

ISAAC ARIAIL REED

INTERPRETATION AND
SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE

On the Use of Theory in the Human Sciences

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Chapter One

Knowledge

I

The construction of social knowledge occurs at the intersection of two meaning-systems, one of theory and one of fact. Let us begin, briefly, with the latter.

The problems that surround what Robert Merton called “establishing the phenomenon”¹ have long been the subject of methodological disputation in social research. Methodology is a reflection on the efficacy of our various techniques for establishing facts—survey data and in-depth interviewing, quantitative versus qualitative approaches to the historical archive, and so on. All of these methodologies (and the disputes about them) are, however, confronted by the problem that, in the case of human affairs, many of the most essential facts of the matter—the *social* facts—are not immediately observable. Rather, they are observable through what Émile Durkheim called their “individual manifestations.”²

1. Robert K. Merton, “Three Fragments from a Sociologist’s Notebooks: Establishing the Phenomenon, Specified Ignorance and Strategic Research Materials,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 13 (1987).

2. Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (New York: Free Press, 1966), 277.

Why is this the case? Certainly much of what human beings who live in societies *do* is observable, recordable, etc. And there are many behaviors that we do not observe or record directly that we can, nonetheless, be fairly sure happened. It is not our spatial or temporal distance from social facts that makes them a difficult category. It is that reporting on the carryings on of human beings requires a reference to the meaning of their actions, in a very minimal yet fundamental way. The telling of the facts of the matter, in human affairs, already involves a structure of meaning and intention, and, therefore, of inference on the part of the investigator toward aspects of life that are not visible, and never were nor will be visible. Social facts understood in this manner can never be fully stated in protocol sentences that are verifiable by literal observation, but must be inferred and understood in a dialogue about what is happening or has happened, at a certain time, in a certain space, in a given society.

For example, when one states that, in 1692, after examination by the village doctor, it was determined by a set of adults in Salem Village, Massachusetts, and its environs that the fits and screams of “afflicted” girls were due to their being under an “evil hand,” one is stating a rather uncontroversial fact. We know this happened—that these adults made this determination. But understanding this fact already involves understanding the possible meanings for the people of seventeenth-century Massachusetts of the physically observable behavior of the girls, the meaning of the utterance “evil hand,” the meaning of the term “doctor,” and the expectations that other people had of doctors, and so on. It is in this way that social facts are “thick.”

Dispute already reigns here. However, the “thickness” of human facts³—that is, the way in which they already contain inferences to

3. Concerning the gathering and interpretation of evidence in the human sciences, Carlo Ginzburg writes that “It is one thing to analyze footprints, stars, feces, sputum, corneas, pulsations, snow covered fields, or cigarette ashes; it is quite another to examine handwriting or paintings or conversation. There is a basic difference between nature, inanimate and living, and culture—certainly greater than the infinitely more superficial and mutable differences that exist between individual disciplines.” Ginzburg constructs an extended argument that the “evidential paradigm” in the human sciences requires specific attention to the semiotics of facts. I agree. In particular, I agree with Ginzburg’s embrace of an anthropocentric approach to evidence in the human sciences, and thus his idea that there is a commonality in the way in which detective work, art history and painting attribution, and psychoanalysis look closely at minute traces that reveal the characteristics of a in individual, action, or historical moment. In this book, however, I take a cue from a comment at the end of Ginzburg’s essay

meanings that are, technically speaking, invisible—is but one aspect of a much larger problem of interpretation in social research. For, while establishing the phenomenon may be the most important and most difficult task a social researcher faces, it is neither the task that produces the most controversy in social science nor the final step in the production of social knowledge. For, as soon as we have established the phenomenon—or, some would say, thickly described it—then we ask the next question: how are we to understand it?

In other words, it is the responsibility of the social researcher not only to report the facts,⁴ but to propose a deeper or broader comprehension of them. When investigators attempt to do this, we reach for our theories. We do this because we need some way of comprehending what is, to speak colloquially, “underneath” the facts. We want to know what generates them, determines them, what their consequences are, how we should think about them politically, what their connection to the here and now is, and so on. To do this, it is very seldom enough to continue to gather more facts, no matter how

“Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm.” There, he writes that “[t]hrough pretensions to systematic knowledge may appear more and more far-fetched, the idea of totality does not necessarily need to be abandoned. On the contrary, the existence of a deeply rooted relationship that explains superficial phenomena is confirmed the very moment it is stated that direct knowledge of such a connection is not possible. Though reality may seem to be opaque, there are privileged zones—signs, clues—which allow us to penetrate it.” Ginzburg writes that this idea is the “crux of the conjectural or semiotic paradigm.” What this indicates to me is the need to recognize not only the way in which evidential reasoning relies upon an “anthropocentric” view of the human sciences, but also how the success of those sciences depends upon the use of social theory to penetrate the clues that have been gathered, so as to generate deep interpretations of sociohistorical episodes. After all, to follow Ginzburg’s argument about the emergence of the evidential paradigm in the work of Sigmund Freud, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Giovanni Morelli, all three may have been interested in the clues left unintentionally behind by humans, but their *theories* of what drives individuals to do this, and of the relationship between the motives of individuals and larger forces and forms of social life, are rather different. Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 118, 123.

4. Here I use the term “report” in direct reference to W. G. Runciman’s concept of *reportage*. In a series of theoretical arguments beginning with a critique of Max Weber’s epistemology, Runciman has developed the position that interpretation is a problem for the human sciences at the level of description, but not at the level of explanation. I disagree, and the argument of this book runs directly counter to Runciman’s proposed solution to the problem of interpretation and social knowledge. See W. G. Runciman, *A Critique of Max Weber’s Philosophy of Social Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972), and W. G. Runciman, *A Treatise on Social Theory*, 3 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). I take up the problem of interpretation and explanation explicitly in chapter 5.

thickly we comprehend them and present them to our colleagues. We need theory to help us explain and evaluate social life.

Our theories are, by their very nature, meaningful human constructions. They exist primarily in the heads of investigators and the pages of their books and journals. Sometimes they consist of a vast, abstract architecture of interrelated and highly consistent terms, sometimes they attempt to specify in the abstract a single mechanism, sometimes they propose a new way to think about something we all already think about, such as democracy. But the world of social theory is meaningful in the basic human sense of providing a coherent model for and model of the (social) world. The hope is that this meaningful world is also a useful one, so that our attempts to develop a deeper understanding of social phenomena are sometimes successful.

Our facts are thus a set of meanings, and our theories are a set of meanings. When we bring theories and facts together, then, we are bringing two meaning-full worlds, or meaning-systems, together. To a certain degree, of course, our theories may indeed influence our use of evidence to construct the facts, or our emphasis on different facts. But this happens less than we think, and at the level of bare social facts—the level of understanding required to *report what happened*—we quite often can achieve a good deal of consensus, despite our theoretical, or even epistemological, differences. (This is not always the case, and I will consider an example of a disputation over facts below.) Rather, the influence of theory on our knowledge claims most often comes in a much more conscious and controlled form—when we deliberately bring terms foreign to our subjects of study (e.g., “mode of production,” “episteme,” “ideological state apparatus,” “habitus”) to bear on our facts, in an effort to grasp some essential aspect of social life that is not given up easily by the facts.

So, by bringing our theoretical terms to bear on what happened at the Salem Witch Trials, we might come to understand that rather horrendous set of actions as an expression of the economic transformation of early America and the politico-economic interests of the parties involved. Or we might grasp it as one of the last violent episodes in the vast formation of early modern European patriarchy, in which the inner resentments and fears of men found their grisly public resolution. Or we might understand Salem as an early expression of American populism, a willingness of some actors, some of the time, to speak outside of the legal structures established by elites,

whatever the risks—and thus as a story that should be recuperated by those interested in the establishment of a more democratic United States today. Each of these proposals gains in power what it loses in obviousness, and each incorporates into its interpretation the basic reports of what happened at Salem. The results of this incorporation are very different, however, and that is what makes them exciting and valuable.⁵

II

To say that theory and fact are both meaning-systems is not to say that they are meaning-systems that work in exactly the same manner. Indeed, the intellectual disciplines dedicated to the study of meaning—hermeneutics and semiotics—are flush with typologies, dichotomies, and elaborate theoretical artifices all designed to work out the different ways in which language—or, more generally, signification—can work in its various social contexts. And needless to say there are surely many ways of gathering evidence and thus producing factual reports on what happened in social life, and many genres of theoretical exploration and imagination. But let us stick to the basics, at least at first. What is the difference between theory and fact as meaning-systems?

I think the central difference is that in the meaning-system of fact, we expect evidence to function *referentially or indexically* when indicating what happened, and in the meaning-system of theory, we expect theoretical terms to function *relationally or conceptually*. Some evidence is directly indexical—we think of it as a trace of a physical act that happened at a certain point in time and space.⁶ But,

5. These different sorts of interpretations crisscross the literature on Salem and on early modern witchcraft. See in particular Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Nancy Ruttenburg, *Democratic Personality: Popular Voice and the Trial of American Authorship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Evelyn Heineemann, *Witches: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of the Killing of Women* (London: Free Association, 2000). For a summary of the scholarly literature on witch hunts and its relationship to feminist concerns, see Elspeth Whitney, “International Trends: The Witch ‘She’/the Historian ‘He’: Gender and the Historiography of the European Witch-Hunts,” *Journal of Women’s History* 7, no. 3 (1995).

6. Peirce writes that “an index stands for its object by virtue of a real connection with it or because it forces the mind to attend to that object” (Charles S. Peirce, “Of Reasoning in General,” in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, vol. 1 [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998]: 11–26, 14), and Roy Rappaport ex-

as discussed above, most of the reality we are busy studying in the human sciences is not reducible to its biophysical supports. Thus it is safer to say that we expect the gathering, organizing, and presenting of evidence, as an active and dynamic meaning-system, to serve a primarily referential function—even if what it references is not (or is not only) a material object or biological person. In the language game of fact, there are myriad evidential signs—sentences, photographs, quotations, assertions, graphs, tables, charts—and we expect these signifiers to express a certain content that *is or was in the social world*. This means that meaningful facts result from the connection of evidential signs to a ground that emerges, from research, as the object of investigation—the selected set of social actions that happened. Evidential signs, colligated together, connect the sociological investigator, and the people who read her text, to a set of social actions that are the ground of factual signification (see fig. 1).⁷

The English locutions “evidence for” and “theory of” hint at how differently theoretical meaning works. In theory, meaning develops to a great degree by the ways in which contrasts between expressions—e.g., “forces of production” and “relations of production”—create conceptual contrasts in the minds of researchers. This is not to say that those concepts cannot, in turn, reference something else, perhaps something in the world. But if they do (and this book is, in part, an effort to figure out what, if anything, theory references) it is surely reasonable to point out that we do not expect theory to reference the social world in the same concrete manner that we expect evidence to reference the social world. Indeed, the *whole point* of theory is to be abstract and conceptual. The necessary result of this is that what theory “references,” first and foremost, is not really a referent at all

plains that “A true index is a sign that is either an effect of, or an aspect of, or a part of its object” (Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], 63).

7. As I explain below, I think that all signs function both referentially and relationally, and thus the difference between the tendencies of evidential signs and theoretical signs is a matter of degree, not a strict distinction. To use Peircian language, most signs have elements of the symbolic, the indexical, and the iconic (and especially the first two), and thus the difference between theory and fact is the tendency of the latter to foreground the indexical dimension of signification, and the former to foreground the symbolic dimension. (As Rappaport comments, “The terms ‘index,’ ‘icon,’ and ‘symbol’ should be taken to be possible aspects of signs rather than labels for necessarily separate and distinct signs.” Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, 66).

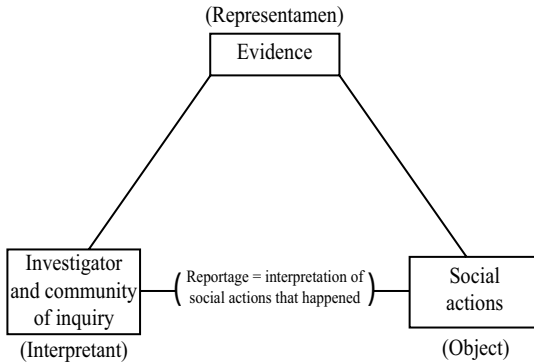


Figure 1: The factual sign

in the concrete sense of *meaningful social actions that actually happened*. Rather, the immediate reference of theoretical expressions is, as far as I can tell, (1) other theoretical expressions and (2) imagined societies, social actions, and social relations whose primary existence is in researchers' heads.

This may seem a strange thing to say, but anyone who has recently had the experience of being initiated into a group of theoretically informed social researchers (or, even worse, into a group of social theorists) probably has an intuitive sense of its truth. The disputations of the early and the late Wittgenstein aside, if there is one language you *cannot* learn by asking, at each turn in the conversation, “can you point to what that word refers to?” it is the language of social theory. This does not, however, make theory irrelevant to or useless for understanding social reality. Quite the opposite is the case. It is precisely because theory is abstract that it enables analysis of facts, and, ultimately, the construction of knowledge. Furthermore, this distinction between theory and evidence is relative; there are relational aspects of evidence as a language, and referential aspects of theory as a language.⁸ As an example of the former, consider how gender history must, even at its most empirical and evidential, use the binary of male/female as source of meaning. As an example of the latter, think

8. For an explanation from the philosophy of science for how the theory/data distinction can function as a matter of degree, see Mary Hesse, “The Hunt for Scientific Reason,” *PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association* 2 (1980).

of the referential importance of Speenhamland for Polanyi's abstract theories of economy and society. Here reference to a set of quite actual processes enabled the development of highly abstract definitions and elaborations of the historical prerequisites for the institutionalization of a "market society"—a theoretical term understood in relation to the abstractions of Marx, Weber, and others.

Still, the point holds, especially when push comes to shove: the most effective way to criticize another researcher's evidence is to suggest that it fails to accurately represent the phenomenon it claims to represent—that it is referentially incorrect; theory, when it is taken to task on its own, separate from any evidence, can be devastated if the critic can show conceptual incoherence. However, perhaps more frequent than either of these criticisms is the critique of a social knowledge claim as suffering from a *disjunction* between theory and evidence: the evidence does not bear out the theory, the theory does not fit the evidence, this is the wrong theory to use to interpret this evidence, etc. This sort of response, by an audience, to a failed knowledge claim gives us a clue as to what happens when theory and evidence do come together successfully.

III

In most of its contacts with actual happenings in the social world (represented by evidence), theory is *metacommentary*. It proposes to rethink, reframe, and recast facts that have already been established; it proposes to set up a research question to be investigated; it hypothesizes about a cause whose traces can be either measured quantitatively, confirmed comparatively, or perhaps verified via testimony and interview; it creates the conditions for critique by denaturalizing the inevitable, reopening the possible, and exhorting for the radically democratic. All of these functions are invaluable, but they are also supervenient upon the existence of referential evidence in a well-colligated meaning-system of fact. In this format, the sign-system of theory combines with the sign-system of fact in an obvious way: facts provide an "example of" a theory, theory provides "a new way to view" the facts.

The importance of these functions of theory should not be underestimated. However, they refer to a kind of discourse in which the difference between theory and fact remains obvious because the two meaning-systems remain to some degree in disjunction. The stakes

are higher when the meanings of theory and the meanings of fact mix in a more extensive and effective manner to produce the social knowledge claims that I will call *maximal interpretations*. In maximal interpretations, theory and fact articulate in such a way that the referential functions of evidence and the relational functions of theory are subsumed under a deeper understanding. No longer is evidence used merely to shore up a factual “example” of a theoretical expression. Rather, the signs of evidence become themselves intertwined with the signs of theory, such that both come to express a deeper social force, a longstanding democratic imperative, or an underlying discursive formation. They become part of a maximal interpretation.⁹

In other words, while “establishing the phenomenon” requires interpretation at the level of evidence and method—the arrangement of evidential signs—such work tends toward one end of a spectrum that runs from *minimal* to *maximal* interpretation. At the minimal end of the spectrum, the frequency of theoretical terms is slight (or . . . minimal), and the claims tend to be less controversial—though they can, on rare occasions, be startlingly new. The maximal end of the spectrum involves statements that mix, in a consistent and deep way, theoretical and evidential signification, in an effort to produce a powerful comprehension of the matter at hand. Here is a minimal interpretation: ‘On the night of August 4, 1789, feudal privileges in France were abolished.’ Here is a maximal interpretation: ‘The French Revolution was a social revolution with political consequences.’

To believe the first statement to be true, one has to understand the meaning of certain basic terms (most notably ‘feudal privileges’),

9. The concept of maximal interpretation could be compared to (and indeed draws inspiration from) Arthur C. Danto’s account of “deep interpretation,” and in particular his article of that name from 1981. However, while Danto works to situate and comprehend a format of “deep interpretation” that is quite distinct from the “routine acceptance of the term,” and even compares it to the “divination anciently practiced by the Greeks,” I attempt to use the distinction between minimal and maximal interpretation as more of a matter of degree, which enables me to comprehend the sorts of truth claims actually made in texts written by social researchers. Still, Danto makes absolutely clear something essential to understanding maximal interpretations, namely that “the distinction between depth and surface cuts at right angles across the philosophically more commonplace distinction between inner and outer.” It is precisely because the distinction between minimal and maximal interpretation cuts across the distinction between inner and outer (or “subjective” and “objective”) that I can distinguish between maximal interpretations that pay a great deal of attention to subjectivity and meaning, and those that pay less attention to these “inner” phenomena. But this should become clear in my discussion of Marx below. See Arthur C. Danto, “Deep Interpretation,” *Journal of Philosophy* 78, no. 11 (1981): 691, 695, 694.

and one has to agree that a series of actions took place at a specific time and place that can be adequately described as the ‘abolition’ of feudal privileges (and that that place can be adequately described as something called ‘France’). This can, of course, be disputed in a variety of ways, including looking empirically into what demands aristocrats still made on the peasants who worked on their land after August 4, 1789, and whether these demands were fulfilled. Still, this statement can inspire a certain degree of agreement, primarily because of its status as a relatively minimal interpretation—there is nothing in the statement to suggest *why* feudal privileges were abolished, or *what it meant* to the future of France that they were abolished.¹⁰ No social research can exist without minimal interpretations, but very few works in the human sciences limit themselves to them, and even those have to choose some statements over others. Minimal interpretation is necessary but not sufficient for powerful social research.

To believe the second statement to be true, one has to understand that the term “social revolution” is given meaning partially by the language of social theory, and in particular one must understand the contrast between ‘social’ and ‘political’ as a fundamental theoretical disagreement about the causes and consequences of social action in many times and places. Furthermore, to believe the second statement one has to agree that all sorts of statements of the first kind (i.e., that feudal privileges were abolished, that a national assembly was constituted, that the army began taking directions from the new government) have their *explanation* in the underlying social conflict between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy in France. And here social scientists dip their pens in the venom of polemic; if we know one thing from the scholarship on the French Revolution from the last century, it is that the disagreements about explanations of the Revolution always outrun the disagreements about its facts.

Maximal interpretations, then, are always organizing, explaining, judging—in a word, interpreting—minimal interpretations, drawing themselves into relationship with the facts, but also going “beyond”

10. I am aware that there are debates around the term ‘feudalism’ that could be characterized as involving the sorts of theoretically informed interpretive disputes that characterize maximal interpretations (see, e.g., Elizabeth A. R. Brown’s classic, “The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe,” *American Historical Review* 79 [1974]). However, particularly in the context of debates about the French revolution, I think the phrase ‘feudal privileges in France’ can be said to have a relatively clear set of manifest historical referents.

the facts. This is not to say that, given a maximal interpretation, one cannot go out in search of minimal interpretations that support it. Undoubtedly one can. It is only to say that, in engaging these maximal interpretations, we are relying on a language that is *not only* the language of fact—it is the language of theory fused with the language of fact to produce the social knowledge that we tend to value highly.¹¹

IV

Maximal interpretations result from bringing theory together with minimal interpretations. They are what we want theory to get us to—an explanation or evaluation of the phenomenon at hand, and perhaps a proposal for explaining other, as yet unexplored, cases, outcomes, events, etc. And so theoretical differences become more and more relevant as we move up the spectrum from minimal to maximal interpretation. Consider an example.

In the 1990s, an academic conflagration swept through American anthropology concerning what happened in Hawai'i in 1778 and 1779.¹² Was Captain James Cook received by the Hawai'ians as the god Lono? And why did several Hawai'ians kill Cook when he and his

11. Thus the spectrum of minimal to maximal interpretation could be described as an attempt to capture the degree of theory-ladenness of truth claims. In maximal interpretations, then, one uses a relatively greater amount of abstract terms that *could* be combined conceptually ("in theory") but which are, in the maximal interpretation, articulated with the minimal interpretations that describe, in a more indexical way, people's behaviors. The result of this articulation is an *in-depth* truth claim about social life. This definition of theory-ladenness and its implications for the opposition of minimal to maximal interpretation emerged in a conversation with Mayer Zald about the issue.

12. Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific* (Princeton and Honolulu: Princeton University Press and Bishop Museum Press, 1992). Marshall Sahlins, *How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, for Example* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). For reviews of the dispute, see Ian Hacking's chapter "The End of Captain Cook," in *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), and Robert Borofsky, "Cook, Lono, Obeyesekere, and Sahlins," *Current Anthropology* 38, no. 2 (1997). The shorter reviews of Obeyesekere's and Sahlins's books are numerous, but for a brief and strongly pro-Sahlins review, see David R. Stoddart, "Captain Cook and How We Understand Him," *Geographical Review* 87, no. 4 (1997). For a more ironic account of the continuing battles over Cook's memory, see Greg Denning, "Review," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1997). Obeyesekere's original article is indispensable for understanding the precise nature of his objections; see Gananath Obeyesekere, "British Cannibals': Contemplation of an Event in the Death and Resurrection of James Cook, Explorer," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (1992).

sailors, due to a broken mast, returned to the island of Kealakekua Bay shortly after they left it? Finally, what is the source of insight or obliviousness that aids or hinders anthropologists who attempt to answer these questions? In this controversy, minimal interpretations about what happened in Hawai'i all those years ago were made controversial, but that was not the end of the story. The dispute invoked and relied upon the meanings of theory, and thus quickly became a dispute about maximal interpretations, which is to say, a polemic about why what happened happened and what its significance is for "us."¹³

"How did the Hawai'ians receive Cook?" is a question that can be answered, initially at least, minimally. There is a great deal of evidence that suggests that they referred to him as "akua"—sometimes translated as "god." But how the Hawai'ians related to "gods" is itself a question that has to be established through interpretation and inference—calling a person a "god" is a social fact in this case, and indeed, debates over the translation of "akua" tend to center on whether the social organization that results from recognition of an akua is such that the better translation might be "chief." Marshall Sahlins had been questioned on this matter before Ganneth Obeyesekere wrote *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook*,¹⁴ and he had responded then, as he did in his reply to Obeyesekere, with a wealth of evidence—drawn from many shipmen's journals—concerning the terms the Hawai'ians used when they received Cook, what these terms meant in that context, and so on.¹⁵ In other words, he responded to some of the initial criticisms of his work on Hawai'i by attempting to solidify his minimal interpretation of the case.

But whether, ultimately, the term "akua" should be translated in English as "god" or "chief," or understood as meaning something in between, the issue was not to be left there. Indeed, the battles over Cook in Hawai'i had never been limited to the facts—in 1982

13. What constitutes the "us" as a community of inquiry dedicated to comprehending social behavior and human history is precisely what much careful postcolonial theory has rendered problematic. Conflicts over the authors and audiences of scholarly work, as well as what sorts of knowledge they take for granted, are one of the underlying tensions sublimated into the discursive battles of social theory, in my view. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

14. Jonathan Friedman, "Captain Cook, Culture, and the World System," *Journal of Pacific History* 20 (1985).

15. Marshall Sahlins, "Captain Cook at Hawaii," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 98 (1989).

Greg Dening, and in 1988 Jonathan Friedman, challenged Sahlins's explanation of why the Hawai'ians did what they did¹⁶—and, with Obeyesekere's book, the debate quickly moved beyond what could be minimally established by, and argued about, using the evidence. And this makes sense: when it comes to the relationship of Hawai'i to the British Empire at the end of the eighteenth century, we do not just want to know a small tidbit of what happened during that time. We do not just want to know *that* the Hawai'ians killed Cook, we also want to know *why* they killed him, and furthermore, what this violent action means to us today. (For example: was it a valiant adumbration of the anticolonial revolutions of the twentieth century?) These “maximal” questions cannot be answered by the evidence alone, though they can never leave the evidence behind. Theory must be mobilized, and a fusion of theory and fact must be attempted by bringing together theoretical signifiers with evidential ones, in search of a new interpretation. In this case, two different theoretical schemas became intertwined with the evidence and thus confronted each other, as it were, on the beach in Hawai'i: Marshall Sahlins's theories of culture and mythology, and of structure and history, and Ganneth Obeyesekere's theories of practical rationality, and of the knowledge-politics of colonialism and postcolonialism. Both are highly abstract meaning formations that purport to say something general about what drives social action. They are both meaningful human creations that were brought to bear upon the evidence, in the attempt to create new and deeper knowledge about the British, the Hawai'ians, and “us.”

Sahlins first explains the Hawai'ians' friendly treatment of Cook as an expression of the ritualized behavior called forth by Hawai'ian mythology. He advances much detail to show that a series of unlikely coincidences—including Cook arriving at the beginning of the time of the season of the Hawai'ian akua Lono, and Cook sailing around the island at a certain time in a certain direction—confirmed empirically to the Hawai'ians that their myth-guided interpretation of Cook was correct, and suggested to the Hawai'ians that Cook and his men were acting according to the same understandings as the Hawai'ians

16. Greg Dening, “Sharks That Walk the Land: The Death of Captain Cook,” *Meanjin* 41 (1982); Jonathan Friedman, “No History Is an Island,” *Critique of Anthropology* 8 (1988). I owe these insights into earlier critiques of Sahlins, and my original awareness of their existence, to Borofsky, “Cook, Lono, Obeyesekere, and Sahlins.”

were. Then, argues Sahlins, Cook left at about the time when, in the mythological interpretation of the calendar, the akua Lono's season was over. And so, when Cook returned, this return was unexpected by the Hawai'ians in a mythological sense of the term 'unexpected.' Cook was outside the sense-making categories of their mythology, and thus a profanation who had to be eliminated. So, they killed him. But in doing so, they appropriated Britishness into their sacred mythological system. This explains why many British symbols were used by Hawai'ian chiefs after the initial encounter with Cook, and why several Hawai'ian leaders named their sons "King George."

Obeyesekere is incredulous about Sahlins's maximal interpretation of Cook's arrival and subsequent death (i.e., that its cause was Hawai'ian myth and the ritualized behaviors that enacted it), and highly skeptical about the theory that organizes the evidence to produce this maximal interpretation (namely, the structural study of myth). This leads him to reread the evidence and provide a quite different maximal interpretation. According to Obeyesekere, the Hawai'ians, like all humans, possessed a certain amount of practical rationality—that is, an ability to perceive the social and natural world realistically and solve impending problems. The Hawai'ians correctly perceived Cook as the representative of a colonial threat, and, as a result, killed him. Obeyesekere also proposes, as part of his maximal interpretation, an explanation for why many Europeans *thought* that the Hawai'ians had received Cook as a god. In the midst of constructing the colonial regime, Obeyesekere argues, Europeans could comfort their conscience by pretending that colonized peoples themselves felt Europeans to be superior. Finally, he offers a highly charged political interpretation of *Sahlins himself* as a participant in this Western ideology, which covers over the brutalities of the colonization of Hawai'i and other parts of the globe. So, we have two maximal interpretations:

'The Hawai'ians killed Cook because he was matter out of place, and they wanted to order the world according to their mythology. Ironically, however, in reaffirming this mythology in their encounter with the British, they also changed it. Such are the intersections between structure and history.'

and

'The Hawai'ians killed Cook because they knew the English were a threat to do violence to them and exploit them. Ironically, however,

because of colonial ideologies, Europeans and American anthropologists have continued to believe that the Hawai'ians thought Cook was a god, when the Hawai'ians knew quite well that he was a man. Such are the fallacies of ideology in the service of power and domination.'

We could produce more and more evidence—as indeed Sahlins did in his defense of himself—but the theoretical aspects of these maximal interpretations would not go away entirely. Our knowledge claims would continue to depend upon the successful resignification of a minimal interpretation into a maximal one. That is the bane and glory of maximal interpretation in social research. It is only because we, as investigators, have theory—or, better put, live in a meaningful world partially constituted by our theories—that we can propose to comprehend not just *that* the Hawai'ians killed Cook, but *why* the Hawai'ians killed Cook, and that we can propose to reflect, in a deep way, on how our knowledge of this episode from the eighteenth century is twisted, clarified, or unaffected by our politics. But how is this fusion of theory and fact, this resignification that takes us from minimal to maximal interpretation, to be accomplished?

V

To begin our answer to this question, let us consider a piece of social research that provides—for this author at least—the *ur*-example of maximal interpretation. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Karl Marx wrote:

When we think about this conjuring up of the dead of world history, a salient difference reveals itself. Camille Desmoulins, Danton, Robespierre, St. Just, Napoleon, the heroes as well as the parties and the masses of the old French Revolution, performed the task of their time—that of unchaining and establishing modern bourgeois society—in Roman costumes and with Roman phrases. The first one destroyed the feudal foundation and cut off the feudal heads that had grown on it. The other created inside France the only conditions under which free competition could be developed, parceled-out land properly used, and the unfettered productive power of the nation employed; and beyond the French borders it swept away feudal institutions everywhere, to provide, as far as necessary, bourgeois society in France with an appropriate up-to-date environment on the European continent. Once the new social formation was established, the antediluvian colossi disappeared and with them also

the resurrected Romanism—the Brutuses, the Gracchi, the publicolas, the tribunes, the senators, and Caesar himself. Bourgeois society in its sober reality bred its own true interpreters and spokesmen in the Says, Cousins, Royer-Collards, Benjamin Constants, and Guizots; its real military leaders sat behind the office desk and the hog-headed Louis XVIII was its political chief. Entirely absorbed in the production of wealth and in peaceful competitive struggle, it no longer remembered that the ghosts of the Roman period had watched over its cradle.¹⁷

Written in 1852, this is a classic, well-known, and much toiled over combination of theory and fact. And, in this paragraph, one can witness how theoretical signifiers come together with evidential signifiers to produce new social knowledge. On the one hand, we have minimal interpretation of the most basic sort: the naming of individuals who existed at a certain time and place (“Danton, Robespierre . . .”). The reference to how French Revolutionaries used “Roman phrases” is also a relatively minimal interpretation. We can, indeed, show that those involved in the French revolution used such language. On the other hand, there are clear and distinct theoretical signifiers throughout, which stand out in their difference from the evidentiary ones: “modern bourgeois society,” “unfettered productive power,” “social formation,” “free competition,” “production of wealth.” The true power of the paragraph, however, derives from the bringing to bear of these theoretical signifiers upon the evidential ones, the *combination* of phrases like “modern bourgeois society” with phrases like “cut off the feudal heads that had grown upon it.”

This combination—so effectively researched and written—is what makes this paragraph part of a maximal interpretation of the French Revolution. Contained therein are the answers to a whole series of why and wherefore questions. Why were feudal privileges abolished and the heads of aristocrats removed from their bodies? (So as to establish a capitalist mode of production.) Why did the new French republic go to war so soon? (To create in all of Europe the conditions it had just created at home, that is, social relations that were no longer fetters for the forces of production, but rather enabled them.) Why did the French leaders after 1815 forget the Roman rhetoric of the

17. Karl Marx, *The Karl Marx Library, Volume 1* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977), 245.

1790s? (Because in an established capitalist society, such ideas are of no use; the effectiveness of rhetoric or ideology is conditioned by the social situation.) For an explicitly moral and political evaluation of the French *Revolutions* (1789–1814 and 1848–51) and for predictions of what is to come, we must reach beyond this paragraph, but not far beyond it. The evaluation of '89 and '48: "The first time as tragedy, the second time as farce." The exhortation for the next revolution: "The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future."

The first thing to note is the *reliance* upon theoretical understanding. None of this explanation and evaluation makes sense unless you understand Marx's (and to some degree Hegel's) theories—of modes of production, of social revolution, of dialectical materialism, of history, and so on. On the other hand, the theory here is almost perfectly fused to the social facts being interpreted—to the point that both fact and theory come together to say something about social *reality*. This paragraph is far more powerful than those theories are in and of themselves. Marx uses theory to understand a piece of social reality in a deep way. We can amass more and more facts about the French Revolution (and we have), but the gauntlet has been thrown down by this text of 1852; there is a deeper sense in which we must strive to *know* the French Revolution, or, for that matter, anything else. In Marx the minimal, relatively uncontroversial, interpretations of what happened in the French Revolution are *resignified* by the use of theory so as to produce maximal interpretations. This process of resignification, on splendid display in Marx, is the essence of the transition from the minimal to maximal interpretations, and is the central object of inquiry for this book.

VI

The maximal interpretations that emerge over the course of Marx's oeuvre grasp fundamental social realities, and thus produce social explanations; they anchor themselves in utopian aspirations, and thus enable critique; and they propose sophisticated historical interpretations of the twisting of human subjectivity by ideology. Perhaps such a synthesis of explanation, criticism, and interpretation will always remain the collective ego-ideal of social research. But there was a certain disequilibrium to this fusion: "History itself is a *real* part of *natural*

history—of nature’s coming to be man.”¹⁸ And so: “The *social* reality of nature, and *human* natural science, or the *natural science about man*, are identical terms.”¹⁹ Thus though Marx exemplified all three epistemic modes I examine in the chapters that follow, it must also be admitted that his naturalist ambitions for sociohistorical analysis tilted his synthesis in a particular direction. I think that because this tendency—toward a naturalistic approach to social science inflected by both scientific ambition and materialist sensibilities—is so well known, well entrenched, and well worked through in contemporary social thought, it is worth considering from a very general point of view before delving into the specific problems associated, in each epistemic mode, with producing maximal interpretations.

For much of the twentieth century—in both academic sociology and in the more wide-ranging and majestic discourse of Marxist social research²⁰—explanation, critique, and interpretation moved backward from the synthesis proposed by Marx himself to a sheer separation based on misrecognition. However, there are now significant strands of intellectual discourse in the social sciences that propose rather explicitly to synthesize explanation and interpretation, and, in some cases, to connect this new synthesis to the goal of social critique.

That the explanation of social life is the stated goal of the social sciences can, in this emergent understanding, be squared with the

18. Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 90.

19. Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” 91.

20. Many of these issues were debated within the language of Marxism, since Marx was, to quote Foucault, a “founder of discursivity” (see Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow [New York: Pantheon Books, 1984], 114). In particular, the problematic of explanation, critique, and interpretation expressed itself in the work of Georg Lukacs, and was taken up by successive generations of Marxist theorists. But note the radical disparities that emerge over the course of the twentieth century—between, for example, Athusserian “science” and E. P. Thompson’s approach to history, or between the “explanatory” study of the global economy (e.g., Wallerstein) and the “interpretive” study of culture (e.g., Jameson). Despite efforts to bring these aspects of Marxist discourse together (e.g., Harvey), it remains the case, I would argue, that the Marxist synthesis has been broken apart. See Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (New York: Academic Press, 1974), Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989).

idea that the human sciences require the interpretation of subjectivity to accomplish their explanatory task. Thus John Goldthorpe argues that the theoretical schemas of rational action theory provide the most coherent approach to the problem of *verstehen*, and the most powerful source of explanations of collective behavior.²¹ And, in his foundational writing on the philosophy of social science, Roy Bhaskar claimed, and other critical realists continue to claim, that the explanatory program of realism in social science of necessity starts with the hermeneutic task of interpreting the conceptions of the social world that actors carry with them; only by moving through this step can the social investigator ultimately grasp the real structures of the social that explain why people do what they do.²² Meanwhile cultural sociology has produced countless investigations into symbolic structures as one aspect of the social that, supposedly having been neglected by a century of positivism, and supposedly misunderstood as ideology by a century and a half of historical materialism, are due some respect. Hence a new set of debates concerning what people do with symbols, how symbols intersect social networks and group processes, and, generally, how the study of symbols and their meanings for actors can help sociologists explain action. And symbols require human subjectivity to give them meaning. Add to this all of the talk about “habitus” and “structuration” in social theory, and we can say that the subjective element of social life has become a central focus of analysis for those who work in the human sciences.

However, there is something odd about this turn to subjectivity. In many cases, it turns out, engagement with the subjective or with the signs and symbols that humans use to make meaning does not connect to an engagement with the problem of interpretation and social knowledge. In rational choice theory, preferences are revealed and observable. In the formalist strands of semiotics and communication theory, the depth of meaning provided by human subjects is eschewed in principle—communication is manifest and thus in studying it we can avoid the entanglements of deep interpretation.

21. John H. Goldthorpe, *On Sociology*, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

22. Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences*, 3rd. ed. (New York: Routledge, 1998); Andrew Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (New York: Verso, 1994).

For much of cultural sociology, it is a question of measuring observable culture, not interpreting “other minds.”²³ And, when the problem of interpreting others *is* recognized as part of the goal of social research, this recognition usually arrives via an argument according to which interpretation augments, enables, but ultimately folds into the much more fundamental, and still separate, project of social scientific explanation.

Thus we find throughout these arguments the idea that, since explanation uses understanding as one moment in a larger process, we can ultimately conclude that the logic of social explanation recalls and relates intimately to the logic of natural scientific explanation. To paraphrase Thomas Nagel, subjectivity exists as part of the objective world, and therefore to grasp the world objectively one must grasp, among other things, the subjective.²⁴ The turn to the subjective, then, is but an *expansion* of the “objectivist” point of view, a fuller comprehension of the social. This is the idea implicit in many of the most compelling and well-argued social scientific epistemologies of today: “critical realism”;²⁵ “second-order empiricism”;²⁶ and of course “the objective limits of objectivism” and “reflexive sociology.”²⁷

This view on social knowledge considers the new, stronger objectivity to be the dialectical supersession of positivism and its critics.

23. In a move iconic for a whole generation of American cultural sociologists, Robert Wuthnow argued that by interpreting discourse or communication, one could avoid interpreting subjectivity. Robert Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). I discuss the issue of interpreting talk as opposed to interpreting people’s motivations, with reference to C. Wright Mills and R. M. MacIver, in chapter 5.

24. Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). This is similar to John Searle’s “one world” thesis. See John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995) and John Searle, “Social Ontology: Some Basic Principles,” *Anthropological Theory* 6, no. 1 (2006).

25. For a selection of the key writings of critical realism, see Margaret Archer et al., eds., *Critical Realism: Essential Readings* (New York: Routledge, 1998). For an account of its importance for comparative-historical sociology, see George Steinmetz, “Critical Realism and Historical Sociology. A Review Article,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40, no. 1 (1998).

26. Geoffrey Brahm Levey, “Theory Choice and the Comparison of Rival Theoretical Perspectives in Political Sociology,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 26, no. 1 (1996).

27. Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays toward a Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990); Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *Science of Science and Reflexivity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

And it expects researchers armed with the new, postpositivist epistemology to arrive at intersubjectively verifiable explanations of why people do what they do, the premises of which are not, ultimately, different from those of any other truth-seeking activity whose primary orientation is empirical. Understanding is thus included in the project of explanation.

It is my view that this line of thinking—which elevates to a new level of sophistication and reflexivity our understanding of the social sciences as sciences—is exactly backward. Explanation, as a goal for the study of human beings, can only function as a subcategory of the larger category of understanding. And the strange human trait of subjectivity has a much deeper effect on the forms of understanding (including explanation) that are possible in the human sciences than is granted by the purveyors of “reflexive science.”

Of course, it is the case that human subjects and human societies exist in a wider world, and that that wider world can to a very effective degree be comprehended under the schemas of the natural sciences. No social explanation can be reasonably proposed that, say, defies physics as we know it. Yet to remain at this level of understanding is to conflate the manifest fact that humans exist in, are of, and work upon nature with the philosophical position that the premises of the human sciences cannot be all that different from the premises of the natural sciences. I think this is a conflation that does not hold up under sustained reflection on what, precisely, social researchers claim when they claim to know something about what other people are up to. What if, before jumping to the naturalist metaphor, we took seriously Hegel’s injunction that before getting to the “cognition of what truly is,” we must first of all develop an understanding of cognition itself?²⁸

This proposal brings us directly to the problems of interpretation, because in examining the process of knowledge production we are attempting to comprehend a very specific, perhaps in some ways privileged, form of meaning-making—the attainment and verification of knowledge. And since all knowledge involves human subjectivity as its instrument or medium, no form of knowledge can be said to exist outside of the problem of interpretation.

Thus I begin, here, from a position that recognizes the meaning-

28. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), paragraph 73.

making nature of human endeavors to produce knowledge.²⁹ From this perspective, rather than seeing natural science as pure and true knowledge that emerges from the encounter of an unblemished subjectivity with unmediated Nature, we can see it as a specification of the interpretive process that, at a more general level, characterizes all human thought and communication.³⁰ It is a specification, furthermore, that required for its achievement a remarkable coincidence of sociohistorical circumstances, and that requires for its continuance a form of training and social organization whose details are still being worked out in sociological research, and whose philosophical basis has become the occupation of post-logical-positivist philosophy of science.

The interpretive capacities of natural science, that is, are of a specific kind. In natural science, the human capacity to interpret, to grasp the meaning of phenomena, is pointed to the reconstruction of sense-experience and observation in terms of a vast and precise set of theories and laws about the natural world. These laws themselves are constructed and justified through the work humans do on and through nature—the practical interaction of human beings with their environment, which is disciplined through scientific training.³¹ If,

29. The critical realists recognize *prima facie* both the hermeneutic problems attending the human sciences and the possibilities and contingencies that “history” introduces to social life. They thus arrive at their version of explanation only after arguing their way out of the epistemic dilemmas of human knowledge. As I shall argue below, however, the realist solution is in need of radical reform.

30. Kurt Hübner in *Critique of Scientific Reason* argues that Weber’s ideal types—and, more generally, work in the human sciences—in fact exemplify the relationship between a priori principles and facts that obtain in all of the sciences, both social and natural. Thus he argues that “the so-called hermeneutic circle, which is discussed so often today, does not really exist . . . this erroneously named ‘circle’ comes up not only in the historical and human sciences, but in every empirical science, since the relation between a priori assumptions and facts interpreted with their help is principally the same everywhere. Hence we are not dealing with something inherent to the historical and human sciences alone.” My goal here is, by examining closely truth claims in the human sciences, to show that Hübner was wrong to find essentially the same “interpretive” operation at work when theory is used in natural science and in the human sciences. It is not clear (to me at least) how Hübner’s philosophical account of scientific reasoning would change what natural scientists do and write; I hope to show that the peculiarities of interpretation *for the human sciences* are in fact of great consequence for how we imagine and practice social research. Kurt Hübner, *Critique of Scientific Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 189.

31. Ian Hacking has considered these issues with extreme care, writing at the intersection of realist philosophies of natural science, pragmatist-influenced epistemology, and Foucauldian-historical studies of the human sciences. See in particular Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of*

indeed, this specific sort of interpretation has managed to achieve a certain kind of universality—to create forms of knowledge that can be explicated and compellingly communicated to humans (or perhaps one day, nonhumans!) who share very little linguistically, socially and culturally, and psychologically with the communicators, this is a remarkable achievement, but not one that belies the way that, at a very general level, the enterprise is interpretive. It suggests, rather, that in so far as the grammar of science is mathematics, and mathematics is a human creation whose intersubjective validity can be established with a remarkable amount of abstract certainty, science can have an objectivist outlook as its working format for making and criticizing knowledge claims, and a pragmatic-realist justification as its working format of philosophical self-reflection.³² This speaks to an essential hermeneutic truth about science often ignored by positivists and anti-positivists alike, but grasped in some philosophies of natural science and certain social-theoretical traditions: that the “scientific mindset” is just that—a specific manipulation of the human ability to assign meaning to certain manifest signifiers—and that scientific objectivity is something earned through labor and social organization, rather than something philosophically guaranteed. Certainly most natural scientists would agree that they work for their objectivity.

For social research, it is not at all clear that the interpretive capacities of the investigator can be channeled in the same way, and I will ultimately argue in this book that the epistemic synthesis that can be traced to Marx’s naturalist inclination must be countered. Metaphors of standing on head or feet notwithstanding, this argument will not ultimately hinge on an inversion, but rather on a differentiation between ways of using theory, and a recognition of the limits, as well as the capacities, of social knowledge. To preview the anti-antirealist

Natural Science (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), and Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?*

32. The issues raised by the rather astounding way in which mathematics can serve as the language for physics and some other natural sciences are outlined in Eugene Wigner, “The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences,” *Communications in Pure and Applied Mathematics* 13, no. 1 (1960). But the larger issue here is the development of a sociological approach to natural scientific knowledge that does not associate “rationality” with individual knowers or philosophical certainty, and as a result oppose social determinants of knowledge to rational determinants of knowledge. This I take to be the central project of Helen Longino’s philosophy/sociology of science, which she traces to C. S. Peirce’s meditations on communities of inquiry and the attainment of truth. Helen Longino, *The Fate of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 4–5, 77–96.

argument that follows: I think realism is correct that social investigation must reach beyond the surface of colligated facts to grasp causal explanations of action, and I will follow the critical realists in suggesting a connection between explanation and critique—I too hold that the critique of social life and its cultural products requires, at least implicitly, some sort of approach to social explanation. But I doubt whether these connections can be adequately established via the mode of theoretical resignification that is at the core of the realist epistemic mode. But to fully articulate both realism and its alternatives, we have to look at how theoretical resignification actually works.

How, in other words, does the use of the language game of social theory enable the construction of compelling historical narratives of cause, critique, and meaning? Let us pull apart these different conceptual methods. For we now work without the fetters—and thus without the supports—of the Marxian philosophy of history, which could connect in one compelling logical circle the explanation of society, the interpretation of culture, and the critique of systematically distorted communication. We have not yet fully understood the ways in which these intellectual tasks have become so radically different from each other.

It may in fact be that the synthesis of these modes will not—or not yet—be possible: that we live in an epistemically fallen age, yearning for the ultimate whole that once was guaranteed by the metanarratives of communism or modernization. However, consider this: the most outstanding versions of that synthesis were based upon an illusory equation of materiality and scientificity, the critique of which is by no means complete, and thus it might be a mistake to wager the possibility of synthetic social knowledge on their success.