which means that there is no fixed limit to the possible transpositions. This is in fact implied by the earlier phrase, "makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks." To say that schemas are transposable, in other words, is to say that they can be applied to a wide and not fully predictable range of cases outside the context in which they are initially learned. This fits with what we usually mean by knowledge of a rule or of some other learned procedure. In ordinary speech one cannot be said to really *know* a rule simply because one can apply it mechanically to repeated instances of the same case. Whether we are speaking of rules of grammar, mathematics, law, etiquette, or carpentry, the real test of knowing a rule is to be able to apply it successfully in *unfamiliar* cases. Knowledge of a rule or a schema by definition means the ability to transpose or extend it – that is, to apply it creatively. If this is so, then *agency*, which I would define as entailing the capacity to transpose and extend schemas to new contexts, is inherent in the knowledge of cultural schemas that characterizes all minimally competent members of society.[2]

The unpredictability of resource accumulation. – But the very fact that schemas are by definition capable of being transposed or extended means that the resource consequences of the enactment of cultural schemas is never entirely predictable. A joke told to a new audience, an investment made in a new market, an offer of marriage made to a new patriline, a cavalry attack made on a new terrain, a crop planted in a newly cleared field or in a familiar field in a new spring – the effect of these actions on the resources of the actors is never quite certain. Investment in a new market may make the entrepreneur a pauper or a millionaire, negotiation of a marriage with a new patriline may result in a family's elevation in status or its extinction in a feud, planting a crop in the familiar field may result in subsistence, starvation, or plenty. Moreover, if the enactment of schemas creates unpredictable quantities and qualities of resources, and if the reproduction of schemas depends on their continuing validation by resources, this implies that schemas will in fact be

differentially validated when they are put into action and therefore will potentially be subject to modification. A brilliantly successful cavalry attack on a new terrain may change the battle plans of subsequent campaigns or even theories of military tactics; a joke that draws rotten tomatoes rather than laughter may result in the suppression of a category of jokes from the comedian's repertoire; a succession of crop failures may modify routines of planting or plowing.[3]

The polysemy of resources. – The term polysemy (or multiplicity of meaning) is normally applied to symbols, language, or texts. Its application to resources sounds like a contradiction in terms. But, given the concept of resources I am advocating here, it is not. Resources, I have insisted, embody cultural schemas. Like texts or ritual performances, however, their meaning is never entirely unambiguous. The form of the factory embodies and therefore teaches capitalist notions of property relations. But, as Marx points out, it can also teach the necessarily social and collective character of production and thereby undermine the capitalist notion of private property. The new prestige, wealth, and territory gained from the brilliant success of a cavalry charge may be attributed to the superior discipline and élan of the cavalry officers and thereby enhance the power of an aristocratic officer corps, or it may be attributed to the commanding general and thereby result in the increasing subordination of officers to a charismatic leader. Any array of resources is capable of being interpreted in varying ways and, therefore, of empowering different actors and teaching different schemas. Again, this seems to me inherent in a definition of agency as the capacity to transpose and extend schemas to new contexts. Agency, to put it differently, is the actor's capacity to reinterpret and mobilize an array of resources in terms of cultural schemas other than those that initially constituted the array.

The intersection of structures. – One reason arrays of resources can be interpreted in more than one way is that structures or structural complexes intersect and over-lap. The structures of capitalist society include both a mode of production based on private property and profit and a mode of labor organization based on workplace solidarity. The factory figures as a crucial resource in both of these structures, and its meaning and consequences for both workers and managers is therefore open and contested. The intersection of structures, in fact, takes place in both the schema and the resource dimensions. Not only can a given array of resources be claimed by different actors embedded in different structural complexes (or differentially claimed different actors embedded in different structural complexes), but schemas can be borrowed or appropriated from one structural complex and applied to another. Not only do workers and factory owners struggle for control of the factory, but Marx appropriates political economy for the advancement of socialism.

Structures, then, are sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by that social action. But their reproduction is never automatic. Structures are at risk, at least to some extent, in all of the social encounters they shape – because structures are multiple and intersecting, because schemas are transposable, and because resources are polysemic and accumulate unpredictably. Placing the relationship between resources and cultural schemas at the center of a concept of structure makes it possible to show how social change, no less than social stasis, can be generated by the enactment of structures in social life.

Notes

1 To generalize a rule implies stating it in more abstract form so that it will apply to a larger number of cases. The verb "transpose" implies a concrete application of a rule to a new case, but in such a way that the rule will have subtly different forms in each of its applications. This is implied by three of the *Oxford English Dictionary's* (1971, s.v. "transpose") defini-tions: "To remove from one place or time to another; to transfer, shift," "to alter the order of or the position of in a series ... to interchange," and, in music, "to put into a different key." *Transposer*, in French (which was of course the language in which Bourdieu wrote), also has an even more appropriate meaning: "faire changer de forme ou de contenu en faisant passer dans un autre domaine," (to cause something to change in form or content by causing it to pass into another domain, *Le Petit Robert* [1984, s.v. "transposer"]). I would like my use of *transpose* to be understood as retaining something of this French meaning.
2 Here my thinking has been influenced by Goran Therborn (1980, esp. pp. 15–22).
3 Although Marshall Sahlins (1981, 1985) does not explicitly include resources in his definition of structure, my argument here runs closely parallel to his. Sahlins argues that "in action in the world – technically, in acts of reference – the cultural categories acquire new functional values" because the categories are "burdened with the world" (1985, p. 138). This burdening of categories with the world is a matter of schemas being changed by the unanticipated effects of action on the resources that sustain the schemas.

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Editor's Notes on Further Reading

Sewell on Cultural Schemas and Structural Change

How is social change possible when social structures pattern and constrain human action? In part, Sewell attacks this classic question by including a cultural dimension – schemas – in his

concept of social structure, and by giving important theoretical weight to the cultural point that meanings for the same thing may vary (polysemy). In the full article he redefines the idea of social structure as combining cultural schemas and resources, develops a theory of human agency as inherent in structures, and articulates how social structures differ in depth and range. Of particular interest here is the way qualities of culture help make social structures changeable.

Sewell builds on and critiques work of Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu: see for example Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) and Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). Related theoretical reflections include Sewell, "The Concept(s) of Culture," pp. 35–61 in Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); "Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille," *Theory and Society* 25 (1996): 841–81; and Sewell "Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case," and Theda Skocpol, "Cultural Idioms and Political Ideologies in the Revolutionary Reconstruction of State Power: A Rejoinder to Sewell," *The Journal of Modern History* 57 (1985): 57–85, 86–96.

On the general issue of structure, culture, continuity, and change see also excerpts from work by Shils, Williams, Bourdieu, Schudson, Swidler, and Wuthnow, this volume, as well as Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, "What is Agency?" *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (1998): 962–1023; Bennett Berger, *An Essay on Culture: Symbolic Structure and Social Structure* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); S. N. Eisenstadt, "Culture and Social Structure Revisited," pp. 280–305 in *Power, Trust, and Meaning: Essays in Sociological Theory and Analysis* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), and other essays in that volume; Mustafa Emirbayer and Jeff Goodwin, "Network Analysis, Culture, and the Problem of Agency," *American Journal of Sociology* 99 (1994): 1411–54; Douglas Porpora, "Cultural Rules and Material Relations," *Sociological Theory* 11 (1993): 212–29; Gene Burns, "Materialism, Ideology, and Political Change," pp. 248–62 in Robert Wuthnow, ed., *Vocabularies of Public Life: Empirical Essays in Symbolic Structure* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Anne Kane, "Cultural Analysis in Historical Sociology: The Analytic and Concrete Forms of the Autonomy of Culture," *Sociological Theory* 9 (1991): 53–69; Margaret Archer, *Culture and Agency* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Gary Alan Fine and Sherryl Kleinman, "Network and Meaning: An Interactionist Approach to Structure," *Symbolic Interaction* 6 (1983): 97–110.

30   Communities of Discourse: Ideology and Social Structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism

Robert Wuthnow

Environments, Institutions, Actions

The sociological tradition ... has generally emphasized the so-called material conditions of the social environment as possible sources of cultural change. In this tradition economic activities, modes of production, demographic patterns, urbanization, class relations, income levels, and the like have been given special attention. The emphasis on these material conditions rests, in addition to whatever theoretical framework may be invoked, on at least three practical considerations: that material conditions are sufficiently distinguishable from cultural phenomena that one is unlikely to become involved in purely tautological arguments by attempting to establish the influence of one on the other; that societies and individuals are relatively dependent on their capacity to extract resources from the material environment and are, therefore, likely to be affected in significant ways by their relations to this environment; and that material conditions, by their very materiality, are likely to have left traces of themselves, thereby facilitating the task of empirical reconstruction. In arguing for both a broader conception of environmental conditions, especially one that includes intellectual precedents and implicit features of the cultural tradition, and a more empirical or behavioral concept of culture itself, some of these practical advantages may be diminished. Nevertheless, the general value of paying attention to the broad environmental conditions under which ideological change comes about would appear to remain beyond dispute.

Environmental conditions, as the term has been used in this study, consist of economic, political, and cultural resources, characterized in terms of overall levels, distributions, and rates of change that determine the nature of broad societal patterns. Unlike more specific concepts, such as bourgeoisie or urbanization, that are intended to denote actual historical formations, the idea of environmental conditions is a purely sensitizing device free of historical content. It therefore requires operationalization in more concrete terms in specific historical settings. As a general category of social factors, however, it points toward the probable importance of economic resources that affect capacities to engage in culture production; political resources

such as guarantees of intellectual freedom, legal guarantees underlying relevant contracts and property relations, and the prestige or legitimacy that political entities may be capable of bestowing on cultural products; communication technologies such as river transportation, postal services, printing, bookshops, or electronic media that influence genres of cultural production and their capacity to reach particular audiences; and cultural resources such as shared languages, literacy, religious and ethnic traditions, and orientations toward particular values. In the case of the Reformation, for instance, the specific manifestations of these general conditions that proved relevant to the analysis include the cultural uniformity that spanned most of Europe as a result of the historic influences of Christianity, the existence of printing and of rising levels of literacy, the prevalence of agrarian modes of economic production, the continent's division into numerous political entities that were often in conflict with one another, a gradual rise in population, expansion in trade, and correlative increases in prices and the circulation of money.

In the cases considered, several points about these environmental conditions appear worth emphasizing. Of particular importance, insofar as ideology is conceived of as the result of a process of production, is the extent to which broad social environments function as pools of resources. Changes in population, trading networks, wages and price levels have all been considered in this manner, as have such relevant conditions as literacy rates, military obligations, levels of national political integration, and tensions within the religious sphere. Treating these conditions as resources has placed emphasis on their potential for altering or maintaining the specific contexts in which ideological production takes place. Changes in the profitability of particular commodities thus become important, for instance, insofar as these changes permit some actors involved in the production of ideology greater latitude in making decisions. This view is, of course, quite different from a perspective that understands ideology to be merely a constitutive element of the broad social environment. It also differs from a purely structural approach that emphasizes certain tacit homologies between environmental conditions and their associated ideologies. In this cases ideology is shaped directly and determinatively by the social environment. Conceiving of environments as resources adds an element of indeterminacy. Resources affect the range of ideologies that are likely to be produced, but these resources are also channeled by the more proximate contexts in which ideological production occurs.

Another point is that the abstract notion of environmental resources takes on meaning only in specific historical settings. What constitutes a relevant resource in one setting clearly may not be an important factor in another setting. The economic changes that permitted towns to fortify themselves against surrounding nobility clearly had greater relevance in the sixteenth century than in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. It also bears noting, however, that this very lack of conceptual specificity has advantages in pointing toward a wide variety of relevant resources. Not only can the role of economic conditions and class relations be considered, but also the influences of intellectual antecedents, prevailing literary genres, precedents for voicing dissent, and so on. The concept of environmental conditions thus subsumes the more generalized, implicit, embedded features of culture that have been emphasized in other perspectives.

Broad changes in dominant ideologies such as those associated with the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and socialism appear to have been facilitated by overall

increases in the level of resources available in the social environment. Demographic, commercial, and political expansion opened the way for new elites to gain power and for new mechanisms of ideological production to emerge without fundamentally undermining established institutions (until later in the process). The effects of resource expansion were, however, mediated. They did not facilitate new ideologies simply by altering the outlooks of disaggregated individuals. Nor did their effects occur uniformly. Changes in resources were decisively channeled by preexisting patterns of social relations, by the particular kinds of resources available, and by prevailing modes of appropriating and distributing resources.

The critical mediating connection between shifts in environmental conditions and changes in ideology appears in all three of the episodes examined to have been the specific institutional contexts in which ideologies were produced, disseminated, and authorized. None of these ideologies sprang into bloom on a thousand hilltops as if scattered there by the wind. They grew under the careful cultivation of particular movements that arose in specific places and that bore specific relations to their surroundings. The Reformation grew in urban pulpits, within certain ranks of the clergy, and in the offices of some ecclesiastical and secular hierarchies; the Enlightenment in salons, academies, bureaus, and universities; the socialist movement in party offices, legislative halls, and clandestine associations. Broadly speaking, institutional contexts are the organizational positions and relations that form the matrix in which ideas are produced and disseminated, including the relations between these organizations and other institutions in the broader environment.

The study of the institutional contexts of ideological production must focus first on the producers themselves: their numbers, conditions of work, sources of patronage, and channels of communication. Second, it must focus on the immediate audiences toward which ideological production is directed: their size and social composition, the channels connecting them with producers, the resources they can place at the disposal of producers, and the limitations they can impose. Finally, it must focus on the broader web of institutional linkages in which these specific activities are embedded: relations with established culture producing institutions, relations with agencies of the state, informal relations with ruling elites, integration into market relations and patronage networks, vulnerability to institutional schisms. These, much more so than the general spirit of the times or even the specific conditions under which culture producers' personalities are shaped, constitute the immediate contexts in which ideology is produced. It is in these contexts that particular forms of patronage can facilitate one kind of ideology more than another, or that audiences with particular grievances can gain the attention of writers capable of articulating these grievances, or that literary markets sizable enough to sustain an interactive and competitive community of literary producers can be created.

Within these institutional contexts ideology is generated and shaped, not all at once but through a series of action sequences. These are the work of historical agents. Their activities occur within the structural constraints of the institutional arrangements to which they are exposed. But within these constraints discretion is exercised, and variability in the cultural products that emerge is the inevitable result. The producers of ideology and those in a position to channel it in one direction or another respond to specific pressures, to crises, to demands that must be met if further crises are to be avoided. These responses occur in time; they follow

one another and depend on the precedents and limitations set by their own predecessors.

The ideologies that result from these processes are likely, over time, to bend in the direction of the resources and situational constraints that went into their formation. They may not, however, reflect the interests of their creators. The decisions from which they emanate are more likely to be made with partial knowledge of the immediate situation, with an even more limited knowledge of the future, and with the intention of resolving short-term crises more than perpetuating long-term interests.

The idea of action sequences also points toward a reciprocal influence (a kind of feedback mechanism) of ideas on the social environment. If, as I have suggested, the social environment consists of resources, then ideology may be recognized as one of the ways in which actors attempt to gain control over these resources. Ideologies are seldom neutral with respect to the distribution of resources. Rather than merely describing the environment, ideologies specify how social resources should be distributed. Claims are made on authorities; scripts are provided that become operative in situations of decision making; standards are set forth for evaluating the propriety of behavior. If an ideology succeeds in becoming institutionalized, therefore, it may play a decisive role in acting back on its environment. This, of course, becomes the point at which to consider the processes involved in articulating a distinct relation between an ideology and its environment.

Production, Selection, Institutionalization

It has been suggested that cultural change comes about as a result of relatively abrupt, episodic ideological innovations, such as those associated with the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and socialism, in addition to the more gradual, incremental migration of outlooks that has often been described in the literature. In these episodes of marked ideological innovation, the conjuncture of changing resources and shifting institutional contexts can be seen clearly. The resulting ideological change does not, however, consist of a simple replacement of an old ideology by a new one. The process, as I have suggested, can be divided into three phases or subprocesses.

The production phase is characterized by an increase in the overall range of variation in ideological forms. Older, well-established forms continue but are faced with deviant alternatives, some of which will eventually fail while others will eventually triumph. The heightened degree of diversity may be evident along a number of dimensions: substantive or thematic emphases, modes of ideological production, genres, distinct charismatic leaders and devotees of a particular ideological orientation, ritual practices. In the Reformation this diversity was evident in an expanded array of biblical interpretations, views of the sacraments, styles of worship, and charismatic figures whose names came to symbolize clusters of alternative beliefs and practices. In the Enlightenment a heightened variety of ideological forms became evident in the use of alternative genres, in an enlarged number of literary and scientific topics, in the increasing range of media and sources of, patronage and again in the proliferation of charismatic figures with distinct ideological positions.

The socialist movement demonstrated a similar proliferation of charismatic figures, a variety of programmatic emphases, experimentation with new genres of discourse, and the adoption of a wide range of discursive vehicles. The accepted ideas of the past were confronted not so much by a single innovative revelation as by many ideological contenders. Permutations compounded, and their advocates often found themselves at odds with one another as much as with the more traditional ideological practices.

All three periods were characterized by a combination of circumstances that expanded the opportunities available for this kind of diversity to be produced. Economic expansion alone contributed to an increasing availability of patronage, opportunities for a larger number of talented writers or speakers to pursue careers in theology or literature or politics, and an enlarged segment of the population with requisite literacy levels or excess income to devote to books, newspapers, and the support of literary associations. In addition, changing configurations of power among fractions of the ruling elite created stalemates that prevented established cultural authorities from repressing the new alternatives, or expanded the variety of patrons from whom support could be obtained or of officials from whom protection could be sought. Changing configurations of power also created structural ambiguities that appear to have encouraged efforts to redefine prevailing ideologies. In the Reformation these ambiguities were evident in uprisings within the lower strata of the towns and cities, in the relations between state officials and the land-owning elite, and in the relations among the leading regimes. In the Enlightenment a critical source of ambiguity lay in the altered balance of power between central bureaucracies and representative bodies and in the heterarchic structure of patronage networks and state agencies. The socialist movement grew in response to ambiguities created by competition between liberal republican parties and monarchic aristocratic parties and by the numeric increases evident in the working class itself. Combined with the resources and de facto opportunities to respond to these ambiguities, circumstances of these kinds became rife with competing communities of discourse.

As the historical evidence has indicated, heightened levels of ideological diversity in these periods, once produced, also became subject to processes of social selection. Certain variants gradually proved more successful at securing resources under particular circumstances, while other contenders gradually fell by the wayside or became relegated to relatively small, marginalized niches. These processes were evident in the trajectories of Lutheranism, Calvinism, Catholicism, and the various Anabaptist sects during the Reformation. Local circumstances reinforced different religious tendencies in different parts of Europe. In the Enlightenment local conditions favored more philosophic orientations in some areas and technical orientations in others. Socialist leaders found some contexts more conducive to revolutionary rhetoric, others to reformist coalitions.

In each instance the very possibility of selective processes coming into being was contingent on two decisive characteristics of the broader society. It was contingent on preexisting ideological diversity, for without heightened variation in ideological forms, fewer options for selection would have been present. It was also contingent on the relation I have emphasized between resources and ideological production. Were ideologies simply the private ruminations of individuals, any number of

conceivable permutations could coexist in happy mutual accommodation. But to be produced, ideologies require resources and, in turn, specify how resources ought to be used. Thus, the various purveyors of ideologies in each of these periods were indeed one another's competitors. Ideologies that secured the necessary resources flourished; others declined.

The competition on which selective processes rested also depended on several broad features of the social environment in which these ideological movements developed. One was the relative ease with which communication occurred. Without it, the Reformation or the Enlightenment or socialism would not have been a single movement with internal competition but a congeries of separate movements. In a general sense, communication in each instance was facilitated by the fact that Europe, even by the sixteenth century, had achieved a remarkable degree of economic integration, was criss-crossed with an increasing amount of trade and travel, and enjoyed a single religious heritage that, despite language differences, provided common values and interests. At the same time, it was also crucial that Europe consisted of a heterogeneous array of local and regional niches. It was possible in all three periods for leaders of ideological movements to gain control over needed resources by adapting to certain of these niches. This adaptation furthered the overall ideological diversity of each period and yet facilitated the survival quotient of the movement as a whole by linking it to a broader array of conditions. None of the three movements depended only on the success or failure of a particular regime.

In addition to the selective processes that connected specific ideological variants with specific geographic locations, more general selective processes are also evident in the three movements. Dependent as they were on the state for patronage of all kinds, the leaders of each movement found themselves constrained by the interests of state officials. This did not mean that state officials encouraged only those ideologies that aggrandized their regimes or adopted ideologies that legitimated the broader class interests on which their power was based. But it did mean, in nearly all instances, that officials were more likely to bestow resources on ideological movements that posed no immediate challenge to their authority and that enhanced their own capacity in the short term to make decisions. Henry VIII's Reformation placed the ecclesiastical hierarchy under the crown's control but militated against Lollardy and other heresies that demanded greater lay control over the church. Town magistrates in central Europe for the most part followed courses of action that they hoped would quiet popular dissent and avoid intervention by outside regimes. The Enlightenment writers produced works of virtually every conceivable kind, but the works that gained them prominence, patronage, and appointments to prestigious academies were more likely to emphasize moral and utilitarian themes, appeal to highbrow aesthetic tastes, and disguise more critical themes in satire and historical treatises than to cater openly to the masses or encourage blatant dissent. Even the socialists, whose revolutionary rhetoric posed direct challenges to the established order, produced an ideology prior to the First World War that largely favored parliamentary debate, moderate reform, and cooperation with the state in achieving legislation favorable to the working classes. At a more general level, we have also seen examples of the degree to which rational procedures for the conduct of scholarly business, rational forms of discourse, utilitarian criteria of evaluation, and universalistic appeals were reinforced by the movements' association with the state.

The fact that selective processes occurred in the context of relatively high levels of ideological diversity and structural ambiguity also resulted in some tendencies for genres of discourse capable of expressing this diversity and ambiguity to be reinforced. For instance, Reformation discourse tended to favor the homily, the tract, and verse-by-verse commentary, all of which were suited to discrete observations about contemporary events, to a greater extent than the more systematically integrated theological tome. Enlightenment literature gradually turned away from the more constricted forms of epic poetry and classical drama and experimented with epistolary fiction, travelogues, and the novel. Socialist writers found advantages in formulating programs around seriatim lists of demands, disaggregated theses, and short polemical tracts and newspaper commentaries. In each instance, a symbolic differentiation also occurred between these more practical modes of discourse and the theoretical treatises that defined the movement's ideology in more abstract terms.

As these examples indicate, selective processes involve the active efforts of ideological producers as well as the effects of impersonal social mechanisms. But in both ways, selective processes draw ideological manifestations into closer articulation with their social contexts and demonstrate the shaping influences of these contexts. Processes of institutionalization, in contrast, point more toward ideologies gaining the capacity to shape their own destinies, as it were, and even to have an effect on the social contexts in which they occur. Institutionalization is characterized by an increasing level of differentiation between other arenas of social activity and those in which ideology is produced. In this process the producers of ideology gain a greater degree of autonomy in setting their own standards of evaluation. This autonomy, together with a more highly developed system of internal communication and greater routinization of the means by which resources are channeled toward ideological production, generally implies a stronger sense of stability for the resulting ideologies.

Institutionalization implies that ideas become embedded in concrete communities of discourse rather than floating freely in the creative minds of their inventors. Despite the loftiness of its ideals, the Enlightenment was grounded firmly in the concrete activities of writers and patrons, publishers and booksellers, the gatherings in salons and academies, classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. So were the ideals of the Protestant reformers and revolutionary Marxists. Indeed, a distinguishing feature of each of the periods examined was that new ideas ceased to be the sporadic contributions of a few inventive minds and became the regular products of social organizations devoted to their cultivation and dissemination. Reading clubs, academies, salons, university chairs, book fairs, subscription lists, and periodicals, in this sense, gauge the success of the Enlightenment as much as do the more ethereal virtues of rationality, skepticism, empiricism, and freedom.

Yet institutionalization also implies the emancipation of ideas from the social contexts in which they are embedded. Clergy made Scripture the measure of their authority, writers their own standards of aesthetic virtue, and revolutionaries the deterministic movement of material conditions that only they and their disciples could claim to understand. Discourse contemporizes itself by addressing concrete issues of collective importance, but it also refers reflexively to its own central themes. The competition separating different wings of the movement is not resolved

by fiat but is allowed to continue, thereby necessitating further discourse and ensuring the perpetuation of its own production. Discretion in the interpretation of dogma is enjoined, giving it flexibility in adapting to unforeseen situations. At the same time, responsibility, deliberation, ritual enactments, festivals, and gatherings are prescribed, increasing the likelihood that fellow producers and their audiences will sustain contact with one another and acquire a tangible identity that reinforces the more abstract levels of their discourse.

Institutionalization, therefore, overlaps with the processes of production and selection but also plays a distinct role in ideological innovation. Like production and selection, it results from the actions of culture producers and involves not only responses to social conditions but also adaptations of the internal structure of discourse itself. It strengthens an ideology's capacity to withstand subsequent changes in its social environment. But it also depends on an appropriate combination of social circumstances. In each of the cases examined, broader expansion in the resource environment made possible an increase in the range of ideologies produced and a more dependable assortment of patronage networks, publishing arrangements, recruitment mechanisms, and offices for culture producers. The relative abundance of resources also made possible an extended period of internal competition which encouraged higher overall levels of ideological productivity. More important perhaps, the particular distribution of these resources among fractions of the ruling elite opened up zones of activity that were relatively free of control by established cultural institutions: urban pulpits, state-initiated academies, working-class political parties. Divisions within religious institutions and other established cultural organizations and in the ruling elite more generally also created conditions that culture producers could exploit to gain greater control over their own affairs. In each case these favorable conjunctures were relatively short-lived, lasting no more than a few generations, but new ideas became sufficiently institutionalized that they could not be ignored in the more turbulent times that followed.

Discursive Fields and Figural Action

The content of ideology in each of these instances was thus shaped in a variety of ways by the social circumstances in which it appeared. To pin down these relations more specifically, I have drawn attention to the connections among social horizons, discursive fields, and figural action. Examining these connections necessitates shifting the primary focus of attention to the discursive texts in which an ideology is expressed. All the foregoing is required in order to grasp the conditions of which the experienced social horizons of culture producers are composed, but the clues for linking these horizons to the internal composition of texts themselves come largely from a different source. They come from structuralist and formalist methods of literary analysis: from Bakhtin, Todorov, Althusser, Jameson, and others.

Linking the internal structure of discourse with the social contexts of its production must also be understood in relation to the problem of articulation that was raised at the outset. Efforts to identify direct homologies between belief systems and the experienced world, such as those prevailing in standard approaches to the sociology of knowledge, have generally proven theoretically sterile and empirically

futile. That ideologies should bear the decisive imprint of class relations, authority structures, or some other feature of the social environment has proven impossible to defend in the face of the vast creative variety that characterizes culture production. At the same time, a distinctly inferior theoretical position is taken if one asserts that culture production is free of all social influences or related to social contexts only in idiosyncratic ways. If ideologies are produced, rather than merely happening by some subjective process, then they are produced in time and space, and these coordinates limit the horizons from which resources can be obtained. Some degree of articulation with these horizons seems inevitable. And yet some degree of disarticulation seems equally inevitable, particularly if the ideologies under consideration have any continuing appeal. This delicate balance between articulation and disarticulation is, of course, partly achieved by the process of institutionalization, insofar as this process places culture producers within a tangible social setting and yet emancipates them from some of the constraints of the surrounding social environment. It is, however, a balance that depends on the more dynamic interaction between experience and discourse as well.

The ideologies purveyed by the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and socialism constitute a distinct mode of discourse: not only are they ideologies that attempt to persuade (for example, in contrast with discourse aimed merely at description, factual communication, or entertainment), but they are also the work of oppositional movements. Through the processes of production, selection, and institutionalization, they generated an enlarged range of ideas and significantly challenged those of established cultural institutions. To a degree more pronounced than in other forms of discourse, therefore, questions of authority, of sacralization and desacralization, and of opposing views play a prominent role in these ideologies.

Beyond the usual binary categories evident in all discourse, the ideologies of the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and Marxism, it has been argued, display a distinct oppositional structure characterized by such polarities as ecclesiastical tradition versus scriptural authority, inherited knowledge versus nature, and capitalist society versus the vision of a classless community. These are not single polarities but an oppositional form to which symbols of a wide variety become attached. Nor are they simple oppositions that only negate each other; they anchor widely separated ends of a continuum, thereby defining a space or field in which discourse can be framed.

The origins of these discursive fields, it appears, can be traced to various intellectual precedents rather than being attributable entirely to the creative work of leading figures of the Reformation, the Enlightenment, or socialism. Nevertheless, these figures appear to have sharpened the rhetorical use to which such oppositions were put, and in so doing effected a greater degree of articulation between them and contemporary social circumstances. In part, the creation of a distinct discursive field appears to have constructed an alternative source of authority with which to challenge the authority of prevailing ideas. But elements of the experienced social context can also be found at each end of the discursive continuum. The social setting in which ideologies were produced was sufficiently heterogeneous that both negative and positive models could be found. Luther attached the church and the nobility to the negative end of his discursive fields but found positive examples in the actions of some rulers and his fellow reformers. Rousseau criticized the pretensions of courtly society and modeled republican ideals after his native city of

Geneva. Marx and Engels castigated the hypocrisy of bourgeois society and extrapolated from economic trends to predict the numerical superiority of the working classes.

In each instance the raw materials of social experience were lifted directly, as it were, and placed into the symbolic frameworks that made up the new ideologies. Movement leaders themselves evoked responses from other actors in their social milieu, and these responses provided grist for the mills that ground out ideological statements. This was one of the ways in which the movements' own action sequences fed back into the formulation and reformulation of movement discourse. Social experience became incorporated as elements of movement ideology, thus forging a higher degree of articulation between ideology and social conditions. As it was incorporated, though, it was also transformed by the other symbolic materials to which it was related. Marxist characterizations of the bourgeois family were not simply factual descriptions; they took on meaning as negative anchors in Marxist discourse, were associated with more trenchant criticisms of bourgeois society, and provided examples of exploitation and oppression. The same was true of Voltaire's satire and Calvin's polemics.

The central concepts that grew from each ideological movement were not modeled directly after the activities of some concrete status group or rising social class but were figural actions that depended on the discursive fields in which they were framed. Luther's and Calvin's admonitions concerning faith, worship, the calling, individual moral responsibility, and even the righteous conduct of rulers were seldom defenses of behavior they witnessed directly in their social environment. These admonitions focused on figural or representative characters and behavior. The legitimation of the reformers' own behavior or that of their secular patrons was sometimes in question, to be sure. But just as frequently this behavior provided instances for making points about the validity of the theological tenets at issue rather than the other way around.

The main role filled by formulations of figural action was to resolve the tensions built into the discursive fields of the ideological system itself. Rather than simply holding up a positive ideal against the negative circumstances of the experienced world, movement leaders provided more subtle and complex examples of behavior that remained in the experienced world and yet aspired to higher ideals. The very problems that inspired discussions of the righteous individual, the enlightened person of liberty, or the valorized revolutionary proletarian were set by the discursive fields in which these discussions were framed.

The moral constructs that specified models for behavior, therefore, were at least one significant step removed from the immediate social experience from which movement leaders produced their ideas. They grew out of this experience but were mediated by the symbolic frameworks in which they were placed. They were as much, or more, dependent on an ideological structure as they were on their social contexts. They consisted of representative actions and characters, and their generality was contingent on the symbolic space that removed them from concrete events. They provided models that could be emulated long after the specific events had changed – models of the righteous individual, the conscientious bourgeois, the heroic worker. These models were loosely recognizable within their immediate contexts of origin because of the tangible examples that were used in formulating

the relevant discursive fields. But they were also disarticulated from these contexts. And this degree of disarticulation permitted them to function as some of the more abiding elements of modern culture.

The most general lesson to be learned from these considerations, it appears, is to situate the study of cultural change within a multifactoral perspective that emphasizes both the tangible social contexts in which culture is produced and the internal structures of the resulting cultural products. Shifts in broad environmental conditions influence the supply and distribution of social resources on which the production of ideology depends. Of special importance are the institutional arrangements that channel these resources and set the constraints that limit the activities of culture producers, their audiences, and patrons. The conditions that shape the various subprocesses involved in cultural change must also be distinguished, especially those augmenting the range of variability in ideological production, those selectively furthering particular ideological orientations in some contexts and impeding the survival of others, and those affecting the institutionalization of ideological forms. These influences, moreover, appear to function not as mechanical processes but as part of a dynamic sequence of action in which culture producers and other relevant agents respond to their circumstances. Part of this response involves modifications to the structure of ideology itself, which at the same time draw on features of the experienced social context and remove ideology from the immediate limitations of this context. The shaping of ideology is thus historically contingent. Certain relevant factors can be identified for bringing these contingencies into sharper relief, but no single overarching framework can be imposed apart from the specific historical conditions of cultural change themselves.

Editor's Notes on Further Reading

Wuthnow on Ideological Innovation

The classic question of how ideas are related to their surrounding social environments, and the related issue of how new ideas emerge, is addressed in depth in Wuthnow's extensive study of three periods of important cultural innovation in the West (the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and nineteenth-century socialism). In this excerpt he summarizes his findings about the factors to be considered in explaining any period of cultural innovation. The larger study develops further the nature of "articulation" between ideas and social environments, shows how this problem was addressed in classical sociological theory, and provides historical accounts of each period. The research shows how the key factors he identifies explain variation in the extent to which each movement succeeded in different places.

Most recent work challenges or refines the idea that there is any simple reflection between ideas and social environments – a view most explicit in older Marxist theories of culture but also evident in many functionalist theories – see Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and Bryan Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1980). Other important reflections on the theory of ideology and its developments include Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London and New York: Verso, 1991); John Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Alvin Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology: The Origins, Grammar, and Future of Ideology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976); and the essays in Richard Münch and Neil Smelser, eds., *Theory of Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). For an overview of the

"problem of articulation" see Lyn Spillman, "Culture, Social Structure, and Discursive Fields," *Current Perspectives in Social Theory* 15 (1995): 129–54.

Reflection on the relations between ideas and their social environments is a central theme of cultural sociology, evident in excerpts throughout this volume: for other approaches to this issue see especially excerpts from work of Schudson, Swidler, and Sewell. Wuthnow's model includes attention to most of the sorts of factors discussed in previous sections. His emphasis on the way particular institutions mediate ideological outcomes is echoed in selections in Part III: see for instance Griswold on the impact of copyright law, Peterson on musical innovation, or Larson on professional context. Further, his emphasis on discursive fields, and the complex, contingent use of underlying binary categories, echoes work on the internal structures of culture excerpted in Part IV: see for instance Alexander and Smith on binary codes or Cerulo on narrative sequences. For earlier work see also Robert Wuthnow, ed., *Vocabularies of Public Life: Empirical Essays in Symbolic Structure* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Robert Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Robert Wuthnow, "State Structures and Ideological Outcomes," *American Sociological Review* 50 (1985): 799–821; and Robert Wuthnow, James Davison Hunter, Albert Bergesen, and Edith Kurzweil, *Cultural Analysis: The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault, and Jürgen Habermas* (Boston and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).

31 Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism

Fredric Jameson

[T]he general thesis of Mandel's book *Late Capitalism*, [is] that there have been three fundamental moments in capitalism, each one marking a dialectical expansion over the previous stage: these are market capitalism, the monopoly stage or the stage of imperialism, and our own – wrongly called postindustrial, but what might better be termed multinational capital. I have already pointed out that Mandel's intervention in the postindustrial involves the proposition that late or multinational or consumer capitalism, far from being inconsistent with Marx's great 19th-century analysis, constitutes on the contrary the purest form of capital yet to have emerged, a prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas. This purer capitalism of our own time thus eliminates the enclaves of precapitalist organization it had hitherto tolerated and exploited in a tributary way: one is tempted to speak in this connection of a new and historically original penetration and colonization of Nature and the Unconscious: that is, the destruction of precapitalist third world agriculture by the Green Revolution, and the rise of the media and the advertising industry. At any rate, it will also have been clear that my own cultural periodization of the stages of realism, modernism and postmodernism is both inspired and confirmed by Mandel's tripartite scheme....

It is therefore in terms of that enormous and threatening, yet only dimly perceivable, other reality of economic and social institutions that in my opinion the postmodern sublime can alone be adequately theorized.

Post-Modernism and the City

I want to sketch the analysis of a full-blown postmodern building – a work which is in many ways uncharacteristic of that postmodern architecture whose principal names are Robert Venturi, Charles Moore, Michael Graves, and more recently Frank Gehry, but which to my mind offers some very striking lessons about the originality of postmodernist space. Let me amplify the figure which has run through the preceding remarks, and make it even more explicit: I am proposing the motion that we are here in the presence of something like a mutation in built space itself. My implication is that we ourselves, the human subjects who happen into this new space, have not kept pace with that evolution; there has been a mutation in the object, unaccompanied as yet by any equivalent mutation in the subject; we do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace, as I will call it, in part because our perceptual habits were formed in that older kind of space I have called the space of high modernism. The newer architecture therefore stands

as something like an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, as yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions.

The Bonaventura Hotel

The building whose features I will very rapidly enumerate in the next few moments is the Bonaventura Hotel, built in the new Los Angeles downtown by the architect and developer John Portman, whose other works include the various Hyatt Regencies, the Peachtree Center in Atlanta, and the Renaissance Center in Detroit. I have mentioned the populist aspect of the rhetorical defence of postmodernism against the elite (and Utopian) austerities of the great architectural modernisms: it is generally affirmed, in other words, that these newer buildings are popular works on the one hand; and that they respect the vernacular of the American city fabric on the other, that is to say, that they no longer attempt, as did the masterworks and monuments of high modernism, to insert a different, a distinct, an elevated, a new Utopian language into the tawdry and commercial sign-system of the surrounding city, but rather, on the contrary, seek to speak that very language, using its lexicon and syntax as that has been emblematically 'learned from Las Vegas'.

On the first of these counts, Portman's *Bonaventura* fully confirms the claim: it is a popular building, visited with enthusiasm by locals and tourists alike (although Portman's other buildings are even more successful in this respect). The populist insertion into the city fabric is, however, another matter, and it is with this that we will begin. There are three entrances to the *Bonaventura*, one from Figueroa, and the other two by way of elevated gardens on the other side of the hotel, which is built into the remaining slope of the former Beacon Hill. None of these is anything like the old hotel marquee, or the monumental porte-cochère with which the sumptuous buildings of yesteryear were wont to stage your passage from city street to the older interior. The entryways of the *Bonaventura* are as it were lateral and rather backdoor affairs: the gardens in the back admit you to the sixth floor of the towers, and even there you must walk down one flight to find the elevator by which you gain access to the lobby. Meanwhile, what one is still tempted to think of as the front entry, on Figueroa, admits you, baggage and all, onto the second-storey shopping balcony, from which you must take an escalator down to the main registration desk. More about these elevators and escalators in a moment. What I first want to suggest about these curiously unmarked ways-in is that they seem to have been imposed by some new category of closure governing the inner space of the hotel itself (and this over and above the material constraints under which Portman had to work). I believe that, with a certain number of other characteristic postmodern buildings, such as the *Beaubourg* in Paris, or the Eaton Centre in Toronto, the *Bonaventura* aspires to being a total space, a complete world, a kind of miniature city (and I would want to add that to this new total space corresponds a new collective practice, a new mode in which individuals move and congregate, something like the practice of a new and historically original kind of hyper-crowd). In this sense, then, ideally the mini-city of Portman's *Bonaventura* ought not to have entrances at all, since the entryway is always the seam that links the building to the rest of the city that

surrounds it: for it does not wish to be a part of the city, but rather its equivalent and its replacement or substitute. That is, however, obviously not possible or practical, whence the deliberate downplaying and reduction of the entrance function to its bare minimum. But this disjunction from the surrounding city is very different from that of the great monuments of the International Style: there, the act of disjunction was violent, visible, and had a very real symbolic significance – as in Le Corbusier's great *pilotis* whose gesture radically separates the new Utopian space of the modern from the degraded and fallen city fabric which it thereby explicitly repudiates (although the gamble of the modern was that this new Utopian space, in the virulence of its Novum, would fan out and transform that eventually by the very power of its new spatial language). The Bonaventura, however, is content to 'let the fallen city fabric continue to be in its being' (to parody Heidegger); no further effects, no larger protopolitical Utopian transformation, is either expected or desired.

This diagnosis is to my mind confirmed by the great reflective glass skin of the *Bonaventura*, whose function I will now interpret rather differently than I did a moment ago when I saw the phenomenon of reflexion generally as developing a thematics of reproductive technology (the two readings are however not incompatible). Now one would want rather to stress the way in which the glass skin repels the city outside; a repulsion for which we have analogies in those reflector sunglasses which make it impossible for your interlocutor to see your own eyes and thereby achieve a certain aggressivity towards and power over the Other. In a similar way, the glass skin achieves a peculiar and placeless dissociation of the *Bonaventura* from its neighbourhood: it is not even an exterior, inasmuch as when you seek to look at the hotel's outer walls you cannot see the hotel itself, but only the distorted images of everything that surrounds it.

Now I want to say a few words about escalators and elevators: given their very real pleasures in Portman, particularly these last, which the artist has termed 'gigantic kinetic sculptures' and which certainly account for much of the spectacle and the excitement of the hotel interior, particularly in the Hyatts, where like great Japanese lanterns or gondolas they ceaselessly rise and fall – given such a deliberate marking and foregrounding in their own right, I believe one has to see such 'people movers' (Portman's own term, adapted from Disney) as something a little more than mere functions and engineering components. We know in any case that recent architectural theory has begun to borrow from narrative analysis in other fields, and to attempt to see our physical trajectories through such buildings as virtual narratives or stories, as dynamic paths and narrative paradigms which we as visitors are asked to fulfil and to complete with our own bodies and movements. In the *Bonaventura*, however, we find a dialectical heightening of this process: it seems to me that the escalators and elevators here henceforth replace movement but also and above all designate themselves as new reflexive signs and emblems of movement proper (something which will become evident when we come to the whole question of what remains of older forms of movement in this building, most notably walking itself). Here the narrative stroll has been underscored, symbolized, reified and replaced by a transportation machine which becomes the allegorical signifier of that older promenade we are no longer allowed to conduct on our own: and this is a dialectical intensification of the autoreferentiality of all modern culture, which tends to turn upon itself and designate its own cultural production as its content.

I am more at a loss when it comes to conveying the thing itself, the experience of space you undergo when you step off such allegorical devices into the lobby or atrium, with its great central column, surrounded by a miniature lake, the whole positioned between the four symmetrical residential towers with their elevators, and surrounded by rising balconies capped by a kind of greenhouse roof at the sixth level. I am tempted to say that such space makes it impossible for us to use the language of volume or volumes any longer, since these last are impossible to seize. Hanging streamers indeed suffuse this empty space in such a way as to distract systematically and deliberately from whatever form it might be supposed to have; while a constant busyness gives the feeling that emptiness is here absolutely packed, that it is an element within which you yourself are immersed, without any of that distance that formerly enabled the perception of perspective or volume. You are in this hyperspace up to your eyes and your body; and if it seemed to you before that that suppression of depth I spoke of in postmodern painting or literature would necessarily be difficult to achieve in architecture itself, perhaps you may now be willing to see this bewildering immersion as the formal equivalent in the new medium.

Yet escalator and elevator are also in this context dialectical opposites; and we may suggest that the glorious movement of the elevator gondolas is also a dialectical compensation for this filled space of the atrium – it gives us the chance at a radically different, but complementary, spatial experience, that of rapidly shooting up through the ceiling and outside, along one of the four symmetrical towers, with the referent, Los Angeles itself, spread out breathtakingly and even alarmingly before us. But even this vertical movement is contained: the elevator lifts you to one of those revolving cocktail lounges, in which you, seated, are again passively rotated about and offered a contemplative spectacle of the city itself, now transformed into its own images by the glass windows through which you view it.

Let me quickly conclude all this by returning to the central space of the lobby itself (with the passing observation that the hotel rooms are visibly marginalized: the corridors in the residential sections are low-ceilinged and dark, most depressingly functional indeed; while one understands that the rooms are in the worst of taste). The descent is dramatic enough, plummeting back down through the roof to splash down in the lake; what happens when you get there is something else, which I can only try to characterize as milling confusion, something like the vengeance this space takes on those who still seek to walk through it. Given the absolute symmetry of the four towers, it is quite impossible to get your bearings in this lobby; recently, colour coding and directional signals have been added in a pitiful and revealing, rather desperate attempt to restore the coordinates of an older space. I will take as the most dramatic practical result of this spatial mutation the notorious dilemma of the shopkeepers on the various balconies: it has been obvious, since the very opening of the hotel in 1977, that nobody could ever find any of these stores, and even if you located the appropriate boutique, you would be most unlikely to be as fortunate a second time; as a consequence, the commercial tenants are in despair and all the merchandise is marked down to bargain prices. When you recall that Portman is a businessman as well as an architect, and a millionaire developer, an artist who is at one and the same time a capitalist in his own right, one cannot but feel that here too something of a 'return of the repressed' is involved.

So I come finally to my principal point here, that this latest mutation in space – postmodern hyperspace – has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. And I have already suggested that this alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment – which is to the initial bewilderment of the older modernism as the velocities of space craft are to those of the automobile – can itself stand as the symbol and analogue of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects.

The New Machine

But as I am anxious that Portman's space not be perceived as something either exceptional or seemingly marginalized and leisure-specialized on the order of Disneyland, I would like in passing to juxtapose this complacent and entertaining (although bewildering) leisure-time space with its analogue in a very different area, namely the space of postmodern warfare, in particular as Michael Herr evokes it in his great book on the experience of Vietnam, called *Dispatches*. The extraordinary linguistic innovations of this work may still be considered postmodern, in the eclectic way in which its language impersonally fuses a whole range of contemporary collective idiolects, most notably rock language and Black language: but the fusion is dictated by problems of content. This first terrible postmodernist war cannot be told in any of the traditional paradigms of the war novel or movie – indeed that breakdown of all previous narrative paradigms is, along with the breakdown of any shared language through which a veteran might convey such experience, among the principal subjects of the book and may be said to open up the place of a whole new reflexivity. Benjamin's account of Baudelaire, and of the emergence of modernism from a new experience of city technology which transcends all the older habits of bodily perception, is both singularly relevant here, and singularly antiquated, in the light of this new and virtually unimaginable quantum leap in technological alienation: 'He was a moving-target-survivor subscriber, a true child of the war, because except for the rare times when you were pinned or stranded the system was geared to keep you mobile, if that was what you thought you wanted. As a technique for staying alive it seemed to make as much sense as anything, given naturally that you were there to begin with and wanted to see it close; it started out sound and straight but it formed a cone as it progressed, because the more you moved the more you saw, the more you saw the more besides death and mutilation you risked, and the more you risked of that the more you would have to let go of one day as a "survivor". Some of us moved around the war like crazy people until we couldn't see which way the run was taking us anymore, only the war all over its surface with occasional, unexpected penetration. As long as we could have choppers like taxis it took real exhaustion or depression near shock or a dozen pipes of opium to keep us even apparently quiet, we'd still be running around inside our skins like something was after us, ha ha, La Vida Loca. In the months after I got back the hundreds of helicopters I'd flown in began to draw together until they'd formed a

collective metachopper, and in my mind it was the sexiest thing going; saver-destroyer, provider-waster, right hand-left hand, nimble, fluent, canny and human; hot steel, grease, jungle-saturated canvas webbing, sweat cooling and warming up again, cassette rock and roll in one ear and door-gun fire in the other, fuel, heat, vitality and death, death itself, hardly an intruder.'

In this new machine, which does not, like the older modernist machinery of the locomotive or the airplane, represent motion, but which can only be represented *in motion*, something of the mystery of the new postmodernist space is concentrated.

The Abolition of Critical Distance

The conception of postmodernism outlined here is a historical rather than a merely stylistic one. I cannot stress too greatly the radical distinction between a view for which the postmodern is one (optional) style among many others available, and one which seeks to grasp it as the cultural dominant of the logic of late capitalism: the two approaches in fact generate two very different ways of conceptualizing the phenomenon as a whole, on the one hand moral judgements (about which it is indifferent whether they are positive or negative), and on the other a genuinely dialectical attempt to think of our present time in History. . . .

[W]hat we have been calling postmodernism is inseparable from, and unthinkable without the hypothesis of, some fundamental mutation of the sphere of culture in the world of late capitalism, which includes a momentous modification of its social function. Older discussions of the space, function or sphere of culture (most notably Herbert Marcuse's classic essay on 'The Affirmative Character of Culture') have insisted on what a different language would call the 'semi-autonomy' of the cultural realm: its ghostly, yet Utopian, existence, for good or ill, above the practical world of the existent, whose mirror image it throws back in forms which vary from the legitimations of flattering resemblance to the contestatory indictments of critical satire or Utopian pain.

What we must now ask ourselves is whether it is not precisely this 'semi-auton-omy' of the cultural sphere which has been destroyed by the logic of late capitalism. Yet to argue that culture is today no longer endowed with the relative autonomy it once enjoyed as one level among others in earlier moments of capitalism (let alone in pre-capitalist societies), is not necessarily to imply its disappearance or extinction. On the contrary: we must go on to affirm that the dissolution of an autonomous sphere of culture is rather to be imagined in terms of an explosion: a prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life – from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself – can be said to have become 'cultural' in some original and as yet untheorized sense. This perhaps startling proposition is, however, sub-stantively quite consistent with the previous diagnosis of a society of the image or the simulacrum, and a transformation of the 'real' into so many pseudo-events.

It also suggests that some of our most cherished and time-honoured radical conceptions about the nature of cultural politics may thereby find themselves out-moded. However distinct those conceptions may have been – which range from slogans of negativity, opposition, and subversion to critique and reflexivity – they all

shared a single, fundamentally spatial, presupposition, which may be resumed in the equally time-honoured formula of 'critical distance'. No theory of cultural politics current on the Left today has been able to do without one notion or another of a certain minimal aesthetic distance, of the possibility of the positioning of the cultural act outside the massive Being of capital, which then serves as an Archimedean point from which to assault this last. What the burden of our preceding demonstration suggests, however, is that distance in general (including 'critical distance' in parti-cular) has very precisely been abolished in the new space of postmodernism. We are submerged in its henceforth filled and suffused volumes to the point where our now postmodern bodies are bereft of spatial coordinates and practically (let alone theo-retically) incapable of distantiation; meanwhile, it has already been observed how the prodigious new expansion of multinational capital ends up penetrating and colonizing those very pre-capitalist enclaves (Nature and the Unconscious) which offered extraterritorial and Archimedean footholds for critical effectivity. The short-hand language of 'cooptation' is for this reason omnipresent on the Left; but offers a most inadequate theoretical basis for understanding a situation in which we all, in one way or another, dimly feel that not only punctual and local countercultural forms of cultural resistance and guerrilla warfare, but also even overtly political interventions like those of *The Clash*, are all somehow secretly disarmed and reabsorbed by a system of which they themselves might well be considered a part, since they can achieve no distance from it. . . .

The Need for Maps

But if all this is so, then at least one possible form of a new radical cultural politics becomes evident: with a final aesthetic proviso that must quickly be noted. Left cultural producers and theorists particularly those formed by bourgeois cultural traditions issuing from romanticism and valorizing spontaneous, instinctive or unconscious forms of 'genius' – but also for very obvious historical reasons such as Zhdanovism and the sorry consequences of political and party interventions in the arts – have often by reaction allowed themselves to be unduly intimidated by the repudiation, in bourgeois aesthetics and most notably in high modernism, of one of the age-old functions of art – namely the pedagogical and the didactic. The teaching function of art was, however, always stressed in classical times (even though it there mainly took the form of *moral* lessons); while the prodigious and still imperfectly understood work of Brecht reaffirms, in a new and formally innovative and original way, for the moment of modernism proper, a complex new conception of the relationship between culture and pedagogy. The cultural model I will propose similarly foregrounds the cognitive and pedagogical dimensions of political art and culture, dimensions stressed in very different ways by *both* Lukács *and* Brecht (for the distinct moments of realism and modernism, respectively).

We cannot, however, return to aesthetic practices elaborated on the basis of historical situations and dilemmas which are no longer ours. Meanwhile, the concep-tion of space that has been developed here suggests that a model of political culture appropriate to our own situation will necessarily have to raise spatial issues as its fundamental organizing concern. I will therefore provisionally define the aesthetic of such new (and hypothetical) cultural form as an aesthetic of *cognitive mapping*. . . .

An aesthetic of cognitive mapping – a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system – will necessarily have to respect this now enormously complex representational dialectic and to invent radically new forms in order to do it justice. This is not, then, clearly a call for a return to some older kind of machinery, some older and more transparent national space, or some more traditional and reassuring perspectival or mimetic enclave: the new political art – if it is indeed possible at all – will have to hold to the truth of postmodernism, that is, to say, to its fundamental object – the world space of multinational capital – at the same time at which it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last, in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion. The political form of postmodernism, if there ever is any, will have as its vocation the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping, on a social as well as a spatial scale.

Editor's Notes on Further Reading

Jameson on Postmodern Culture

Some of the most significant and pervasive cultural innovations in the late twentieth century have been characterized as "postmodern." Here, literary theorist Fredric Jameson summarizes his thesis that postmodern culture should be situated historically as the dominant culture expressing the signifying practices and sensibilities generated by contemporary global capitalism, and illustrates it with his famous architectural exemplar of the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles. The full essay treats more extensively some features of postmodern culture, such as an emphasis on pastiche, a focus on images, dissociation between meaning and emotional attachment, and ahistoricism. Jameson's argument here bears comparison with Simmel's characterization of modern culture, Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of the modern culture industry, and Larson's investigation of the specific professional context generating postmodern architecture in the United States, all excerpted in this volume.

This essay is collected with other work of related interest in Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991). See also Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks, eds., *The Jameson Reader* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds., *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); and Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983–1998* (London and New York: Verso, 1998). Important earlier works include Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983); *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981); and *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971). For review essays which address links between textual and social analysis see Jameson, "On Goffman's *Frame Analysis*" *Theory and Society* 3 (1976): 119–33, "Ideology, Narrative Analysis, and Popular Culture," *Theory and Society* 4 (1977): 543–59; "On *Habits of the Heart*," pp. 97–113 in Charles Reynolds and Ralph Norman, eds., *Community in America: The Challenge of Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); and "Culture and Finance Capital," *Critical Inquiry* 24 (1997): 246–65.

Some commentary on this essay and Jameson's work more generally can be found in Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998); Sean Homer, *Fredric Jameson: Marxism, Hermeneutics, Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1998); M. Gottdiener, *Postmodern Semiotics: Material Culture and the Forms of Postmodern Life* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 122–4; Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1991), pp. 182–92; Lidia Curti, "What is Real and What is Not: Female Fabulations in Cultural Analysis," pp. 134–53 in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992); and Charles Bernstein, "Centering the Postmodern," *Socialist Review* 17 (1987): 45–56.

Influential statements on postmodernism include Andreas Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern," *New German Critique* 33 (1984): 5–52; Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, Mark Poster, ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988) and *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); and Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). For a useful introduction see Tim Woods, *Beginning Postmodernism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999).

By linking the postmodern aesthetic to changes in capitalism Jameson bridges the textual and the social in ways which challenge both postmodern literary theorists and sociologists. A more direct challenge to postmodern theory is Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity vs. Postmodernity," *New German Critique* 22 (1981): 3–14; on this challenge see Scott Lash, "Postmodernity and Desire," *Theory and Society* 14 (1985): 1–33, and works by Foster, and Best and Kellner cited above. Other important commentary on modernism, postmodernism and their social contexts includes Paul Rabinow, "Representations are Social Facts: Modernism and Postmodernism in Anthropology," pp. 234–61 in James Clifford and George Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Scott Lash, *Sociology of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990); Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman, eds., *Modernity and Identity* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992); Steven Seidman, ed., *The Postmodern Turn: New Perspectives on Social Theory* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman, eds., *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Charles Lemert, *Postmodernism is Not What You Think* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); and works by Best and Kellner, and Gottdiener, cited above. Two otherwise different studies examining postmodernism empirically are Barry Schwartz, "Postmodernity and Historical Reputation: Abraham Lincoln in Late Twentieth-Century American Memory," *Social Forces* 77 (1998): 63–103, and George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism, and the Poetics of Place* (London and New York: Verso, 1994).