THE MEANINGS OF SOCIAL LIFE
A Cultural Sociology

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Modern men and women go about their lives without really knowing why. Why do we work for such a long time every day? Why do we finish one war only to fight another? Why are we so obsessed with technology? Why do we live in an age of scandal? Why do we feel compelled to honor those, like the victims of the Holocaust, who have been murdered for an unjust cause?

If we had to explain these things, we would say "it just makes sense" or "it's necessary" or "it's what good people do." But there is nothing natural about any of this. People don't naturally do any of these things. We are compelled to be this way.

We are not anywhere as reasonable or rational or sensible as we would like to think. We still lead lives dictated more by unconscious than conscious reason. We are still compelled by feelings of the heart and the fearful instincts of the gut.

America and its allies are waging today a war against terrorism. This is said to be necessary and rational, a means to attain the end of safety. Is the war against terrorism only this, or even primarily this? No, for it rests on fantasy as much as on fact. The effort to protect the people of the United States and Europe is shrouded in the rhetoric of good and evil, of friends and enemies, of honor, conscience, loyalty, of God and country, of civilization and primeval chaos. These are not just ideas. They are feelings, massive ones. Our leaders evoke these rhetorics in solemn tones, and we honor the victims of terrorism in the most rhetorical of benedictions.

These rhetorics are cultural structures. They are deeply constraining but also enabling at the same time. The problem is that we don't understand them. This is the task of a cultural sociology. It is to bring the unconscious cultural struc-
tures that regulate society into the light of the mind. Understanding may change but not dissipate them, for without such structures society cannot survive. We need myths if we are to transcend the banality of material life. We need narratives if we are to make progress and experience tragedy. We need to divide the sacred from profane if we are to pursue the good and protect ourselves from evil.

Of course, social science has always assumed that men and women act without full understanding. Sociologists have attributed this to the force of social structures that are "larger" and more "powerful" than mere individual human beings. They have pointed, in other words, to the compulsory aspects of social life.

But what fascinates and frightens me are those collective forces that are not compulsory, the social forces to which we enthusiastically and voluntarily respond. If we give our assent to these, without knowing why, it is because of meaning. Materialism is not forced on us. It is also a romance about the sacrality of things. Technology is not only a means. It is also an end, a desire, a lust, a salvationary belief. People are not evil, but they are made to be. Scandals are not born from the facts but constructed out of them, so that we can purify ourselves. We do not mourn mass murder unless we have already identified with the victims, and this only happens once in a while, when the symbols are aligned in the right way.

The secret to the compulsive power of social structures is that they have an inside. They are not only external to actors but internal to them. They are meaningful. These meanings are structured and socially produced, even if they are invisible. We must learn how to make them visible. For Freud, the goal of psychoanalysis was to replace the unconscious with the conscious: "Where Id was, Ego shall be." Cultural sociology is a kind of social psychoanalysis. Its goal is to bring the social unconscious up for view. To reveal to men and women the myths that think them so that they can make new myths in turn.

In the middle 1980s, in the lunch line at the UCLA Faculty Center, I was engaging three sociology colleagues in a heated debate. An assistant professor was struggling for tenure, and the faculty were lining up pro and con. Those skeptical of the appointment objected that the candidate's work could not even be called sociology. Why not, I asked? He was not sociological, they answered: He paid more attention to the subjective framing and interpreting of social structures than to the nature of those social structures themselves. Because he had abandoned social-structural causality, he had given up on explanation, and thus on sociology itself. I countered: While his work was indeed different, it remained distinctly sociological. I suggested that it might possibly be seen as a kind of "cultural" sociology.

This remark did not succeed in its intended effect. Instead it generated a kind of incredulity—at first mild snickers, then guffaws, and then real belly laughs. Cultural sociology? my colleagues scoffed. This idea struck them not only as deeply offensive to their disciplinary sense but intellectually absurd. The very phrase "cultural sociology" seemed an oxymoron. Culture and sociology could not be combined as adjective and noun. If there were a sociological approach to culture, it should be a sociology of culture. There certainly could not be a cultural approach to sociology.

My colleagues were right about the present and the past of our discipline, but events did not prove them prescient about its future. In the last fifteen years, a new and specifically cultural approach to sociology has come into existence. It never existed before—not in the discipline's first hundred and fifty years. Nor has such a cultural approach been present in the other social sciences that have concerned themselves with modern or contemporary life.

In the history of the social sciences there has always been a sociology of culture. Whether it had been called the sociology of knowledge, the sociology of art, the sociology of religion, or the sociology of ideology, many sociologists paid respect to the significant effects of collective meanings. However, these sociologists of culture did not concern themselves primarily with interpreting collective meanings, much less with tracing the moral textures and delicate emotional pathways by which individuals and groups come to be influenced by them. Instead, the sociology-of-approach sought to explain what created meanings; it aimed to expose how the ideal structures of culture are formed by other structures—for a more material, less ephemeral kind.

By the mid-1980s, an increasing if still small number of social scientists had come to reject this sociology-of-approach. As an enthusiastic participant in this rejection, I, too, accused sociology of basic misunderstanding, one that continues to hobble much of the sociological investigation into culture today. To recognize the immense impact of ideals, beliefs, and emotions is not to surrender to an (unsociological) voluntarism. It is not to believe that people are free to do as they will. It is not to lapse into the idealism against which sociology should indeed define itself, nor the wish-fulfilling moralism to which it is a welcome antidote. Cultural sociology can be as hardheaded and critical as materialistic sociology. Cultural sociology makes collective emotions and ideas central to its methods and theories precisely because it is such subjective and internal feelings that so often seem to rule the world. Socially constructed subjectivity forms the will of collectivities; shapes the rules of organizations; defines the moral substance of law; and provides the meaning and motivation for technologies, economies, and military machines.

But if idealism must be avoided, the facts of collective idealization must not be. In our postmodern world, factual statements and fictional narratives are densely interwoven. The binaries of symbolic codes and true/false statements are implanted one on the other. Fantasy and reality are so hopelessly intertwined that we can separate them only in a posthoc way. It was the same in modern society. In this respect, little has changed since traditional life. Classical and modern sociologists did not believe this to be true. They saw the break from the "irrationalities" of traditional society as radical and dichotomous. One needs to
develop an alternative, more cultural sociology because reality is not nearly as transparent and rational as our sociological forefathers believed.

My sensitivity to this reality, and my ability to understand it, has been mediated by a series of critical intellectual events: the linguistic turn in philosophy, the rediscovery of hermeneutics, the structuralist revolution in the human sciences, the symbolic revolution in anthropology, and the cultural turn in American historiography. Behind all these contemporary developments has been the continuing vitality of psychoanalytic thinking in both intellectual and everyday life. It has been in response to these significant movements in our intellectual environment that the slow, uneven, but nevertheless steadily growing strand of a genuinely cultural sociology has developed.

These essays do not aim at building a new model of culture. They do not engage in generalizing and deductive theory. In this respect they are postfoundational. I see them, rather, to borrow from Merleau-Ponty, as adventures in the dialectics of cultural thought. They move back and forth between theorizing and researching, between interpretations and explanations, between cultural logics and cultural pragmatics. They enter into interpretive disputes with some of the exemplars of classical, modern, and postmodern thinking.

Even when they offer models and manifest generalizing ambitions—aiming toward science, in the hermeneutic sense—these essays are also rooted in pragmatic, broadly normative interests. As a chastened but still hopeful post-sixties radical, I was mesmerized by the Watergate crisis that began to shake American society in 1972. It showed me that democracy still lived and that critical thought was still possible, even in an often corrupted, postmodern, and still capitalist age. More fascinating still was how this critical promise revealed itself through a ritualized display of myth and democratic grandeur, a paradox I try to explain in chapter 6.

In the decade that followed this early political investigation, my interest turned to the newly revived concept of civil society. Over the same period, as my understanding of the mythical foundations of democracy became elaborated more semiotically, I discovered that a deep, and deeply ambiguous, structure underlies the struggles for justice in democratic societies. When Philip Smith and I discuss the binary discourse of American civil society, in chapter 5, we show that combining Durkheim with Saussure demonstrates how the good of modern societies is linked to the evils, how democratic liberation has so often been tied to democratic repression. As I suggest in chapter 4, these considerations point us to a sociology of evil. Like every other effort to realize normative ideals, modernity has had a strong vision of social and cultural pollution and has been motivated to destroy it.

In chapter 2, I try to come to grips with the event that has been defined as the greatest evil of our time, the Holocaust. This evil is a constructed one, for it is not a fact that reflects modern reality but a collective representation that has constituted it. Transforming the mass murder of the Jews into an "engorged" evil has been fundamental to the expansion of moral universalism that marks the hopeful potential of our times, and it is paradigmatic of the way cultural traumas shape collective identities, for better and for worse.

Indeed, the very notion of "our times" can itself be construed as the creation of an ever-shifting narrative frame. It is with this in mind that in chapter 8 I offer a cultural-sociological approach to the venerable topic of intellectual ideology. Comparing intellectuals to priests and prophets, I bracket the reality claims that each of these groups of postwar intellectuals has made.

A similar commitment to relativizing the reality claims of intellectual-cum-political authority inspired chapter 7. When he first came to power, President Ronald Reagan embarked on the hapless quest to create an impregnable missile defense shield for the United States. Tens of billions of dollars were spent on this pursuit, which formed a backdrop to Soviet President Michael Gorbachev's suit to end the Cold War. While personally resistant to President Reagan's claims, sociologically I was fascinated by them. To understand their mythical roots, I have tried to reconstruct technology in a fundamentally cultural-sociological way.

But more than pragmatic-political and scientific-empirical interests have guided me in approaching the topics in this book. My aim has always also been theoretical. By applying the cultural-sociological method to a widely dispersed range of topics, I wish to demonstrate that culture is not a thing but a dimension, not an object to be studied as a dependent variable but a thread that runs through, one that can be teased out of, every conceivable social form. These essays enter into thick description. They tease out overarching grand narratives. They build maps of complex symbolic codes. They show how the fates of individuals, groups, and nations are often determined by these invisible but often gigantically powerful and patterned ideational rays.

Yet, at the same time, these investigations also pay careful attention to the "material factor"—that terrible misnomer—in its various forms: to the interests of racial, national, class, religious, and party-political groups; to capitalist economic demands; to the deracinating pressures of demography, the centralizing forces of bureaucracy, and the geopolitical constrictions of states. Such "hard" structural factors are never ignored; they are, rather, put into their appropriate place. Once again: To engage in cultural sociology is not to believe that good things happen or that idealistic motives rule the world. To the contrary, only if cultural structures are understood in their full complexity and nuance can the true power and persistence of violence, domination, exclusion, and degradation be realistically understood.

With the exception of the programmatic first chapter, written also with Philip Smith, I have tried not to overload these essays with theoretical disquisition. Some orienting abstraction there certainly must be. Yet in selecting the essays to be included in this book, and in editing them, my goal has been to make the theoretical ideas that inspire cultural sociology live through the empirical
discussions, the social narratives, the case studies. In fact, from several of these chapters I have expunged large chunks of theoretical discussion that accompanied them in their originally published forms. Much of my academic life has been devoted to writing "pure theory." This book is different. Its purpose is to lay out a research program for a cultural sociology and to show how this program can be concretely applied to some of the principal concerns of contemporary life.

A great aperitif marks the birth of sociology—a great, mysterious, and unexplained rupture. It concerns the relation between religion and rationality, tradition and modernity. The extraordinary German founder of sociology, Max Weber, devoted a large part of his maturity to the historical-comparative study of world religions. He showed that the human desire for salvation became patterned in different ways, that each difference contained a practical ethic, and that these ethics, carried on the wings of salvation, had enormous impact on the social organization of practical life. With the other part of his energetic maturity, however, Weber devoted himself to laying out the concepts of a much more materialistic economic and political sociology, one that emphasized instrumental motives and domination, not ideas about salvation and moral ethics. Weber never explained how these two parts of his work could be reconciled. Instead he finessed the issue by suggesting, via his rationalization thesis, that faith was relevant only to the creation of modernity, not to the project of its ongoing institutionalization.

We must go beyond this disconnect, which has merely been replicated by more contemporary theories of social life. If we are to understand how the insights of Weber's *religion-soziologie* can be applied to the nonreligious domains of secular society, we need a cultural sociology. Only by understanding the nature of social narrative can we see how practical meanings continue to be structured by the search for salvation. How to be saved—how to jump to the present from the past and into the future—is still of urgent social and existential concern. This urgency generates fantasies and myths and inspires giant efforts at practical transformation. We must respectfully disagree with Weber's contention that modernity has forced charisma to be routinized in a fateful and permanent way.

It is striking that the French founder of modern sociology, Emile Durkheim, suffered from a similar theoretical affliction. There is a great divide between Durkheim's early and middle studies of social structure on the one hand and the symbolic and ritual studies that occupied his later work on the other. Durkheim called this later work his "religious sociology," and he promised that his study of Aboriginal societies, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, would be the beginning, not the end, of exploration of society's symbolic dimensions. Was it Durkheim's premature death or some more fundamental ideological or theoretical inhibition that prevented him from fulfilling this promise, from demonstrating the continuity between the religion of early societies and the cultural life of later, more complex ones? If the love of the sacred, the fear of pollution, and the need for purification have continued to mark modern as much as traditional life, we can find out how and why only by following a cultural-sociological path.

In the history of social science, the "friends of culture" have tended to be conservative. They have betrayed a nostalgia for the organicism and the solidity of traditional life. The idea of a cultural sociology has foundered on this yearning, on the idea that only in simple, religiously ordered, undemocratic, or old-fashioned societies do myths and narratives and codes play a fundamental role. These essays demonstrate the opposite. Reflection and criticism are imbedded in myths that human beings cannot be entirely reflective and critical about. If we understand this, we can separate knowledge from power and not become only a servant to it.
Throughout the world, culture has been doggedly pushing its way onto the center stage of debates not only in sociological theory and research but also throughout the human sciences. As with any profound intellectual shift, this has been a process characterized by leads and lags. In Britain, for example, culture has been making headway since the early 1970s. In the United States, the tide began to turn unmistakably only in the mid-1980s. In continental Europe, it is possible to argue that culture never really went away. Despite this ongoing revival of interest, however, there is anything but consensus among sociologists specializing in the area about just what the concept means and how it relates to the discipline as traditionally understood. These differences of opinion can be usefully explained only partly as empirical reflections of geographical, sociopolitical, or national traditions. More important, they are manifestations of deeper contradictions relating to axiomatic and foundational logics in the theory of culture. Pivotal to all these disputes is the issue of "cultural autonomy" (Alexander, 1990a; Smith, 1998a). In this chapter, we employ the concept of cultural autonomy to explore and evaluate the competing understandings of culture currently available to social theory. We suggest that fundamental flaws characterize most of these models, and we argue for an alternative approach that can be broadly understood as a kind of structural hermeneutics.

Lévi-Strauss (1974) famously wrote that the study of culture should be like the study of geology. According to this dictum, analysis should account for surface variation in terms of deeper generative principles, just as geomorphology explains the distribution of plants, the shape of hills, and the drainage patterns followed by rivers in terms of underlying geology. In this chapter, we intend to
apply this principle to the enterprise of contemporary cultural sociology in a way that is both reflexive and diagnostic. Our aim is not so much to review the field and document its diversity, although we will indeed conduct such a review, as to engage in a seismographic enterprise that will trace a fault line running right through it. Understanding this fault line and its theoretical implications allows us not only to reduce complexity but also to transcend the kind of purely taxonomic mode of discourse that so often plagues essays of this programmatic kind. This seismographic principle will provide a powerful tool for getting to the heart of current controversies and understanding the slippages and instabilities that undermine so much of the territory of cultural inquiry. Contra Lévi-Strauss, however, we do not see our structural enquiry as a disinterested scientific exercise. Our discourse here is openly polemical, our language slightly colored. Rather than affecting neutrality, we are going to propose one particular style of theory as offering the best way forward for cultural sociology.

THE FAULT LINE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The fault line at the heart of current debates lies between “cultural sociology” and the “sociology of culture.” To believe in the possibility of a cultural sociology is to subscribe to the idea that every action, no matter how instrumental, reflexive, or coerced vis-à-vis its external environments (Alexander, 1988), is embedded to some extent in a horizon of affect and meaning. This internal environment is one toward which the actor can never be fully instrumental or reflexive. It is, rather, an ideal resource that partially enables and partially constrains action, providing for both routine and creativity and allowing for the reproduction and transformation of structure (Sewell, 1992). Similarly, a belief in the possibility of a cultural sociology implies that institutions, no matter how impersonal or technocratic, have an ideal foundation that fundamentally shapes their organization and goals and provides the structured context for debates over their legitimation. When described in the folk idioms of positivism, one could say that the more traditional sociology of culture approach treats culture as a dependent variable, whereas in cultural sociology it is an “independent variable” that possesses a relative autonomy in shaping actions and institutions, providing inputs every bit as vital as more material or instrumental forces.

Viewed from a distance, the sociology of culture offers the same kind of landscape as cultural sociology. There is a common conceptual repertoire of terms like values, codes, and discourses. Both traditions argue that culture is something important in society, something that repays careful sociological study. Both speak of the recent “cultural turn” as a pivotal moment in social theory. But these resemblances are only superficial. At the structural level we find deep antinomies. To speak of the sociology of culture is to suggest that culture is something to be explained, by something else entirely separated from the do-

main of meaning itself. To speak of the sociology of culture is to suggest that explanatory power lies in the study of the “hard” variables of social structure, such that structured sets of meanings become superstructures and ideologies driven by these more “real” and tangible social forces. In this approach, culture becomes defined as a “soft,” not really independent variable: it is more of less confined to participating in the reproduction of social relations.

A notion that has emerged from the extraordinary new field of science studies is the sociologically inspired idea of the “strong program” (e.g., Bloor, 1976; Latour & Woolgar, 1986). The argument here is that scientific ideas are cultural and linguistic conventions as much as they are simply the results of other, more “objective” actions and procedures. Rather than only “findings” that hold up a mirror to nature (Rorty, 1979), science is understood as a collective representation, a language game that reflects a prior pattern of sense-making activity. In the context of the sociology of science, the concept of the strong program, in other words, suggests a radical uncoupling of cognitive content from natural determination. We would like to suggest that a strong program also might be emerging in the sociological study of culture. Such an initiative argues for a sharp analytical uncoupling of culture from social structure, which is what we mean by cultural autonomy (Alexander, 1988; Kane, 1992). As compared to the sociology of culture, cultural sociology depends on establishing this autonomy, and it is only via such a strong program that sociologists can illuminate the powerful role that culture plays in shaping social life. By contrast, the sociology of culture offers a “weak program” in which culture is a feeble and ambivalent variable. Borrowing from Basil Bernstein (1971), we might say that the strong program is powered by an elaborated theoretical code, whereas the weak program is limited by a restricted code that reflects the inhibitions and habits of traditional, institutionally oriented social science.

Commitment to a cultural-sociological theory that recognizes cultural autonomy is the single most important quality of a strong program. There are, however, two other defining characteristics that must drive any such approach, characteristics that can be described as methodological. One is the commitment to hermeneutically reconstructing social texts in a rich and persuasive way. What is needed here is a Geertzian “thick description” of the codes, narratives, and symbols that create the textured webs of social meaning. The contrast here is to the “thin description” that typically characterizes studies inspired by the weak program, in which meaning is either simply read off from social structure or reduced to abstracted descriptions of reified values, norms, ideology, or fetishism. The weak program fails to fill these empty vessels with the rich wine of symbolic significance. The philosophical principles for this hermeneutic position were articulated by Dilthey (1962), and it seems to us that his powerful methodological injunction to look at the “inner meaning” of social structures has never been surpassed. Rather than inventing a new approach, the deservedly
influential cultural analyses of Clifford Geertz can be seen as providing the most powerful contemporary application of Dilthey's ideas. 3

In methodological terms, the achievement of thick description requires the bracketing-out of wider, nonsymbolic social relations. This bracketing-out, analogous to Husserl's phenomenological reduction, allows the reconstruction of the pure cultural text, the theoretical and philosophical rationale for which Ricoeur (1971) supplied in his important argument for the necessary linkage between hermeneutics and semiotics. This reconstruction can be thought of as creating, or mapping out, the culture structures (Rambo & Chan, 1990) that form one dimension of social life. It is the notion of the culture structure as a social text that allows the well-developed conceptual resources of literary studies—from Aristotle to such contemporary figures as Frye (1971, [1957]) and Brooks (1984)—to be brought into social science. Only after the analytical bracketing demanded by hermeneutics has been completed, after the internal pattern of meaning has been reconstructed, should social science move from analytic to concrete autonomy (Kane, 1992). Only after having created the analytically autonomous culture object does it become possible to discover in what ways culture intersects with other social forces, such as power and instrumental reason in the concrete social world.

This brings us to the third characteristic of a strong program. Far from being ambiguous or shy about specifying just how culture makes a difference, far from speaking in terms of abstract systemic logics as causal processes (à la Lévi-Strauss), we suggest that a strong program tries to anchor causality in proximate actors and agencies, specifying in detail just how culture interferes with and directs what really happens. By contrast, as Thompson (1978) demonstrated, weak programs typically hedge and studder on this issue. They tend to develop elaborate and abstract terminological (de)devices that provide the illusion of specifying concrete mechanisms, as well as the illusion of having solved intractable dilemmas of freedom and determination. As they say in the fashion business, however, the quality is in the detail. We would argue that it is only by resolving issues of detail—who says what, why, and to what effect—that cultural analysis can become plausible according to the criteria of a social science. We do not believe, in other words, that hardheaded and skeptical demands for causal clarity should be confined to empiricists or to those who are obsessively concerned with power and social structure. 4 These criteria also apply to a cultural sociology.

The idea of a strong program carries with it the suggestions of an agenda. In what follows we discuss this agenda. We look first at the history of social theory, showing how this agenda failed to emerge until the 1960s. We go on to explore several contemporary traditions in the social scientific analysis of culture. We suggest that, despite appearances, each comprises a weak program, failing to meet in one way or another the defining criteria we have set forth here. We conclude by pointing to an emerging tradition of cultural sociology, most of it American, that in our view establishes the parameters of a strong program.

CULTURE IN SOCIAL THEORY FROM THE CLASSICS TO THE 1960S

For most of its history, sociology, both as theory and method, has suffered from a numbness toward meaning. Culturally unmusical scholars have depicted human action as insipidly or brutally instrumental, as if it were constructed without reference to the internal environments of actions that are established by the moral structures of sacred—good and profane—evil (Brooks, 1984) and by the narrative teleologies that create chronology (White, 1987) and define dramatic meaning (Frye, 1971, [1957]). Caught up in the ongoing crises of modernity, the classical founders of the discipline believed that epochal historical transformations had emptied the world of meaning. Capitalism, industrialization, secularization, rationalization, anomie, and egoism, these core processes were held to create confused and dominated individuals, to shatter the possibilities of a meaningful telos, to eliminate the ordering power of the sacred and profane. Only occasionally does a glimmer of a strong program come through in this classical period. Weber's (1958) religious sociology, and most particularly his essay "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions" (see Alexander, 1988) suggested that the quest for salvation was a universal cultural need whose various solutions had forcefully shaped organizational and motivational dynamics in world civilizations. Durkheim's later sociology, as articulated in critical passages from The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1968) and in posthumously recovered courses of lectures (Alexander, 1982), suggested that even contemporary social life had an ineluctable spiritual-cum-symbolic component. While plagued by the weak program symptom of causal ambivalence, the young Marx's (1963b) writings on species-being also forcefully pointed to the way nonmaterial forces tied humans together in common projects and destinies. This early suggestion that alienation is not only the reflection of material relationships adumbrated the critical chapter in Capital, "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof," (Marx, 1966a [1867], 71–83) which has so often served as an unstable bridge from structural to cultural Marxism in the present day.

The communist and fascist revolutionary upheavals that marked the first half of this century were premised on the same kind of widespread fear that modernity had eroded the possibility of meaningful sociability. Communist and fascist thinkers attempted to alchemize what they saw as the barren codes of bourgeois civil society into new, resacralized forms that could accommodate technology and reason within wider, encompassing spheres of meaning (Smith, 1998c). In the calm that descended on the postwar period, Talcott Parsons and his colleagues, motivated by entirely different ideological ambitions, also began to think that modernity did not have to be understood in such a corrosive way. Beginning from an analytical rather than eschatological premise, Parsons theorized that "values" had to be central to actions and institutions if a society was to be
able to function as a coherent enterprise. The result was a theory that seemed to many of Parsons’s modern contemporaries to exhibit an idealizing culturalist bias (Lockwood, 1992). We ourselves would suggest an opposite reading.

From a strong program viewpoint, Parsonian functionalism can be taken as insufficiently cultural, as denuded of musicality. In the absence of a musical moment where the social text is reconstructed in its pure form, Parsons’s work lacks a powerful hermeneutic dimension. While Parsons theorized that values were important, he did not explain the nature of values themselves. Instead of engaging in the social imaginary, diving into the febrile codes and narratives that make up a social text, he and his functionalist colleagues observed action from the outside and induced the existence of guiding valuations using categorial frameworks supposedly generated by functional necessity. Without a counter-weight of thick description, we are left with a position in which culture has autonomy only in an abstract and analytic sense. When we turn to the empirical world, we find that functionalist logic ties up cultural form with social function and institutional dynamics to such an extent that it is difficult to imagine where culture’s autonomy might lie in any concrete setting. The result was an ingenuous systems theory that remains too hermeneutically feeble, too distant on the issue of autonomy to offer much to a strong program.

Flawed as the functionalist project was, the alternatives were far worse. The world in the 1960s was a place of conflict and turmoil. When the Cold War turned hot, macrosocial theory shifted toward the analysis of a one-sided and anticultural stance. Thinkers with an interest in macrohistorical process approached meaning through its contexts, treating it as a product of some supposedly more “real” social force, when they spoke of it at all. For scholars like Barrington Moore and C. Wright Mills and later followers such as Charles Tilly, Randall Collins, and Michael Mann, culture must be thought of in terms of self-interested ideologies, group process, and networks rather than in terms of texts. Meanwhile, during the same period, microsociology emphasized the radical reflexivity of actors. For such writers as Blumer, Goffman, and Garfinkel, culture forms an external environment in relation to which actors formulate lines of action that are “accountable” or give off a good “impression.” We find precious little indication in this tradition of the power of the symbolic to shape interactions from within, as normative precepts or narratives that carry an internalized moral force.

Yet during the same period of the 1960s, at the very moment when the halfway cultural approach of functionalism was disappearing from American sociology, theories that spoke forcefully of a social text began to have enormous influence in France. Through creative misreadings of the structural linguistics of Saussure and Jacobson, and bearing a (carefully hidden) influence from the late Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, thinkers like Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and the early Michel Foucault created a revolution in the human sciences by insisting on the textuality of institutions and the discursive nature of human action.

When viewed from a contemporary strong program perspective, such approaches remain too abstracted; they also typically fail to specify agency and causal dynamics. In these failings they resemble Parsons’ functionalism. Nevertheless, in providing hermeneutic and theoretical resources to establish the autonomy of culture, they constituted a turning point for the construction of a strong program. In the next section we discuss how this project has been detailed by a succession of weak programs that continue to dominate research on culture and society today.

WEAK PROGRAMS IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL THEORY

One of the first research traditions to apply French nouvelle vague theorizing outside of the hothouse Parisian environment was the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, widely known as the Birmingham School. The masterstroke of the school was to meld ideas about cultural texts onto the neo-Marxist understanding that Gramsci established about the role played by cultural hegemony in maintaining social relations. This allowed exciting new ideas about how culture worked to be applied in a flexible way to a variety of settings, all the while without letting go of comforting old ideas about class domination. The result was a “sociology of culture” analysis, which tied cultural forms to social structure as manifestations of “hegemony” (if the analyst did not like what they saw) or “resistance” (if they did). At its best, this mode of sociology could be brilliantly illuminating. Paul Willis’s (1977) ethnographic study of working-class school kids was outstanding in its reconstruction of the zeitgeist of the “lads.” Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts’s (1978) classic study of the moral panic over mugging in 1970s Britain, Policing the Crisis, managed in its early pages to decode the discourse of urban decay and racism that underpinned an authoritarian crackdown. In these ways, Birmingham work approached a “strong program” in its ability to recreate social texts and lived meanings. Where it fails, however, is in the area of cultural autonomy (Sherwood, Smith, & Alexander, 1993). Notwithstanding attempts to move beyond the classical Marxist position, neo-Gramscian theorizing exhibits the telltale weak program ambiguities over the role of culture that plague the luminous Prison Notebooks (Gramsci, 1971) themselves. Terms like “articulation” and “anchoring” suggest contingency in the play of culture. But this contingency is often reduced to instrumental reason (in the case of elites articulating a discourse for hegemony purposes) or to some kind of ambiguous systemic or structural causation (in the case of discourses being anchored in relations of power).

Failure to grasp the nettle of cultural autonomy and quit the sociology of culture–driven project of “Western Marxism” (Anderson, 1979) contributed to a fateful ambiguity over the mechanisms through which culture links with social structure and action. There is no clearer example of this latter process.
than in *Policing the Crisis* (Hall, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978) itself. After building up a detailed picture of the mugging panic and its symbolic resonances, the book lurches into a sequence of insistent claims that the moral panic is linked to the economic logic of capitalism and its proximate demise; that it functions to legitimate law-and-order politics on streets that harbor latent revolutionary tendencies. Yet the concrete mechanisms through which the incipient crisis of capitalism (has it arrived yet?) are translated into the concrete decisions of judges, parliamentarians, newspaper editors, and police officers on the beat are never spelled out. The result is a theory that despite a critical edge and superior hermeneutic capabilities to classical functionalism curiously resembles Parsons in its tendency to invoke abstracted influences and processes as adequate explanation for empirical social actions.

In this respect, in contrast to the Birmingham School, the work of Pierre Bourdieu has real merits. While many Birmingham-style analyses seem to lack any clear application of method, Bourdieu’s oeuvre is resolutely grounded in middle-range empirical research projects of both a qualitative and quantitative nature. His inferences and claims are more modest and less manifestly tendentious. In his best work, moreover, such as the description of a Kabyle house or a French peasant dance (Bourdieu, 1962, 1977), Bourdieu’s thick description abilities show that he has the musicality to recognize and decode cultural texts that is at least equal to that of the Birmingham ethnographers. Despite these qualities, Bourdieu’s research also can best be described as a weak program dedicated to the sociology of culture rather than cultural sociology. Once they have penetrated the thickets of terminological ambiguity that always mark out a weak program, commentators agree that in Bourdieu’s framework culture has a role in ensuring the reproduction of inequality rather than permitting innovation (Alexander, 1995a; Honneth, 1986; Sewell, 1992). As a result, culture, working through habitus, operates more as a dependent than an independent variable. It is a gearbox, not an engine. When it comes to specifying exactly how the process of reproduction takes place, Bourdieu is vague. Habitus produces a sense of style, ease, and taste. Yet to know just how these influence stratification, something more would be needed: a detailed study of concrete social settings where decisions are made and social reproduction ensured (see Lamont, 1992). We need to know more about the thinking of gatekeepers in job interviews and publishing houses, the impact of classroom dynamics on learning, or the logic of the citation process. Without this “missing link” we are left with a theory that points to circumstantial homologies but cannot produce a smoking gun.

Bourdieu’s understanding of the links of culture to power also falls short of demanding strong program ideals. For Bourdieu, stratification systems make use of status cultures in competition with each other in various fields. The semantic content of these cultures has little to do with how society is organized. Meaning has no wider impact. While Weber, for example, argued that forms of eschatology have determinate outputs on the way that social life is patterned, for

Bourdieu cultural content is arbitrary and without import. In his formulation there always will be systems of stratification defined by class, and all that is important for dominant groups is to have their cultural codes embraced as legitimate. In the final analysis, what we have here is a Veblen-esque vision in which culture provides a strategic resource for actors, an external environment of action, rather than a Text that shapes the world in an immanent fashion. People use culture, but they do not seem to really care about it.

Michel Foucault’s works, and the poststructural and postmodern theoretical program they have initiated, provides the third weak program we discuss here. Despite its brilliance, what we find here, yet again, is a body of work wrought with the tortured contradictions that indicate a failure to grasp the nettle of a strong program. On the one hand, Foucault’s (1970, 1972) major theoretical texts, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *The Order of Things*, provide important groundwork for a strong program with their assertion that discourses operate in arbitrary ways to classify the world and shape knowledge formation. His empirical applications of this theory also should be praised for assembling rich historical data in a way that approximates the reconstruction of a social text. So far so good. Unfortunately, there is another hand at work. The crux of the issue is Foucault’s genealogical method; his insistence that power and knowledge are fused in power/knowledge. The result is a reductionist line of reasoning akin to functionalism (Brenner, 1994), where discourses are homologous with institutions, flows of power, and technologies. Contingency is specified at the levels of “history,” at the level of untheorizable collisions and ruptures, not at the level of the dispositif. There is little room for a synchronically arranged contingency that might encompass disjunctures between culture and institutions, between power and its symbolic or textual foundations, between texts and actors interpretations of those texts. This binding of discourse to social structure, in other words, leaves no room for understanding how an autonomous cultural realm hinders or assists actors in judgment, in critique, or in the provision of transcendental goals that texture social life. Foucault’s world is one where Nietzsche’s prison house of language finds its material expression with such force that no room is left for cultural autonomy or, by implication, the autonomy of action. Responding to this sort of criticism, Foucault attempted to theorize self and resistance in his later work. But he did so in an ad hoc way, seeing acts of resistance as random dysfunctions (Brenner, 1994: 678) or unexplained self-assertions. These late texts do not work through the ways that cultural frames might permit “outsiders” to produce and sustain opposition to power.

In the currently most influential stream of work to come out of the Foucauldian stable, we can see that the latent tension between the Foucault (1972) of the *Archaeology* and Foucault’s genealogical avatar has been resolved decisively in favor of an anticultural mode of theory. The proliferating body of work on “governmentality” centers on the control of populations (Miller & Rose, 1990; Rose, 1993) but does so through an elaboration of the role of administrative
techniques and expert systems. To be sure, there is acknowledgment that "language" is important, that government has a "discursive character." This sounds promising, but on closer inspection we find that "language" and "discourse" boil down to dry modes of technical communication (graphs, statistics, reports, etc.) that operate as technologies to allow "evaluation, calculation, intervention" at a distance by institutions and bureaucracies (Miller & Rose, 1990: 7). There is little work here to recapture the more textual nature of political and administrative discourses. No effort is made to go beyond a "thin description" and identify the broader symbolic patterns, the hot, affective criteria through which policies of control and coordination are appraised by citizens and elites alike. Here the project of governmentality falls short of the standards set by Hall et al. (1978), which at least managed to conjure up the emotive spirit of populism in Heathera Britain.

Research on the "production and reception of culture" marks the fourth weak program we will identify. Unlike those we have just discussed, it is one that lacks theoretical bravura and charismatic leadership. For the most part it is characterized by the unsung virtues of intellectual modesty, diligence, clarity, and a studious attention to questions of method. Its numerous proponents make sensible, middle-range empirical studies of the circumstances in which "culture" is produced and consumed (for an overview see Crane, 1992). For this reason it has become particularly powerful in the United States, where these kinds of properties assimilate best to professional norms within sociology. The great strength of this approach is that it offers explicit causal links between culture and social structure, thus avoiding the pitfalls of indeterminacy and obfuscation that have plagued more theoretically ambitious understandings. Unfortunately, this intellectual honesty usually serves only to broadcast a reductionist impulse that remains latent in the other approaches we have examined. The insistent aim of study after study (e.g., Blau, 1985; Peterson, 1985) seems to be to explain away culture as the product of sponsoring institutions, elites, or interests. The quest for profit, power, prestige, or ideological control sits at the core of cultural production. Reception, meanwhile, is relentlessly determined by social location. Audience ethnographies, for example, are undertaken to document the decisive impact of class, race, and gender on the ways that television programs are understood. Here we find the sociology of culture writ large. The aim of analysis is not so much to uncover the impact of meaning on social life and identity formation but rather to see how social life and identities constrain potential meanings.

While the sociological credentials of such undertakings are to be applauded, something more is needed if the autonomy of culture is to be recognized, namely a robust understanding of the codes that are at play in the cultural objects under consideration. Only when these are taken into account can cultural products be seen to have internal cultural inputs and constraints. However, in the production of culture approach, such efforts at hermeneutic understanding are rare. All too often meaning remains a sort of black box, with analytical attention centered on the circumstances of cultural production and reception. When meanings and discourses are explored, it is usually in order to talk through some kind of fit between cultural content and the social needs and actions of specific producing and receiving groups. Wendy Griswold (1983), for example, shows how the trickster figure was transformed with the emergence of Restoration drama. In the medieval morality play, the figure of "vice" was evil. He was later to morph into the attractive, quick-thinking "gallant." The new character was one that could appeal to an audience of young, disenfranchised men who had migrated to the city and had to depend on their wits for social advancement. Similarly, Robert Wuthnow (1989) argues that the ideologies of the Reformation germinated and took root as an appropriate response to a particular set of social circumstances. He persuasively demonstrates that new binary oppositions emerged in theological discourse, for example, those between a corrupt Catholicism and a pure Protestantism. These refracted the politics and social dislocations underlying religious and secular struggles in sixteenth-century Europe.

We have some concerns about singling such work out for criticism, for they are among the best of the genre and approximate the sort of thick description we advocate. There can be little doubt that Griswold and Wuthnow correctly understand a need to study meaning in cultural analysis. However, they fail to systematically connect its exploration with the problematic of cultural autonomy. For all their attention to cultural messages and historical continuities, they do little to reduce our fear that there is an underlying reductionism in such analysis. The overall effect is to understand meanings as infinitely malleable in response to social settings. A more satisfying approach to Griswold's data, for example, would recognize the dramatic narratives as inevitably structured by constraining, cultural codes relating to plot and character, for it is the combinations between these that make any kind of drama a possibility. Similarly, Wuthnow should have been much more sensitive to the understanding of binary opposition advocated by Saussure: it is a precondition of discourse rather than merely a description of its historically specific form. And so to our reading, such efforts as Griswold's and Wuthnow's represent narrowly lost opportunities for a decisive demonstration cultural autonomy as a product of culture-structure. In the final section of this chapter, we look for signs of a structuralist hermeneutics that can perhaps better accomplish this theoretical goal.

**Steps Toward a Strong Program**

All things considered, the sociological investigation of culture remains dominated by weak programs characterized by some combination of hermeneutic inadequacy, ambivalence over cultural autonomy, and poorly specified, abstract mechanisms for grounding culture in concrete social process. In this final section we discuss recent trends in cultural sociology where there are signs that a bona fide strong program might finally be emerging.
A first step in the construction of a strong program is the hermeneutic project of "thick description" itself, which we have already invoked in a positive way. Drawing on Paul Ricoeur and Kenneth Burke, Clifford Geertz (1973, 1964) has worked harder than any other person to show that culture is a rich and complex text, with a subtle patterning influence on social life. The result is a compelling vision of culture as webs of significance that guide action. Yet while superior to the other approaches we have considered, this position too has its flaws. Nobody could accuse Geertz of hermeneutic inadequacy or of neglecting cultural autonomy, yet on close inspection his enormously influential concept of thick description seems rather elusive. The precise mechanisms through which webs of meaning influence action on the ground are rarely specified with any clarity. Culture seems to take on the qualities of a transcendental actor (Alexander, 1987). So in terms of the third criterion of a strong program that we have specified—causal specificity—the program initiated by Geertz runs into trouble. One reason is the later Geertz's reluctance to connect his interpretive analysis to any kind of general theory. There is a relentless emphasis on the way that the local explains the local. He insists that societies, like texts, contain their own explanation. Writing the local, as a consequence, comes into play as a substitute for theory construction. The focus here is on a novelistic recapitulation of details, with the aim of analysis being to accumulate these and fashion a model of the cultural text within a particular setting. Such a rhetorical turn has made it difficult to draw a line between anthropology and literature, or even travel writing. This in turn has made Geertz's project vulnerable to takeover bids. Most notably, during the 1980s the idea that society could be read like a text was taken over by poststructural writers who argued that culture was little more than contending texts or "representations" (Clifford, 1988) and that ethnonography was either allegory, fantasy, or biography. The aim of analysis now shifted to the exposition of professional representations and the techniques and power relations behind them. The resulting program has been one that has told us a good deal about academic writing, ethnographic museum displays, and so on. It helps us to understand the discursive conditions of cultural production but has almost given up on the task of explaining ordinary social life or the possibility of a general understanding. Not surprisingly, Geertz enthusiastically devoted himself to the new cause, writing an eloquent text on the tropes through which anthropologists construct their ethnographic authority (Geertz, 1988). As the text replaces the tribe as the object of analysis, cultural theory begins to look more and more like critical narcissism and less and less like the explanatory discipline that Dilshey so vividly imagined.

Inadequate as it may be, the work of Geertz provides a springboard for a strong program in cultural analysis. It indicates the need for the explication of meaning to be at the center of the intellectual agenda and offers a vigorous affirmation of cultural autonomy. What is missing, however, is a theory of culture that has autonomy built into the very fabric of meaning as well as a more robust understanding of social structure and institutional dynamics. We suggest, following Saussure, that a more structural approach toward culture helps with the first point. In addition, it initiates the movement toward general theory that Geertz avoids. In short, it can recognize the autonomy and the centrality of meaning but does not develop a hermeneutics of the particular at the expense of a hermeneutics of the universal.

As the 1980s turned into the 1990s, we saw the revival of "culture" in American sociology and the declining prestige of anticultural forms of macro- and micro-thought. This strand of work, with its developing strong program characteristics, offers the best hope for a truly cultural sociology finally to emerge as a major research tradition. To be sure, a number of weak programs organized around the sociology of culture remain powerful, perhaps dominant, in the U.S. context. One thinks in particular of studies of the production, consumption, and distribution of culture that (as we have shown) focus on organizational and institutional contexts rather than content and meanings (e.g., Blau, 1989; Peterson, 1985). One also thinks of work inspired by the Western Marxist tradition that attempts to link cultural change to the workings of capital, especially in the context of urban form (e.g., Davis, 1992; Goetheiner, 1995). The neoinstitutionalists (see DiMaggio & Powell, 1991) see culture as significant but only as a legitimating constraint, only as an external environment of action, not as a lived text, as Geertz might (see Fiedland & Alford, 1991). Of course, there are numerous United States-based apostles of British cultural studies (e.g., Fiske, 1987; Grossberg, Nelson, & Treichler, 1991), who combine virtuoso hermeneutic readings with thin, stratification-oriented forms of quaismaterialist reduction. Yet it is equally important to recognize that there has emerged a current of work that gives to meaningful and autonomous texts a much more central place (for a sample, see Smith, 1998b). These contemporary sociologists are the "children" of an earlier generation of culturalist thinkers, Geertz, Bellah (1970; see Alexander & Sherwood, 2002), Turner (1974), and Sahlins (1976) foremost among them, who wrote against the grain of 1960s and 1970s reductionism and attempted to demonstrate the textuality of social life and the necessary autonomy of cultural forms. In contemporary scholarship, we are seeing efforts to align these two axioms of a strong program with the third imperative of identifying concrete mechanisms through which culture does its work.

Responses to the question of transmission mechanisms have been decisively shaped, in a positive direction, by the American pragmatist and empiricist traditions. The influence of structural linguistics on European scholarship sanctioned a kind of cultural theory that paid little attention to the relationship between culture and action (unless tempered by the dangerously "humanist" discourses of existentialism or phenomenology). Simultaneously, the philosopher formation of writers like Althusser and Foucault permitted a dense and tortured kind of writing, where issues of causality and autonomy could be circled around in endless, elusive spirals of words. By contrast, American pragma-
tism has provided the seedbed for a discourse where clarity is rewarded; where it is believed that complex language games can be reduced to simpler statements; where it is argued that actors have to play some role in translating cultural structures into concrete actions and institutions. While the influence of pragmatism has reached American cultural sociologists in a diffuse way, its most direct inheritance can be seen in the work of Swidler (1986), Sewell (1992), Emirbayer and his collaborators (e.g., Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1996; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), and Fine (1987), where efforts are made to relate culture to action without recourse to the materialistic reductionism of Bourdieu's praxis theory.

Other forces also have played a role in shaping the emerging strong program in American cultural sociology. Because these are more closely related than the pragmatists to our argument that a structuralist hermeneutics is the best way forward, we will expand on them here. Pivotal to all such work is an effort to understand culture not as just a text (à la Geertz) but rather as a text that is underpinned by signs and symbols that are in patterned relationships to each other. Writing in the first decades of the twentieth century, Durkheim and his students such as Heitz and Mauss understood that culture was a classification system consisting of binary oppositions. At the same time Saussure was developing his structural linguistics, arguing that meanings were generated by means of patterned relationships between concepts and sounds. A few decades later, Lévi-Strauss was to pull these linguistic and sociological approaches to classification together in his pioneering studies of myth, kinship, and totemism. The great virtue of this synthesis was that it provided a powerful way for understanding the autonomy of culture. Because meanings are arbitrary and are generated from within the sign system, they enjoy a certain autonomy from social determination, just as the language of a country cannot be predicted from the knowledge that it is capitalist or socialist, industrial or agrarian. Culture now becomes a structure as objective as any more material social fact.

With the thematics of the "autonomy of culture" taking center stage in the 1980s, there was a vigorous appreciation of the work of the late Durkheim, with his insistence on the cultural as well as functional origins of solidarity (for a review of this literature, see Emirbayer, 1996; Smith & Alexander, 1996). The felicitous but not altogether accidental congruence between Durkheim's opposition of the sacred and the profane and structuralist theories of sign-systems enabled insights from French theory to be translated into a distinctively sociological discourse and tradition, much of it concerned with the impact of cultural codes and codings. Numerous studies of boundary maintenance, for example, reflect this trend (for a sample, see Lamont & Fournier, 1993), and it is instructive to contrast them with more reductionist weak program alternatives about processes of "othering." Emerging from this tradition has been a focus on the binary opposition as a key tool for asserting the autonomy of cultural forms (see Alexander & Smith, 1993; Edles, 1998; Magnuson, 1997; Smith, 1991). Further inspirations for structural hermeneutics within a strong program for cultural theory have come from anthropology. The new breed of symbolic anthropologists, in addition to Geertz, most notably Mary Douglas (1966), Victor Turner (1974), and Marshall Sahlins (1976, 1981), took on board the message of structuralism but tried to move it in new directions. Postmodernisms and post-structuralisms also have played their role but in an optimistic guise. The knot between power and knowledge that has stunted European weak programs has been loosened by American postmodern theorists like Steven Seidman (1988). For postmodern pragmatic philosophers like Richard Rorty (e.g., 1989), language tends to be seen as a creative force for the social imaginary rather than as Nietzsche's prison house. As a result, discourses and actors are provided with greater autonomy from power in the construction of identities.

These trends are well known, but there also is an interdisciplinary dark horse to which we wish to draw attention. In philosophy and literary studies, there has been growing interest in narrative and genre theory. Cultural sociologists such as Robin Wagner-Pacifici (1986, 1994, 2000; Wagner-Pacifici & Schwartz, 1991), Margaret Somers (1995), Wendy Griswold (1983), Ronald Jacobs (1996, 2000), Agnes Ku (1996), William Gibson (1994), and the authors of this chapter are now reading literary theorists like Northrup Frye, Peter Brooks, and Fredric Jameson, historians like Hayden White, and Aristotelian philosophers like Ricoeur and MacIntyre (see Lara, 1998). The appeal of such theory lies partially in its affinity for a textual understanding of social life. The emphasis on teleology carries with it some of the interpretive power of the classical hermeneutic model. This impulse toward reading culture as a text is complemented, in such narrative work, by an interest in developing formal models that can be applied across different comparative and historical cases. In other words, narrative forms such as the morality play or melodrama, tragedy, and comedy can be understood as "types" that carry with them particular implications for social life. The morality play, for example, does not seem to be conducive to compromise (Wagner-Pacifici, 1986, 1994). Tragedy can give rise to fatalism (Jacobs, 1996) and withdrawal from civic engagement, but it also can promote moral responsibility (Alexander, 1995b; Eyerman, 2001). Comedy and romance, by contrast, generate optimism and social inclusion (Jacobs & Smith, 1997; Smith, 1994). Irony provides a potent tool for the critique of authority and reflexivity about dominant cultural codes, opening space for difference and cultural innovation (Jacobs & Smith, 1997; Smith, 1996).

A further bonus for this narrative approach is that cultural autonomy is assured (e.g., in the analytic sense, see Kane, 1992). If one takes a structuralist approach to narrative (Barthes, 1977), textual forms are seen as interwoven repertoires of characters, plot lines, and moral evaluations whose relationships can be specified in terms of formal models. Narrative theory, like semiotics, thus operates as a bridge between the kind of hermeneutic inquiry advocated by Geertz and the impulse toward general cultural theory. As Northrop Frye recognized, when approached in a structural way narrative allows for the construction of
models that can be applied across cases and contexts but at the same time provides a tool for interrogating particularities.

It is important to emphasize that while meaningful texts are central in this American strand of a strong program, wider social contexts are not by any means necessarily ignored. In fact, the objective structures and visceral struggles that characterize the real social world are every bit as important as in work from the weak programs. Notable contributions have been made to areas such as censorship and exclusion (Beisel, 1993), race (Jacobs, 1996), sexuality (Seidman, 1988), violence (Gibson, 1994; Smith, 1991, 1996; Wagner-Pacifici, 1994), and failed sociohistorical projects for radical transformation (Alexander, 1995b). These contexts are treated, however, not as forces unto themselves that ultimately determine the content and significance of cultural texts; rather, they are seen as institutions and processes that refract cultural texts in a meaningful way. They are arenas in which cultural forces combine or clash with material conditions and rational interests to produce particular outcomes (Ku, 1999; Smith, 1996). Beyond this they are seen as cultural metatexts themselves, as concrete embodiments of wider ideal currents.

CONCLUSIONS

We have suggested here that structuralism and hermeneutics can be made into fine bedfellows. The former offers possibilities for general theory construction, prediction, and assertions of the autonomy of culture. The latter allows analysis to capture the texture and temper of social life. When complemented by attention to institutions and actors as causal intermediaries, we have the foundations of a robust cultural sociology. The argument we have made here for an emerging strong program has been somewhat polemical in tone. This does not mean we disparage efforts to look at culture in other ways. If sociology is to remain healthy as a discipline, it should be able to support a theoretical pluralism and lively debate. There are important research questions, in fields from demography to stratification to economic and political life, to which weak programs can be expected to make significant contributions. But it is equally important to make room for a genuinely cultural sociology. A first step toward this end is to speak out against false idols, to avoid the mistake of confusing reductionist sociology of culture approaches with a genuine strong program. Only in this way can the full promise of a cultural sociology be realized during the coming century.

ON THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF MORAL UNIVERSALS

The “Holocaust” from War Crime to Trauma Drama

If we beat this suffering, and if there are still Jews left, when it is over, then Jews, instead of being doomed, will be held up as an example. Who knows, it might even be our religion from which the world and all peoples learn good, and for that reason and for that alone do we have to suffer now.

—Anne Frank, 1944

“Holocaust” has become so universal a reference point that even contemporary Chinese writers, who live thousands of miles from the place of Nazi brutality and possess only scanty knowledge of the details of the Holocaust, came to call their horrendous experiences during the Cultural Revolution “the ten-year holocaust.”

—Sheng Mei Ma, 1987

The term history unites the objective and the subjective side, and denotes . . . not less what happened than the narration of what happened. This union of the two meanings we must regard as of a higher order than mere outward accident; we must suppose historical narrations to have appeared contemporaneously with historical deeds and events.

—G. W. F. Hegel, The Philosophy of History
How did a specific and situated historical event, an event marked by ethnic and racial hatred, violence, and war, become transformed into a generalized symbol of human suffering and moral evil, a universalized symbol whose very existence has created historically unprecedented opportunities for ethnic, racial, and religious justice, for mutual recognition, and for global conflicts becoming regulated in a more civil way? This cultural transformation has been achieved because the originating historical event, traumatic in the extreme for a delimited particular group, has come over the last fifty years to be redefined as a traumatic event for all of humankind. Now free-floating rather than situated—universal rather than particular—this traumatic event vividly “lives” in the memories of contemporaries whose parents and grandparents never felt themselves even remotely related to it.

In what follows, I explore the social creation of a cultural fact and the effects of this cultural fact on social and moral life.

In the beginning, in April 1945, the Holocaust was not the “Holocaust.” In the torrent of newspaper, radio, and magazine stories reporting the discovery by American infantrymen of the Nazi concentration camps, the empirical remains of what had transpired were typified as “atrocities.” Their obvious awfulness, and indeed their strangeness, placed them for contemporary observers at the borderline of the category of behavior known as “man’s inhumanity to man.” Nonetheless, qua atrocities, the discoveries were placed side by side—metonymically and semantically—with a whole series of other brutalities that were considered to be the natural results of the ill wind of this second, very unnatural, and most inhuman world war.

The first American reports on “atrocities” during that second world war had not, in fact, even referred to actions by German Nazis, let alone to their Jewish victims, but to the Japanese army’s brutal treatment of American and other allied prisoners of war after the loss of Corregidor in 1943. On January 27, 1944, the United States released sworn statements by military officers who had escaped the so-called Bataan Death March. In the words of contemporary journals and magazines, these officers had related “atrocity stories” revealing “the inhuman treatment and murder of American and Filipino soldiers who were taken prisoner when Bataan and Corregidor fell.” In response to these accounts, the U.S. State Department had lodged protests to the Japanese government about its failure to live up to the provisions of the Geneva Prisoners of War Convention (Current History, March 1944: 249). Atrocities, in other words, were a signifier specifically connected to war. They referred to war-generated events that transgressed the rules circumscribing how national killing could normally be carried out. Responding to the same incident, Newsweek, in a section entitled “The Enemy” and under the headline “Nation Replies in Grim Fury to Jap Brutality to Prisoners,” reported that “with the first impact of the news, people had shuddered at the story of savage atrocity upon Allied prisoners of war by the Japanese” (February 7, 1944: 19, italics added).

It is hardly surprising, then, that it was this nationally specific and particular war-related term that was employed to represent the grisly Jewish mass murders discovered by American GIs when they liberated the Nazi camps. Through April 1945, as one camp after another was discovered, this collective representation was applied time after time. When, toward the end of that month, a well-known Protestant minister explored the moral implications of the discoveries, he declared that, no matter how horrifying and repulsive, “it is important that the full truth be made known so that a clear indication may be had of the nature of the enemy we have been dealing with, as well as of a realization of the sheer brutalities that have become the accompaniment of war.” The New York Times reported this sermon under the headline “Bonnell Denounces German Atrocities” (April 23, 1945: 23, italics added). When alarmed American Congressmen visited Buchenwald, the Times headlined it that they had witnessed firsthand the “War Camp Horror” (April 26, 1945: 12, italics added). When a few days later the U.S. army released a report on the extent of the killings in Buchenwald, the Times headlined it an “Atrocity Report” (April 29, 1945: 20). A few days after that, under the headline “Enemy Atrocities in France Bared,” the Times wrote that a just-released report had shown that “in France, German brutality was not limited to the French underground or even to the thousands of hostages whom the Germans killed for disorders they had nothing to do with, but was practiced almost systematically against entirely innocent French people” (May 4, 1945: 6).

The Nazis’ anti-Jewish mass murders had once been only putative atrocities. From the late thirties on, reports about them had been greeted with widespread public doubt about their authenticity. Analogizing to the allegations about German atrocities during World War I that later had been thoroughly discredited, they were dismissed as a kind of Jewish moral panic. Only three months before the GIs’ “discovery” of the camps, in introducing a firsthand report on Nazi mass murder from a Soviet-liberated camp in Poland, Collier’s magazine acknowledged: “A lot of Americans simply do not believe the stories of Nazi mass executions of Jews and anti-Nazi Gentiles in eastern Europe by means of gas chambers, freight cars partly loaded with lime and other horrifying devices. These stories are so foreign to most Americans’ experience of life in this country that they seem incredible. Then, too some of the atrocity stories of World War I were later proved false” (January 6, 1945: 62). From April 3, 1945, however, the date when the GIs first liberated the concentration camps, all such earlier reports were retrospectively accepted as facts, as the realistic signifiers of Peirce rather than the “arbitrary” symbols of Saussure. That systematic efforts at Jewish mass murder had occurred, and that the numerous victims and the few survivors had been severely traumatized, the American and worldwide audience now had little doubt. Their particular and unique fate, however, even while it was widely recognized as representing the grossest of injustices, did not itself become a traumatic experience for
the audience to which the mass media’s collective representations were transmitted, that is, for those looking on, either from near or from far. Why this was not so defines my initial explanatory effort here.

For an audience to be traumatized by an experience that they themselves do not directly share, symbolic extension and psychological identification are required. This did not occur. For the American infantrymen who first made contact, for the general officers who supervised the rehabilitation, for the reporters who broadcast the descriptions, for the commissions of Congressmen and intellectuals who quickly traveled to Germany to conduct on-site investigations, the starving, depleted, often weird-looking and sometimes weird-acting Jewish camp survivors seemed like a foreign race. They could just as well have been from Mars, or from hell. The identities and characters of these Jewish survivors rarely were personalized through interviews or individualized through biographical sketches; rather, they were presented as a mass, and often as a mess, a petrified, degrading, and smelly one, not only by newspaper reporters but by some of the most powerful general officers in the Allied high command. This depersonalization made it more difficult for the survivors’ trauma to generate compelling identification.

Possibilities for universalizing the trauma were blocked not only by the depersonalization of its victims but by their historical and sociological specification. As I have indicated, the mass murders semantically were immediately linked to other “horrors” in the bloody history of the century’s second great war and to the historically specific national and ethnic conflicts that underlay it. Above all, it was never forgotten that these victims were Jews. In retrospect, it is bitterly ironic, but it is also sociologically understandable, that the American audience’s sympathy and feelings of identity flowed much more easily to the non-Jewish survivors, whether German or Polish, who had been kept in better conditions and looked more normal, more composed, more human. Jewish survivors were kept for weeks and sometimes even for months in the worst areas and under the worst conditions of what had become, temporarily, displaced persons camps. American and British administrators felt impatient with many Jewish survivors, even personal repugnance for them, sometimes resorting to threats and even to punishing them.9 The depth of this initial failure of identification can be seen in the fact that when American citizens and their leaders expressed opinions and made decisions about national quotas for emergency postwar immigration, displaced German citizens ranked first, Jewish survivors last.

How could this have happened? Was it not obvious to any human observer that this mass murder was fundamentally different from the other traumatic and bloody events in a modern history already dripping in blood, that it represented not simply evil but “radical evil,” in Kant’s remarkable phrase (Kant, 1960),10 that it was unique? To understand why none of this was obvious, to understand how and why each these initial understandings and behaviors were radically changed, and how this transformation had vast repercussions for establishing not only new moral standards for social and political behavior but unprecedented, if still embryonic, regulatory controls, it is important to see the inadequacy of common-sense understandings of traumatic events.

There are two kinds of common-sense thinking about trauma, forms of thinking that comprise what I call “lay trauma theory.”11 These commonsensical forms of reasoning have deeply informed thinking about the effects of the Holocaust. They are expressed in the following strikingly different conceptualizations of what happened after the revelations of the mass killings of Jews.

The Enlightenment version. The “horror” of onlookers provoked the postwar end of anti-Semitism in the United States. The common-sense assumption here is that because people have a fundamentally “moral” nature—as a result of their rootedness in Enlightenment and religious traditions—they will perceive atrocities for what they are and react to them by attacking the belief systems that provided legitimation.

The psychoanalytic version. When faced with the horror, Jews and non-Jews alike reacted not with criticism and decisive action but with silence and bewilderment. Only after two or even three decades of repression and denial were people finally able to begin talking about what happened and to take actions in response to this knowledge.

Enlightenment and psychoanalytic forms of lay trauma thinking have permeated academic efforts at understanding what happened after the death camp revelations. One or the other version has informed not only every major discussion of the Holocaust but virtually every contemporary effort to investigate trauma more generally, efforts that are, in fact, largely inspired by Holocaust debates.12

What is wrong with this lay trauma theory is that it is “naturalistic,” either in the naively moral or the naively psychological sense. Lay trauma theory fails to see that there is an interpretive grid through which all “facts” about trauma are mediated, emotionally, cognitively, and morally. This grid has a supraindividual, cultural status; it is symbolically structured and sociologically determined. No trauma interprets itself: Before trauma can be experienced at the collective (not individual) level, there are essential questions that must be answered, and answers to these questions change over time.

THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF TRAUMA

Coding, Weighting, Narrating

Elie Wiesel, in a moving and influential statement in the late 1970s, asserted that the Holocaust represents an “ontological evil.” From a sociological perspective, however, evil is epistemological, not ontological. For a traumatic event to have the status of evil it is a matter of its becoming evil. It is a matter of how the trauma is known, how it is coded.13 “At first glance it may appear a paradox,” Diner has noted—and certainly it does—but, considered only in and of itself, “Auschwitz
has no appropriate narrative, only a set of statistics” (Diner, 2000: 178). Becoming evil is a matter, first and foremost, of representation. Depending on the nature of representation, a traumatic event may be regarded as ontologically evil, or its badness, its “evilness,” may be conceived as contingent and relative, as something that can be ameliorated and overcome. This distinction is theoretical, but it is also practical. In fact, decisions about the ontological versus contingent status of the Holocaust were of overriding importance in its changing representation.

If we can deconstruct this ontological assertion even further, I would like to suggest that the very existence of the category “evil” must be seen not as something that naturally exists but as an arbitrary construction, the product of cultural and sociological work. This contrived binary, which simplifies empirical complexity into two antagonistic forms and reduces every shade of gray between, has been an essential feature of all human societies but especially important in those Eisenstadt (1982) has called the Axial Age civilizations. This rigid opposition between the sacred and profane, which in Western philosophy has typically been constructed as a conflict between normativity and instrumentality, not only defines what people care about but establishes vital safeguards around the shared normative “good.” At the same time it places powerful, often aggressive barriers against anything that is construed as threatening the good, forces defined not merely as things to be avoided but as sources of horror and pollution that must be contained at all costs.

The Material “Base”: Controlling the Means of Symbolic Production

Yet if this grid is a kind of functional necessity, how it is applied very much depends on who is telling the story, and how. This is first of all a matter of cultural power in the most mundane, materialist sense: Who controls the means of symbolic production?14 It was certainly not incidental to the public understanding of the Nazis’ policies of mass murder, for example, that for an extended period of time it was the Nazis themselves who were in control of the physical and cultural terrain of their enactment. This fact of brute power made it much more difficult to frame the mass killings in a distinctive way. Nor is it incidental that, once the extermination of the Jews was physically interrupted by Allied armies in 1945, it was America’s “imperial republic”—the perspective of the triumphant, forward-looking, militantly and militarily democratic new world warrior—that directed the organizational and cultural responses to the mass murders and their survivors. The contingency of this knowledge is so powerful that it might well be said that, if the Allies had not won the war, the “Holocaust” would never have been discovered.15 Moreover, if it had been the Soviets and not the Allies who “liberated” most of the camps, and not just those in the Eastern sector, what was discovered in those camps might never have been portrayed in a remotely similar way.16 It was, in other words, precisely and only be-

cause the means of symbolic production were not controlled by a victorious postwar Nazi regime, or even by a triumphant communist one, that the mass killings could be called the Holocaust and coded as evil.

Creating the Culture Structure

Still, even when the means of symbolic production came to be controlled by “our side,” even when the association between evil and what would become known as the Holocaust trauma was assured, this was only the beginning, not the end. After a phenomenon is coded as evil, the question that immediately follows is: How evil is it? In theorizing evil, this refers to the problem not of coding but of weighting. For there are degrees of evil, and these degrees have great implications in terms of responsibility, punishment, remedial action, and future behavior. Normal evil and radical evil cannot be the same.

Finally, alongside these problems of coding and weighting, the meaning of a trauma cannot be defined unless we determine exactly what the “it” is. This is a question of narrative: What were the evil and traumatizing actions in question? Who was responsible? Who were the victims? What were the immediate and long-term results of the traumatizing actions? What can be done by way of remediation or prevention?

What these theoretical considerations suggest is that even after the physical force of the Allied triumph and the physical discovery of the Nazi concentration camps, the nature of what was seen and discovered had to be coded, weighted, and narrated. This complex cultural construction, moreover, had to be achieved immediately. History does not wait; it demands that representations be made, and they will be. Whether or not some newly reported event is startling, strange, terrible, or inexpressibly weird, it must be “typified,” in the sense of Husserl and Schutz, that is, it must be explained as a typical and even anticipated example of some thing or category that was known about before.17 Even the vastly unfamiliar must somehow be made familiar. To the cultural process of coding, weighting, and narrating, in other words, what comes before is all-important. Historical background is critical, both for the first “view” of the traumatic event and, as “history” changes, for later views as well. Once again, these shifting cultural constructions are fatedly affected by the power and identity of the agents in charge, by the competition for symbolic control, and the structures of power and distribution of resources that condition it.

BACKGROUND CONSTRUCTIONS

Naziism as the Representation of Absolute Evil

What was the historical structure of “good and evil” within which, on April 3, 1945, the “news” of the Nazi concentration camps was first confirmed to the
American audience? To answer this question, it is first necessary to describe what came before. In what follows I will venture some observations, which can hardly be considered definitive, about how social evil was coded, weighted, and narrated during the interwar period in Europe and the United States.

In the deeply disturbing wake of World War I, there was a pervasive sense of disillusionment and cynicism among mass and elite members of the Western "audience," a distancing from protagonists and antagonists that, as Paul Fussell has shown, made irony the master trope of that first postwar era. This trope transformed "demonology"—the very act of coding and weighting evil—into what many intellectuals and lay persons alike considered to be an act of bad faith. Once the coding and weighting of evil were delegitimized, however, good and evil became less distinct from one another and relativism became the dominant motif of the time. In such conditions, coherent narration of contemporary events becomes difficult if not impossible. Thus it was that, not only for many intellectuals and artists of this period but for many ordinary people as well, the startling upheavals of these interwar years could not easily be sorted out in a conclusive and satisfying way.

In this context of the breakdown of representation, racism and revolution, whether fascist or communist, emerged as compelling frames, not only in Europe but also in the United States. Against a revolutionary narrative of dogmatic and authoritarian modernism on the Left, there arose the narrative of reactionary modernism, equally revolutionary but fervently opposed to rationality and cosmopolitanism. In this context, many democrats in western Europe and the United States withdrew from the field of representation itself, becoming confused and equivocating advocates of disarmament, nonviolence, and peace "at any price." This formed the cultural frame for isolationist political policy in both Britain and the United States.

Eventually the aggressive military ambition of Nazism made such equivocation impossible to sustain. While racialism, relativism, and narrative confusion continued in the United States and Britain until the very beginning of World War II, and even continued well into it, these constructions were countered by increasingly forceful and confident representations of good and evil that coded liberal democracy and universalism as unalloyed goods and Nazism, racism, and prejudice as deeply corrosive representations of the polluting and profane.

From the late 1930s on, there emerged a strong, and eventually dominant, antifascist narrative in Western societies. Nazism was coded, weighted, and narrated in apocalyptic, Old Testament terms as "the dominant evil of our time." Because this radical evil aligned itself with violence and massive death, it not merely justified but compelled the risking of life in opposing it, a compulsion that motivated and justified massive human sacrifice in what came later to be known as the last "good war." That Nazism was an absolute, unmitigated evil, a radical evil that threatened the very future of human civilization, formed the presupposition of America's four-year prosecution of the world war.

The representation of Nazism as an absolute evil emphasized not only its association with sustained coercion and violence but also, and perhaps even especially, the way Nazism linked violence with ethnic, racial, and religious hatred. In this way, the most conspicuous example of the practice of Nazi evil—its policy of systematic discrimination, coercion, and, eventually, mass violence against the Jews—was initially interpreted as "simply" another horrifying example of the subhumanism of Nazi action.

Interpreting Kristallnacht: Nazi Evil as Anti-Semitism

The American public's reaction to Kristallnacht demonstrates how important the Nazis' anti-Jewish activities were in crystallizing the polluted status of Nazism in American eyes. It also provides a prototypical example of how such representations of the evils of anti-semitism were folded into the broader and more encompassing symbolism of Nazism. Kristallnacht refers, of course, to the rhetorically virulent and physically violent expansion of the Nazi repression of Jews that unfolded throughout German towns and cities on November 9 and 10, 1938. These activities were widely recorded. "The morning editions of most American newspapers reported the Kristallnacht in banner headlines," according to one historian of that fateful event, "and the broadcasts of H. V. Kaltenborn and Raymond Gram Swing kept the radio public informed of Germany's latest adventure" (Diamond, 1969: 198). Exactly why these events assumed such critical importance in the American public's continuing effort to understand "what Hitlerism stood for" (2011) goes beyond the simple fact that violent and repressive activities were, perhaps for the first time, openly, even brazenly, displayed in direct view of the world public sphere. Equally important was the altered cultural framework within which these activities were observed. For Kristallnacht occurred just six weeks after the now infamous Munich agreements, acts of appeasement to Hitler's expansion that at that time were understood, not only by isolationists but by many opponents of Nazism, indeed by the vast majority of the American people, as possibly reasonable ascensions to a possibly reasonable man (197). What occurred, in other words, was a process of understanding fueled by symbolic contrast, not simply observation.

What was interpretively constructed was the cultural difference between Germany's previously apparent cooperativeness and reasonableness—representations of the good in the discourse of American civil society—and its subsequent demonstration of violence and irrationality, which were taken to be representations of antivsic evil. Central to the ability to draw this contrast was the ethnic and religious hatred Germans demonstrated in their violence against Jews. If one examines the American public's reactions, it clearly is this anti-Jewish violence that is taken to represent the evil of Nazism. Thus it was with references to this violence that the news stories of the New York Times employed the rhetoric of pollution to further code and weight Nazi evil: "No foreign propagandist
bent upon blackening the name of Germany before the world could outdo the tale of beating, of blackguardly assaults upon defenseless and innocent people, which degraded that country yesterday" (quoted in Diamond, 1969: 198). The Times' controversial columnist, Anne O'Hare McCormick, wrote that "the suffering [the Germans] inflict on others, now that they are on top, passes all understanding and mocks all sympathy," and she went on to label Kristallnacht "the darkest day Germany experienced in the whole post-war period" (quoted in Diamond, 1969: 199). The Washington Post identified the Nazi activities as "one of the worst setbacks for mankind since the Massacre of St. Bartholomew" (quoted in Diamond, 1969: 198–9).

This broadening identification of Nazism with evil, simultaneously triggered and reinforced by the anti-Jewish violence of Kristallnacht, stimulated influential political figures to make more definitive judgments about the antipathy between American democracy and German Nazism than they had up until that point. Speaking on NBC radio, Al Smith, the former New York governor and democratic presidential candidate, observed that the events confirmed that the German people were "incapable of living under a democratic government" (quoted in Diamond, 1969: 200). Following Smith on the same program, Thomas E. Dewey, soon to be New York governor and a future presidential candidate, expressed the opinion that "the civilized world stands revolted by the bloody pogrom against a defenseless people...by a nation run by madmen" (quoted in Diamond, 1969: 201). Having initially underplayed America's official reaction to the events, four days later President Franklin Roosevelt took advantage of the public outrage by emphasizing the purity of the American nation and its distance from this emerging representation of violence and ethnic hatred: "The news of the past few days from Germany deeply shocked public opinion in the United States...I myself could scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth century civilization" (quoted in Diamond, 1969: 205).

Judging from these reactions to the Nazi violence of Kristallnacht, it seems only logical that, as one historian has put it, "most American newspapers or journals" could "no longer...view Hitler as a plausible and reasonable man, but as an aggressive and contemptible dictator [who] would have to be restrained" (quoted in Diamond, 1969: 207). What is equally striking, however, is that in almost none of the American public's statements of horror is there explicit reference to the identity of the victims of Kristallnacht as Jews. Instead they are referred to as a "defenseless and innocent people," as "others," and as a "defenseless people" (quoted in Diamond, 1969: 198, 199, 201). In fact, in the public statement just quoted, President Roosevelt goes well out of his way to separate his moral outrage from any link to a specific concern for the fate of the Jews. "Such news from any part of the world," the President insists, "would inevitably produce similar profound reaction among Americans in any part of the nation" (Diamond, 1969: 205, italics added). In other words, despite the centrality of the Nazis' anti-Jewish violence to the emerging American symbolization of Nazism as evil, there existed—at that point in historical and cultural time—a reluctance for non-Jewish Americans to identify with Jewish people as such. Jews were highlighted as vital representations of the evils of Nazism: their fate would be understood only in relation to the German horror that threatened democratic civilization in America and Europe. This failure of identification would be reflected seven years later in the distanciation of the American soldiers and domestic audience from the traumatized Jewish camp survivors and their even less fortunate Jewish compatriots whom the Nazis had killed.

Anti-Anti-Semitism: Fighting Nazi Evil by Fighting for the Jews

It was also during the 1930s, in the context of the Nazi persecution of German Jews, that a historically unprecedented attack on anti-Semitism emerged in the United States. It was not that Christians suddenly felt genuine affection for, or identification with, those whom they had vilified for centuries as the killers of Christ. It was that the logic of symbolic association had dramatically and fatefully changed. Nazism was increasingly viewed as the vile enemy of universalism, and the most hated enemies of Nazism were the Jews. The laws of symbolic antimony and association thus were applied. If Nazism singled out the Jews, then the Jews must be singled out by democrats and anti-Nazis. Anti-Semitism, tolerated and condoned for centuries in every Western nation, and for the preceding fifty years embraced fervently by proponents of American "nativism," suddenly became distinctly unpopular in progressive circles throughout the United States (Gleason, 1981; Higham, 1984).25

What I will call "anti-anti-Semitism" became particularly intense after the United States declared war on Nazi Germany. The nature of this concern is framed in a particularly clear manner by one leading historian of American Jewry: "The war saw the merging of Jewish and American fates. Nazi Germany was the greatest enemy of both Jewry and the United States" (Shapiro, 1992: 16). For the first time, overly positive representations of Jewish people proliferated in popular and high culture alike. It was during this period that the phrase "Judeo-Christian tradition" was born. It appeared as Americans tried to fend off the Nazi enemy that threatened to destroy the sacred foundations of Western democratic life (Silk, 1986).

MASS MURDER UNDER THE PROGRESSIVE NARRATIVE

Nazism marked a traumatic epoch in modern history. Yet, while coded as evil and weighted in the most fundamental, weltgeschichte (world-historical) terms, it was narrated inside a framework that offered the promise of salvation and triggered actions that generated confidence and hope.25 What I will call the "pro-
gressive narrative" proclaimed that the trauma created by social evil would be overcome, that Nazism would be defeated and eliminated from the world, that it would eventually be relegated to a traumatic past whose darkness would be obliterated by a new and powerful social light. The progressivity of this narrative depended on keeping Nazism situated and historical, which prevented this representation of absolute evil from being universalized and its cultural power from being equated, in any way, shape, or form with the power possessed by the good. In narrative terms, this asymmetry, this insistence on Nazism's anomalous historical status, assured its ultimate defeat. In the popular consciousness and in the dramas created by cultural specialists, the origins of Nazism were linked to specific events in the interwar period and to particular organizations and actors within it, to a political party, to a crazy and inhuman leader, to an anomalous nation that had demonstrated militaristic and violent tendencies over the previous one hundred years.

Yes, Nazism had initiated a trauma in modern history, but it was a liminal trauma presenting "time out of time," in Victor Turner's sense. The trauma was dark and threatening, but it was, at the same time, anomalous and, in principle at least, temporary. As such the trauma could and would be removed, via a just war and a wise and forgiving peace. The vast human sacrifices demanded by the winds of war were measured and judged in terms of this progressive narrative and the salvation it promised. The blood spilled in the war sanctified the future peace and obliterated the past. The sacrifice of millions could be redeemed, the social salvation of their sacred souls achieved, not by dwelling in a lachrymose manner on their deaths but by eliminating Nazism, the force that had caused their deaths, and by planning the future that would establish a world in which there could never be Nazism again.

Framing Revelations about the Jewish Mass Murder

While initially received with surprise, and always conceived with loathing, the gradual and halting but eventually definitive revelations of Nazi plans for displacing, and quite possibly murdering, the entirety of European Jewry actually confirmed the categorizing of evil already in place: the coding, weighting, and narrating of Nazism as an inhuman, absolutely evil force. What had been experienced as an extraordinary trauma by the Jewish victims, was experienced by the audience of others as a kind of categorical vindication. In this way, and for this reason, the democratic audience for the reports on the mass murders experienced distance from, rather than identification with, the trauma's victims. The revelations had the effect, in some perverse sense, of normalizing the abnormal.

The empirical existence of Nazi plans for the "Final Solution," as well as extensive documentation of their ongoing extermination activities, had been publicly documented by June 1942 (Dawidowicz, 1982; Laqueur, 1980; Norich, 1998-99). In July of that year more than twenty thousand persons rallied in Madison Square Garden to protest the Nazis' war against the Jews. Though he did not attend in person, President Franklin Roosevelt sent a special message that what he called "these crimes" would be redeemed by the "final accounting" following the Allied victory over Nazism. In March 1943 the American Jewish Congress announced that two million Jews had already been massacred and that millions more were slated for death. Its detailed descriptions of the "extermination" were widely reported in the American press. By March 1944, when the Germans occupied Hungary and their intention to liquidate its entire Jewish population became known, Dawidowicz shows that "Auschwitz was no longer an unfamiliar name" (Dawidowicz, 1982).

Yet it was this very familiarity that seemed to undermine the sense of astonishment that might have stimulated immediate action. For Auschwitz was typified in terms of the progressive narrative of war, a narrative that made it impossible to denormalize the mass killings, to make the Holocaust into the "Holocaust." As I indicated in my earlier reconstruction of the discourse about atrocity, what eventually came to be called the Holocaust was reported to contemporaries as a war story, nothing less but nothing more. In private conferences with the American president, Jewish leaders demanded that Allied forces make special efforts to target and destroy the death camps. In describing these failed efforts to trigger intervention, a leading historian explains that the leaders "couldn't convince a preoccupied American President and the American public of the significance of Auschwitz for their time in history" (Feingold, 1974: 250).

In other words, while Auschwitz was coded as evil, it simply was not weighted in a sufficiently dire way.

In these symbolically mediated confrontations, attention was not focused on the mass killings in and of themselves. What was definitely not illuminated or asserted was the discovery of an evil unique in human history. The evil of that time had already been discovered, and it was Nazism, not the massive killing of European Jews. The trauma that this evil had created was a second world war. The trauma that the Jews experienced in the midst of their liquidation was represented as one among a series of effects of Nazi evil. When the London Times reported Adolph Hitler's death, on May 2, 1945—in the month following the death camp revelations—its obituary described the German dictator as "the incarnation of absolute evil" and only briefly mentioned Hitler's "fanatical aversion to Jews" (quoted in Benn, 1995: 102). As one historian has put it, "the processed mass murders became merely another atrocity in a particularly cruel war" (quoted in Benn, 1995: 102). The mass murders were explained, and they would be redeemed, within the framework of the progressive struggle against Nazism.

To fully understand the initial, frame-establishing encounter between Americans and the Jewish mass murder, it is vital to remember that narratives, no matter how progressive and future oriented, are composed of both antagonists and protagonists. The antagonists and their crimes were well established: the
German Nazis had murdered the Jews in a gigantic, heinous atrocity of war. The protagonists were the American GIs, and their entrance into the concentration camps was portrayed not only as a discovery of such horrendous atrocities but as another, culminating stage in a long and equally well-known sequence of "liberation," with all the ameliorating expectations that utopian term implies. "When the press entered the camps of the western front," the cultural historian Barbie Zelizer writes, "it found that the most effective way to tell the atrocity story was as a chronicle of liberation" (Zelizer, 1998: 63). In fact, Zelizer entitles her own detailed reconstruction of these journalist encounters "Chronicles of Liberation" (63–85). When readers of the New York Times and Los Angeles Times were confronted, on April 16, with the photo from Buchenwald of bunk beds stuffed to overflowing with haunted, pathetically undernourished male prisoners, they were informed that they were looking at "freed slave laborers" (83). On May 5, the Picture Post published a six-page spread of atrocity photos. Framing the heartwrenching visual images, the theme of forward progress was palpable. One collective caption read: "These Were Inmates of Prison Camps Set Free in the Allied Advance: For Many We Came Too Late" (129). Photos of dead or tattered and starving victims were often juxtaposed with pictures of well-dressed, well-fed German citizens from the surrounding towns, pointedly linking the crime to the particular nature of the German people themselves. In a sidebar story entitled "The Problem That Makes All Europe Wonder," the Picture Post described "the horror that took place within the sight and sound of hundreds of thousands of seemingly normal, decent German people. How was it possible? What has happened to the minds of a whole nation that such things should have been tolerated for a day?" (quoted in Zelizer, 1998: 128). The same photos often included a representative GI standing guard, passing judgment looking on the scene. The text alongside another widely circulated photo in the Picture Post made the progressive answer to such questions perfectly plain. "It is not enough to be mad with rage. It is no help to shout about 'exterminating' Germany. Only one thing helps: the attempt to understand how men have sunk so far, and the firm resolve to face the trouble, the inconvenience and cost of seeing no nation gets the chance to befoul the world like this again" (quoted in Zelizer, 1998: 129).

It was within this highly particularized progressive narrative that the first steps toward universalization actually took place. Because the Jewish mass killings came at the chronological conclusion of the war and because they without doubt represented the most gruesome illustration of Nazi atrocities, they came very quickly to be viewed not merely as symptoms but as emblems and iconic representations of the evil that the progressive narrative promised to leave behind. As the novelist and war correspondent Meyer Levin wrote of his visit to Ohrdruf, the first camp American soldiers liberated, "it was as though we had penetrated at last to the center of the black heart, to the very crawling inside of the vicious heart" (quoted in Abzug, 1985: 19). On the one hand, the trauma was localized and particularized—it occurred in this war, in this place, with these persons. On the other hand, the mass murder was universalized. Within months of the initial revelations, indeed, the murders frequently were framed by a new term, "genocide," a crime defined as the effort to destroy an entire people, which, while introduced earlier, during the war period itself, came to be publicly available and widely employed only after the discovery of the Nazi atrocities.31

In response to this new representation, the scope of the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal was enlarged. Conceived as a principal vehicle for linking the postwar Allied cause to progressive redemption, the trials were now to go beyond prosecuting the Nazi leaders for crimes of war to considering their role in the mass murder against the Jewish people. Justice Robert Jackson, the chief American prosecutor, promised that the trial would not only prosecute those responsible for the war but would present "undeniable proofs of incredible events"—the Nazi crimes (quoted in Benn, 1995: 102). The first three counts of the twenty-thousand-word indictment against the twenty-three high-ranking Nazi officials concerned the prosecution of the war itself. They charged conspiracy, conducting a war of aggression, and violating the rules of war. The fourth count, added only in the months immediately preceding the October trial in Nuremberg, accused the Nazi leaders of something new, namely of "crimes against humanity." This was the first step toward universalizing the public representation of the Jewish mass murder. From the perspective of the present day, however, it appears as a relatively limited one, for it functioned to confirm the innocent virtue and national ambitions of one particular side. In its first report on the indictments, for example, the New York Times linked the Jewish mass murder directly to the war itself and placed its punishment within the effort to prevent any future "war of aggression." Under the headline "The Coming War Trials," the paper noted that "the authority of this tribunal to inflict punishment is directly from victory in war" and that its goal was "to establish the principle that no nation shall ever again go to war, except when directly attacked or under the sanction of a world organization" (October 9, 1945: 20). The Nuremberg trials were not, in other words, perceived as preventing genocide or crimes against humanity as such. At that time the commission of such crimes could not be conceived apart from the Nazis and the recently concluded aggressive war.

The force of the progressive narrative meant that, while the 1945 revelations confirmed the Jewish mass murder, they did not create a trauma for the postwar audience. Victory and the Nuremberg war trials would put an end to Nazism and alleviate its evil effects. Postwar redemption depended on putting mass murder "behind us," moving on, and getting on with the construction of the new world.
From the end of the war until the early 1960s, a "can-do," optimistic spirit pervaded America. Those who had returned from the war were concerned with building a family and a career, not with dwelling on the horrors of the past. . . . It did not seem to be an appropriate time to focus on a painful past, particularly a past which seemed to be of no direct concern to this country. This event had transpired on another continent. It had been committed by another country against "an-other" people. What relevance did it have for Americans? (Lipstadt, 1996: 195–214)

[As for] the terms in which Americans of the mid-1950s were prepared to confront the Holocaust: a terrible event, yes, but ultimately not tragic or depressing; an experience shadowed by the specter of a cruel death, but at the same time not without the ability to inspire, console, uplift. . . . Throughout the late 1940s and well into the 50s, a prevalent attitude was to put all of "that" behind one and get on with life. (Rosenfeld, 1995: 37–8)

After the War, American Jewry turned — with great energy and generosity — to liquidating the legacy of the Holocaust by caring for the survivors [who] were urged to put the ghastly past behind them, to build new lives in their adopted homes. . . . When a proposal for a Holocaust memorial in New York City came before representatives of the leading Jewish organizations in the late 1940s, they unanimously rejected the idea: it would, they said, give currency to the image of Jews as "helpless victims," an idea they wished to repudiate. (Novick, 1994: 160)

It was neither emotional repression nor good moral sense that created the early responses to the mass murder of the Jews. It was, rather, a system of collective representations that focused its beam of narrative light on the triumphant expulsion of evil. Most Americans did not identify with the victims of the Jewish trauma. Far from being implicated in it, Americans had defeated those responsible for the mass murders and righteously engaged in restructuring the social and political arrangements that had facilitated them. This did not mean that the mass murder of Jews was viewed with relativism or equanimity. According to the progressive narrative, it was America's solemn task to redeem the sacrifice of this largest of all categories of Nazi victims. In postwar America, the public redeemed the sacrifices of war by demanding the thorough de-Nazification not only of German but of American society. As Sumner Welles eloquently framed the issue a month after the GIs had entered the Nazi death camps,

the crimes committed by the Nazis and by their accomplices against the Jewish people are indelible stains upon the whole of our modern civilization. . . . They are stains which will shame our generation in the eyes of generations still unborn. For we and our governments, to which we have entrusted power during these years between the Great Wars, cannot shake off the responsibility for having permitted the growth of world conditions which made such horrors possible. The democracies cannot lightly attempt to shirk their responsibility. No recompense can be offered the dead. . . . But such measure of recompense as can be offered surely constitutes the moral obligation of the free peoples of the earth as soon as their victory is won. (Welles, 1945: 511)

Purifying America and Redeeming the Murder of the Jews

Propelled by the logic of this progressive understanding of redemption, in America's immediate postwar years the public legitimation of anti-Semitism was repeatedly attacked and some of its central institutional manifestations destroyed. The longstanding anti-anti-Semitism framing the progressive narrative, and crystallized during the interwar years by leading figures in the American intellectual and cultural elite, culminated in the immediate postwar period in a massive shift of American public opinion on the Jewish question (Stember, 1966). Only days after the hostilities ceased, in response to an appeal from the National Council of Christians and Jews, the three candidates for mayor of New York City pledged to "refrain from appeals to racial and religious divisiveness during the campaign." One of them made explicit the connection of this public anti-anti-Semitism to the effort to remain connected to, and enlarge on, the meaning of America's triumph in the anti-Nazi war.

This election will be the first held in the City of New York since our victory over nazism and Japanese fascism. It will therefore be an occasion for a practical demonstration of democracy in action — a democracy in which all are equal citizens, in which there is not and never must be a second class citizenship and in which . . . the religion of a candidate must play no part in the campaign. (New York Times, October 1, 1945: 32)

In an influential article, Leonard Dinnerstein has documented the vastly heightened political activism of Jewish groups in the immediate postwar period from 1945 to 1948 (Dinnerstein, 1981–82). He records how these newly surfaced and often newly formed groups held conferences, wrote editorials, and issued specific proposals for legal and institutional changes. By 1950, these activities had successfully exposed and often defeated anti-Jewish quotas and, more generally, created an extraordinary shift in the practical and cultural position of American Jews. During the same month that New York's mayoral candidates announced their anti-anti-Semitism, the American Mercury published an article, "Discrimination in Medical Colleges," replete with graphs and copious documentation, detailing the existence of anti-Jewish quotas in some of America's most prestigious professional institutions. While the specific focus
was anti-Jewish discrimination, these facts were narrated in terms of the overarching promise of America and democracy. The story began with a vignette about "Leo, a bright and personable American lad" who "dreamed of becoming a great physician."

[He] made an excellent scholastic record [but] upon graduation . . . his first application for admission to a medical school . . . was mysteriously turned down. He filed another and another—at eighty-seven schools—always with the same heartbreaking result . . . not one of the schools had the courage to inform Leo frankly that he was being excluded because he was a Jew . . . . The excuse for imposing a quota system usually advanced is that there ought to be some correlation between the number of physicians of any racial or religious strain and the proportion of that race or religion in the general population [but] the surface logic of this arithmetic collapses as soon as one subjects it to democratic or at least human, let alone scientific, tests. (It is) spurious and un-American arithmetic. (October, 1945: 391–9, italics added)\(^\text{32}\)

Earlier that year, an "Independent Citizens Committee" had asked three hundred educators to speak out against restricting Jewish enrollment in the nation's schools. Ernest Hopkins, the president of Dartmouth College, refused, openly defending Dartmouth's Jewish quota on the grounds that German Nazism had been spurred because a large proportion of the German professions had become Jewish. A storm of public opprobrium followed Hopkins's remarks. The New York Post headlined, "Dartmouth Bars Jews 'To End Anti-Semitism,'" Says Presy." The next day, the rival tabloid, PM, placed Hopkins's picture side by side with the Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg and accused the Dartmouth president of "spouting the Hitler-Rosenberg line" (quoted in "Sense or Nonsense?" Time, August 20, 1945: 92, italics added). In an article entitled "Anti-Semitism at Dartmouth," the New Republic brought a progressive perspective to the controversy by suggesting that it could bring "us a step nearer to amelioration of one of the outstanding blots on American civilization today." Anti-Semitism belonged to the outmoded past that had been shattered by the anti-Nazi war: "We can no longer afford the luxury of these obsolete myths of racial differentiation, Mr. Hopkins; if you don't believe it, ask Hitler" (August 20, 1945: 208–9, italics added).

In the years that followed, the fight against quotas continued to be informed by similar themes. In 1946, an educational sociologist wrote in the American Scholar that such restrictions were "in contradistinction to the growing realization which has come as a result of the war." Quotas must be abolished if postwar progress were to be made.

Today, our society as a whole sees the relationship between social welfare and prejudices which thwart the development of the capacities of individuals. This threat to the basic concepts of democracy is so plain that almost all of us, except the vested interests, have seen it. The question is whether or not the colleges and universities have seen it and are willing to bring their practices into line with present day insights, even though some of their most precious traditions be jeopardized. (Dodson, 1946: 268, italics added)

Similar connections between the anti-Nazi war, antiques, and the progress of anti-anti-Semitism informed another popular magazine article the following year: "It is extremely regrettable that in 1946, the children of [parents] who are returning from all parts of the world where they have been engaged in mortal combat to preserve democracy, are confronted with the same closed doors that greeted their alien fathers" (Hart, 1947: 61). In 1949, Collier's published an article describing the "scores of college men to whom fraternities" for "full-blooded Aryans" are a little nauseating in this day." Quoting the finding of an Amherst College alumni committee that exclusive fraternities gave young men "a false and undemocratic sense of superiority," the article claimed that "the anti-discrimination movement is hopping from campus to campus" (Whitman, 1949: 34–5).

While Jewish voluntary organizations had begun to organize in 1943–45, they entered the American public sphere as aggressive political advocates only after 1945, an intervention that marked the first time Jews had forcefully entered the civil sphere as advocates for their own rather than others' causes. In the prewar period, and even less in earlier times, such an explicit and aggressively Jewish public intervention would certainly have been repelled; in fact, it would only have made anti-Semitism worse. In the postwar period, however, despite their failure to identify with the Jewish victims of Nazism, the American non-Jewish audience was determined to redeem them. If, as Dinnestain writes, Jewish groups intended to "mobilize public opinion against intolerance, and [thus to] utilize the courts and legislative bodies" (Dinnestain, 1981–1982: 137) in their anti-semitic fight, they were able to carry on these political activities only because postwar public opinion had already been defined as committed to "tolerance."

Progress toward establishing civil relations between religious and ethnic groups was woven into the patriotic postwar narratives of the nation's mass circulation magazines. Better Homes and Gardens ran such stories as "Do You Want Your Children to Be Tolerant?" "The old indifference and local absorption cannot continue. If we relapse into our before-the-war attitudes and limitations, war will burst upon us as suddenly and as unexpectedly as the atomic bomb fell upon the people of Hiroshima—and we shall be as helpless." (Buck, 1947: 135, italics added).

In another piece in Better Homes and Gardens the same year, "How to Stop the Hate Mongers in Your Home Town," a writer observed: "I suspect that many a decent German burgher, hearing tales of Nazi gangs, likewise shrugged off the
implications of uncurbed racial and religious persecution" (Carter, 1947: 186). The following year, the *Saturday Evening Post* profiled "the story of the Jewish family of Jacob Golomb." The lengthy article concluded with the by now widely expected forward-looking line.

As a family, the Golombs are more than just nice folks who lead busy, fruitful, decent lives; a family whose sons have sprung, in time of national emergency, with promptness to the defense of their country. As members of a race with a long history of persecution, they have kept the faith, since Abraham Golomb's time, that the United States really was, or would soon be, the land of the genuinely free. They are still convinced. (Perry, 1948: 96, italics added)

Four years later, America's most popular photo magazine published "Life Goes to a Bar Mitzvah: A Boy Becomes a Man" (October 13, 1952: 170–6).

The anti-anti-Semitism theme also entered popular culture through the movies. In the 1945 box office hit *Pride of the Marines*, the Jewish protagonist Larry Diamond chided a friend for pessimism about the possibility of eliminating prejudice in the postwar years. He did so by connecting their present situation to the progressive ideals that had sustained their anti-Nazi war: "Ah, come on, climb out of your foxholes, what's a matter you guys, don't you think anybody learned anything since 1930? Think everybody's had their eyes shut and brains in cold storage?" (Short, 1981: 161). Diamond goes on to remark that, if and when prejudice and repression dare to show their ugly heads in the postwar United States, he will fight to defeat them, just as he has learned to fight in the war: "I fought for me, for the right to live in the USA. And when I get back into civilian life, if I don't like the way things are going, O.K. it's my country; I'll stand on my own two legs and howler! If there's enough of us howling we'll go places—Check?" (Short, 1981: 161). The narrative of progress is forcefully extended from the anti-Nazi war into the post-Nazi peace. Diamond had been "the pride of the marines," and the war's progressive narrative is fundamentally tied to assertions about the utopian telos of the United States. As the movie's closing music turns into "America the Beautiful," Diamond wraps it up this way: "One happy afternoon when God was feeling good, he sat down and thought of a rich beautiful country and he named it the USA. All of it, Al, the hills, the rivers, the lands, the whole works. Don't tell me we can't make it work in peace like we do in war. Don't tell me we can't pull together. Don't you see it guys, can't you see it?" (Short, 1981: 161–2).

Two years later, a movie promoting anti-anti-Semitism, *Gentleman's Agreement*, won the Academy Award for best motion picture, and another, *Crossfire*, had been nominated as well. Both are conspicuously progressive, forward-looking narratives. In the final dialogue of *Gentleman's Agreement*, the film's future-oriented, utopian theme could not be more clear. "Wouldn't it be wonderful," Mrs. Green asks Phil, "if it turned out to be everybody's century, when people all over the world, free people, found a way to live together? I'd like to be around to see some of that, even a beginning." (quoted in Short, 1981: 180).

As they had immediately before and during the war, "Jews" held symbolic pride of place in these popular culture narratives because their persecution had been preeminently associated with the Nazi evil. In fact it was not tolerance as such that the progressive narrative demanded but tolerance of the Jews. Thus, despite their feelings of solidarity with their foreign coreligionists, Jewish leaders carefully refrained from publicly endorsing the wholesale lifting of anti-immigration quotas after 1945. They realized that the idea of immigration remained so polluted by association with stigmatized others that it might have the power to counteract the ongoing purification of Jewishness. In the preceding half century, antiimmigration and anti-Semitism had been closely linked, and Jews did not want to pollute "Jewishness" with this identity again. While demonstrating their support in private, Jewish leaders resolutely refused to make any public pronouncements against lifting the immigration quotas (Dinnerstein, 1981–82: 140).

What Dinnerstein has called the "turnabout in anti-Semitic feelings" represented the triumph over Nazism, not recognition of the Holocaust trauma. News about the mass murder, and any ruminations about it, disappeared from newspapers and magazines rather quickly after the initial reports about the camps' liberation, and the Nazis' Jewish victims came to be represented as displaced persons, potential immigrants, and potential settlers in Palestine, where a majority of Americans wanted to see a new, and redemptive, Jewish state. This interpretation suggests that it was by no means simply realpolitik that led President Truman to champion, against his former French and British allies, the postwar creation of Israel, the new Jewish state. The progressive narrative demanded a future-oriented renewal. Zionists argued that the Jewish trauma could be redeemed, that Jews could both sanctify the victims and put the trauma behind them, only if they returned to Jerusalem. According to the Zionist worldview, if Israel were allowed to exist, it would create a new race of confident and powerful Jewish farmer-warriors who would redeem the anti-Jewish atrocities by developing such an imposing military power that the massive murdering of the Jews would never, anywhere in the world, be allowed to happen again. In important respects, it was this convergence of progressive narratives in relation to the war and the Jewish mass killings that led the postwar paths of the United States and the state of Israel to become so fundamentally intertwined. Israel would have to prosper and survive for the redemptive telos of America's progressive narrative to be maintained.

These cultural-sociological considerations do not suggest that the postwar American fight against anti-Semitism was in any way morally inauthentic. It was triggered by grassroots feelings as deep as those that had motivated the earlier anti-Nazi fight. When one looks at these powerful new arguments against anti-Semitism, it is only retrospectively surprising to realize that the "atrocit-
ties" revealed in 1945—the events and experiences that defined the trauma for European Jews—figure hardly at all. This absence is explained by the powerful symbolic logic of the progressive narrative, which already had been established in the prewar period. With the victory in 1945, the United States got down to the work of establishing the new world order. In creating a Nazi-free future, Jewishness came for the first time to be analogically connected with core American symbols of "democracy" and "nation."

In the course of this postwar transformation, American Jews also became identified with democracy in a more primordial and less universalistic way, namely as newly minted, patriotic representations of the nation. "After 1945," a leading historian of that period remarks, "other Americans no longer viewed the Jews as merely another of the many exotic groups within America's ethnic and religious mosaic. Instead, they were now seen as comprising one of the country's three major religions" (Shapiro, 1992: 28). This patriotic-national definition was expressed by the Jewish theologian Will Herberg's insistence on the "Judeo-Christian" rather than "Christian" identity of the religious heritage of the United States (53). As I have indicated, what motivated this intense identification of anti-Semitism with the American nation was neither simple emotional revulsion for the horrors of the Jewish mass killings nor common-sense morality. It was, rather, the progressive narrative frame. To end anti-Semitism, in President Truman's words, was to place America alongside "the moral forces of the world" (quoted in Shapiro, 1992: 143). It was to redeem those who had sacrificed themselves for the American nation, and, according to the teleology of the progressive narrative, this emphatically included the masses of murdered European Jews.

The critical point is this: What was a trauma for the victims was not a trauma for the audience. In documenting this for the American case, I have examined the principal carrier group for the progressive narrative, the nation that in the immediate postwar world most conspicuously took the lead in "building the new world upon the ashes of the old." I have shown that the social agents, both Jewish and non-Jewish Americans, who took the lead in reconstructing a new moral order, dedicated themselves to redeeming those who had been sacrificed to the anti-Nazi struggle, and most especially to the Jewish victims, by putting an end to anti-Semitism in the United States. The goal was focused not on the Holocaust but on the need to purge postwar society of Nazi-like pollution.

JEWISH MASS MURDER UNDER THE TRAGIC NARRATIVE

I will now show how a different kind of narrative developed in relation to the Nazis' mass murder of the Jews, one that gave the evil it represented significantly greater symbolic weight. I will treat this new culture structure both as cause and effect. After reconstructing its internal contours, I will examine the kind of "symbolic action" it caused and how these new meanings compelled the trauma of the mass murders to be seen in a radically different way, with significant consequences for social and political action that continue to ramify to the present day. After completing this analytic reconstruction of the new cultural configuration, I will proceed to a concrete examination of how it was constructed in real historical time, looking at changes in carrier groups, moral contexts, and social structural forces. Finally, I will examine some of the long-term ramifications of the highly general, decontextualized, and universal status that the trauma of the Holocaust came to assume.

The New Culture Structure

Ever since Dilthey defined the method specific to the Geisteswissenschaften—literally "sciences of the spirit" but typically translated as "human sciences"—it has been clear that what distinguishes the hermeneutic from the natural scientific method is the challenge of penetrating beyond the external form to inner meaning of actions, events, and institutions. Yet to enter into this thicker of subjectivity is not to embrace impressionism and relativism. As Dilthey emphasized, meanings are governed by structures just as surely as economic and political processes; they are just governed in different ways. Every effort at interpretive social science must begin with the reconstruction of this culture structure.

Deepening Evil

In the formation of this new culture structure, the coding of the Jewish mass killings as evil remained, but its weighting substantially changed. It became burdened with extraordinary gravitas. The symbolization of the Jewish mass killings became generalized and reified, and in the process the evil done to the Jews became separated from the profanation of Nazism per se. Rather than seeming to "typify" Nazism, or even the nefarious machinations of any particular social movement, political formation, or historical time, the mass killings came to be seen as not being typical of anything at all. They came to be understood as a unique, historically unprecedented event, as evil on a scale that had never occurred before. The mass killings entered into universal history, becoming a "world-historical" event in Hegel's original sense, an event whose emergence onto the world stage threatened, or promised, to change the fundamental course of the world. In the introduction to an English collection of his essays on Nazi history and the Holocaust, the German-Israeli historian Dan Diner observes that "well into the 1970s, wide-ranging portraits of the epoch would grant the Holocaust a modest (if any) mention." By contrast, "it now tends to fill the entire picture. . . . The growing centrality of the Holocaust has altered the entire warp and woof of our sense of the passing century. . . . The incriminated event has thus become the epoch's marker, its final and inescapable wellspring" (Diner, 2000: 1).
The Jewish mass killings became what we might identify, in Durkheimian terms, as a sacred-evil, an evil that recalled a trauma of such enormity and horror that it had to be radically set apart from the world and all of its other traumatizing events. It became inexplicable in ordinary, rational terms. As part of the Nazi scheme of world domination, the Jewish mass killing was heinous, but at least it had been understandable. As a sacred-evil, set apart from ordinary evil things, it had become mysterious and inexplicable. One of the first to comment on, and thus to characterize, this postprogressive inexplicability was the Marxist historian Isaac Deutscher. This great biographer of Trotsky, who had already faced the consequences of Stalinism for the myth of communist progress, was no doubt already conditioned to see the tragic dimensions of the Holocaust. In 1968, in "The Jewish Tragedy and the Historian," Deutscher suggested that comprehending the Holocaust "will not be just a matter of time." He meant that there would not be progress in this regard.

I doubt whether even in a thousand years people will understand Hitler, Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Treblinka better than we do now. Will they have a better historical perspective? On the contrary, posterity may even understand it all even less than we do. Who can analyze the motives and the interests behind the enormities of Auschwitz? . . . We are confronted here by a huge and ominous mystery of the generation of the human character that will forever baffle and terrify mankind. (Deutscher, 1968: 163)

For Deutscher, such a huge and mysterious evil, so resistant to the normal progress of human rationality, suggested tragedy and art, not scientific fact-gathering. "Perhaps a modern Aeschylus and Sophocles could cope with this theme," he suggested, "but they would do so on a level different from that of historical interpretation and explanation" (Deutscher, 1968: 164). Geoffrey Hartman, the literary theorist who has directed Yale University's Video Archive for the Holocaust since 1981 and has been a major participant in post sixties discussions of the trauma, points to the enigma that, while no historical event has ever "been so thoroughly documented and studied," social and moral "understanding comes and goes; it has not been progressive." By way of explaining this lack of progress, Hartman acknowledges that

The scholars most deeply involved often admit an "excess" that remains dark and frightful. . . . Something in the . . . Shoah remains dark at the heart of the event. . . . A comparison with the French Revolution is useful. The sequence French Revolution: Enlightenment cannot be matched by Holocaust: Enlightenment. What should be placed after the colon? "Eclipse of Enlightenment" or "Eclipse of God"? (Hartman, 1996: 3-4)

To this day the Holocaust is almost never referred to without asserting its inexplicability. In the spring of 1999, a New York Times theater reviewer began his remarks on *The Gathering*, a newly opened drama, by asserting that "the profound, agonizing mystery of the Holocaust echoes through the generations and across international borders," presenting "an awesome human and theological enigma as an old century prepares to give way to a new millennium" (van Gelder, 1999: 1).

This separateness of sacred-evil demanded that the trauma be renamed, for the concept of "mass murder" and even the notion of "genocide" now appeared unacceptably to normalize the trauma, to place it too closely in proximity to the banal and mundane. In contrast, despite the fact that the word "Holocaust" did have a formally established English meaning—according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "something wholly burnt up" (Garber & Zuckerma, 1989: 199)—it no longer performed this sign function in everyday speech. Rather the term entered into ordinary English usage, in the early 1960s, as a proper rather than a common noun.42 Only several years after the Nazis' mass murder did Israelis begin to employ the Hebrew word *shoah*, the term by which the Torah evoked the kind of extraordinary sufferings God had periodically consigned to the Jews. In the official English translation of the phrase "Nazi *shoah*" in the preamble to the 1948 Israeli Declaration of Independence, one can already find the reference to "Nazi *holocaust*"(Novick, 1999: 132). With the decline of the progressive narrative, in other words, as "Holocaust" became the dominant representation for the trauma, it implied the sacral mystery, the "awe-fullness," of the transcendent tradition. "Holocaust" became part of contemporary language as an English symbol that stood for that thing that could not be named.43 As David Roskies once wrote, "it was precisely the nonreferential quality of *Holocaust* that made it so appealing" (quoted in Garber & Zuckerma, 1989: 201).

This new linguistic identity allowed the mass killings of the Jews to become what might be called a bridge metaphor: it provided the symbolic extension so necessary if the trauma of the Jewish people were to become a trauma for all humankind. The other necessary ingredient, psychological identification, was not far behind. It depended on configuring this newly weighted symbolization of evil in a different narrative frame.

Suffering, Catharsis, and Identification

The darkness of this new postwar symbolization of evil cast a shadow over the progressive story that had thus far narrated its course. The story of redeeming Nazism's victims by creating a progressive and democratic world order could be called an ascending narrative, for it pointed to the future and suggested confidence that things would be better over time. Insofar as the mass killings were defined as a Holocaust, and insofar as it was the very emergence of this sacred-evil, not its eventual defeat, that threatened to become emblematic of "our time,"44 the progressive narrative was blocked, and in some manner overwhelmed, by a sense of historical descent, by a falling away from the good. Re-
cent Holocaust commentators have drawn this conclusion time and again. According to the progressive narrative, the Nazis' mass murder of the Jews would provide a lesson for all humankind, a decisive learning process on the way to a better world. Reflecting on the continuing fact of genocidal mass murders in the post-Holocaust world, Hartman revealingly suggests that "these developments raise questions about our species, our preconceptions that we are the human, the 'family of man.' Or less dramatically, we wonder about the veneer of progress, culture, and educability."

In dramaturgical terms, the issue concerns the position occupied by evil in the historical narrative. When Aristotle first defined tragedy in the Poetics, he linked what I have here called the weight of the representation of suffering to temporal location of an event in plot:

Tragedy is the representation of a complete, i.e., whole action which has some magnitude (for there can be a whole action without magnitude). A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle and a conclusion. A beginning is that which itself does not of necessity follow something else, but after which there naturally is, or comes into being, something else. A conclusion, conversely, is that which itself naturally follows something else, either of necessity or for the most part, but has nothing else after it. A middle is that which itself naturally follows something else, and has something else after it. Well-constructed plots, then, should neither begin from a random point nor conclude at a random point, but should use the elements we have mentioned [i.e., beginning, middle and conclusion]. (Aristotle, 1987: 3.2.1, italics added)

In the progressive narrative frame, the Jewish mass killings were not an end but a beginning. They were part of the massive trauma of World War II, but in the postwar period they and related incidents of Nazi horror were regarded as a birth trauma, a crossroads in a chronology that would eventually be set right. By contrast, the newly emerging world-historical status of the mass murders suggested that they represented an end point, not a new beginning, a death trauma rather than a trauma of birth, a cause for despair, not the beginning of hope. In place of the progressive story, then, there began to emerge the narrative of tragedy. The end point of a narrative defines its telos. In the new tragic understanding of the Jewish mass murder, suffering, not progress, became the telos toward which the narrative was aimed.

In this tragic narrative of sacred-evil, the Jewish mass killings become not an event in history but an archetype, an event out-of-time. As archetype, the evil evoked an experience of trauma greater than anything that could be defined by religion, race, class, region—indeed, by any conceivable sociological configuration or historical conjuncture. This transcendental status, this separation from the specifics of any particular time or space, provided the basis for psychological identification on an unprecedented scale. The contemporary audience cares little about the second and third installments of Sophocles' archetypal story of Oedipus, the tragic hero. What we are obsessed with is Oedipus's awful, unrecognized, and irredeemable mistake, how he finally comes to recognize his responsibility for it, and how he blinds himself from guilt when he understands its full meaning. Tragic narratives focus attention on some future effort at reversal or amelioration—"progress," in the terms I have employed here—but on the nature of the crime, its immediate aftermath, and on the motives and relationships that led up to it.

A tragic narrative offers no redemption in the traditionally religious, Judeo-Christian sense. There is no happy ending, no sense that something else could have been done, and no belief that the future could, or can, necessarily be changed. Indeed, protagonists are tragic precisely because they have failed to exert control over events. They are in the grip of forces larger than themselves—impersonal, even inhuman forces that often are not only beyond control but, during the tragic action itself, beyond comprehension. This sense of being overwhelmed by unjust force or fate explains the abjection and helplessness that permeates the genre of tragedy and the experience of pity it arouses.

Instead of redemption through progress, the tragic narrative offers what Nietzsche called the drama of the eternal return. As it now came to be understood, there was no "getting beyond" the story of the Holocaust. There was only the possibility of returning to it: not transcendence but catharsis. Hartman resists "the call for closure" on just these grounds. "Wherever we look, the events of 1933–1945 cannot be relegated to the past. They are not over; anyone who comes in contact with them is gripped, and finds detachment difficult." Quoting from Lawrence Langer's book Admitting the Holocaust, Hartman suggests that "those who study it must 'reverse history and progress and find a way of restoring to the imagination of coming generations the depth of the catastrophe'" (Hartman, 1996: 2, 5).

As Aristotle explained, catharsis clarifies feeling and emotion. It does so not by allowing the audience to separate itself from the story's characters, a separation, according to Frye, that defines the very essence of comedy (Frye, 1971 [1957]). Rather, catharsis clarifies feeling and emotion by forcing the audience to identify with the story's characters, compelling them to experience their suffering with them and to learn, as often they did not, the true causes of their death. That we survive and they do not, that we can get up and leave the theater while they remain forever prostrate—this allows the possibility of catharsis, that strange combination of cleansing and relief, that humbling feeling of having been exposed to the dark and sinister forces that lie just beneath the surface of human life and of having survived. We seek catharsis because our identification with the tragic narrative compels us to experience dark and sinister forces that are also inside of ourselves, not only inside others. We "redeem" tragedy by experiencing it, but, despite this redemption, we do not get over it. Rather, to achieve redemption we are compelled to dramatize and redramatize, experience
and reexperience the archetypal trauma. We pity the victims of the trauma, identifying and sympathizing with their horrible fate. Aristotle argued that the tragic genre could be utilized only for the “sorts of occurrence [that] arouse dread, or compassion in us” (Aristotle, 1987: 4.1.2). The blackness of tragedy can be achieved only if, “first and foremost, the [suffering] characters should be good,” for “the plot should be constructed in such a way that, even without seeing it, someone who hears about the incidents will shudder and feel pity at the outcome, as someone may feel upon hearing the plot of the Oedipus” (Aristotle, 1987: 4.2.1, 4.1.1.3). It is not only the fact of identification, however, but its complexity that makes the experience of trauma as tragedy so central to the assumption of moral responsibility, for we identify not only with the victims but with the perpetrators as well. The creation of this cultural form allows the psychological activity of internalization rather than projection, acceptance rather than displacement.47

_The Trauma Drama of Eternal Return_

In the tragic narration of the Holocaust, the primal event became a “trauma drama” that the “audience” returned to time and time again. This became, paradoxically, the only way to ensure that such an event would happen “never again.” This quality of compulsively returning to the trauma drama gave the story of the Holocaust a mythical status that transformed it into the archetypal sacred-evil of our time. Insofar as it achieved this status as a dominant myth, the tragedy of the Holocaust challenged the ethical self-identification, the self-esteem, of modernity—indeed, the very self-confidence that such a thing as “modern progress” could continue to exist. For to return to the trauma drama of the Holocaust, to identify over and over again with the suffering and helplessness of its victims, was in some sense to give that confidence-shattering event a continuing existence in contemporary life. It was, in effect, to acknowledge that it could happen again.

In this way, the tragic framing of the Holocaust fundamentally contributed to postmodern relativism and disquiet. Because the tragic replaced the progressive narrative of the Nazi mass murder, the ethical standards protecting good from evil seemed not nearly as powerful as modernity’s confident pronouncements had promised they would be. When the progressive narrative had organized understanding, the Nazi crimes had been temporalized as “medieval,” in order to contrast them with the supposedly civilizing standards of modernity. With the emergence of the more tragic perspective, the barbarism was lodged within the essential nature of modernity itself.48 Rather than maintaining and perfecting modernity, as the postwar progressive narrative would have it, the path to a more just and peaceful society seemed now to lead to postmodern life (Bauman, 1989).49

It would be wrong, however, to imagine that because a trauma drama lies at

the center of the Holocaust’s tragic narration, with all the ambition of exciting pity and emotional catharsis that this implies, that this lachrymose narrative and symbol actually became disconnected from the ethical and the good.50 While it is undeniable that the Jewish mass killings came to assume a dramaturgical form, their significance hardly became aestheticized, that is, turned into a free-floating, amoral symbol whose function was to entertain rather than to instruct.51 The events of the Holocaust were not dramatized for the sake of drama itself but rather to provide what Martha Nussbaum once described as “the social benefits of pity” (Nussbaum, 1992).52 The project of renaming, dramatizing, reifying, and ritualizing the Holocaust contributed to a moral remaking of the (post)modern (Western) world. The Holocaust story has been told and retold in response not only to an emotional need but a moral ambition. Its characters, its plot, and its pitiful denouement have been transformed into a less nationally bound, less temporally specific, and more universal drama. This dramatic universalization has deepened contemporary sensitivity to social evil. The trauma drama’s message, like that of every tragedy, is that evil is inside all of us, and in every society. If we are all the victims, and all the perpetrators, then there is no audience that can legitimately distance itself from collective suffering, either from its victims or its perpetrators.

This psychological identification with the Jewish mass killings and the symbolic extension of its moral implications beyond the immediate parties involved has stimulated an unprecedented universalization of political and moral responsibility. To have created this symbol of sacred-evil in contemporary time, then, is to have so enlarged the human imagination that it is capable, for the first time in human history, of identifying, understanding, and judging the kinds of genocidal mass killings in which national, ethnic, and ideological groupings continue to engage today.53 This enlargement has made it possible to comprehend that heinous prejudice with the intent to commit mass murder is not something from an earlier, more “primitive” time or a different, “foreign” place, committed by people with values we do not share. The implication of the tragic narrative is not that progress has become impossible. It has had the salutary effect, rather, of demonstrating that progress is much more difficult to achieve than moderns once believed. If progress is to be made, morality must be universalized beyond any particular time and place.54

_The New Social Processes_

Most Western people today would readily agree with the proposition that the Holocaust was a tragic, devastating event in human history. Surely it was, and is. One implication of my discussion thus far, however, is that this perception of its moral status is not a natural reflection of the event itself. The Jewish mass killings first had to be dramatized—as a tragedy. Some of the most eloquent and influential Holocaust survivors and interpreters have disagreed sharply, and
moralistically, with this perspective, insisting on that fictional representations must not be allowed to influence the perception of historical reality. In 1978, Elie Wiesel excoriated NBC for producing the Holocaust miniseries, complaining that "it transforms an ontological event into soap-opera" and that "it is all make-believe." Because "the Holocaust transcends history," Wiesel argued, "it cannot be explained nor can it be visualized" (Wiesel, 1978: 1). In response to Schindler's List, Claude Lanzman said much the same thing. Writing that the Holocaust "is above all unique in that it erects a ring of fire around itself," he claimed that "fiction is a transgression" and that "there are some things that cannot and should not be represented" (quoted in Hartman, 1996: 84). 55

I am obviously taking a very different perspective here. Thus far I have reconstructed the internal patterning of the culture structure that allowed the new, tragic dramatization to take place. I would like now to turn to the historically specific social processes, both symbolic and social structural, that made this new patterning attractive and, eventually, compelling. While my reference here is primarily to the United States, I believe some version of this analysis also applies to those other Western societies that attempted to reconstruct liberal democracies after World War II. 56

I have earlier shown how the struggle against anti-Semitism became one of the primary vehicles by which the progressive narrative redeemed those who had been sacrificed in the war against Nazi evil. Fighting anti-Semitism was not the only path to redemption, of course; for America and its victorious allies, there was a whole new world to make. At the same time, the struggle against anti-Semitism had a special importance. The understanding of Nazism as an absolute evil stemmed not only from its general commitment to anticivil domination but also from its effort to legitimate such violence according to the principles of prejudice and primordiality. Because the Jewish people were by far the most conspicuous primordial target, symbolic logic dictated that to be anti-Nazi was to be anti-Semitic. 57

As I have suggested earlier, the rhetorics and policies of this anti-Semitic did not require that non-Jewish Americans positively identify with Jews, any more than the role that the Holocaust played in the postwar progressive narrative depended on a sense of identification with the weary and bedraggled survivors in the concentration camps themselves. To narrate the Holocaust in a tragic manner, however, did depend on just such an identification being made. This identification was a long time in coming, and it depended on a number of factors unrelated to public opinion and cultural change. 58 Nonetheless, it certainly depended, in addition to such social structural factors, on the fact that the cultural idiom and the organizational apparatus of anti-Semitism had, indeed, been attacked and destroyed in the early "progressive" postwar years, and that, for the first time in American history, Jews seemed, to a majority of Christian Americans, not that much different from anybody else.

As this tragic narrative crystallized, the Holocaust drama became, for an increasing number of Americans, and for significant proportions of Europeans as well, the most widely understood and emotionally compelling trauma of the twentieth century. These barthecic events, once experienced as traumatic only by Jewish victims, became generalized and universalized. Their representation no longer referred to events that took place at a particular time and place but to a trauma that had become emblematic, and iconic, of human suffering as such. The horrific trauma of the Jews became the trauma of all humankind. 59

The Production of New Social Dramas

How was this more generalized and universalized status achieved? Social narratives are not composed by some hidden hand of history. Nor do they appear all at once. The new trauma drama emerged in bits and pieces. It was a matter of this story and that, this scene and that scene from this movie and that book, this television episode and that theater performance, this photographic capturing of a moment of torture and suffering. Each of these glimpses into what Meyer Levin had called, in April 1945, "the very crawling inside of the vicious heart" contributed some element to the construction of this new sensibility, which highlighted suffering, helplessness, and dark inevitability and which, taken together and over time, reformulated the mass killing of the Jews as the most tragic event in Western history. It is not the purpose of this discussion to provide anything approaching a thick description of this process of symbolic reconstruction but only to identify the signposts along this new route and the changing "countryside" that surrounded it.

Personalizing the Trauma and Its Victims

In the course of constructing and broadcasting the tragic narrative of the Holocaust, there were a handful of actual dramatizations—in books, movies, plays, and television shows—that played critically important roles. Initially formulated for an American audience, they were distributed worldwide, seen by tens and possibly hundreds of millions of persons, and talked incessantly about by high-, middle-, and lowbrow audiences alike. In the present context, what seems most important about these dramas is that they achieved their effect by personalizing the trauma and its characters. This personalization brought the trauma drama "back home." Rather than depicting the events on a vast historical scale, rather than focusing on larger-than-life leaders, mass movements, organizations, crowds, and ideologies, these dramas portrayed the events in terms of small groups, families and friends, parents and children, brothers and sisters. In this way, the victims of trauma became everyman and everywoman, every child and every parent.

The prototype of this personalizing genre was Anne Frank's famous Diary. First published in Holland in 1947, 60 the edited journals appeared in English
in 1952. They became the basis for a Pulitzer Prize–winning Broadway play in 1955 and in 1959 a highly acclaimed and equally popular but immensely more widely influential Hollywood movie. This collective representation began in Europe as the journal recorded by a young Dutch girl in hiding from the Nazis and evolved, via a phase of Americanization, into a universal symbol of suffering and transcendence. This transmogrification was possible, in the first place, precisely because Anne’s daily jottings focused less on the external events of war and Holocaust—from which she was very much shut off—than on her inner psychological turmoil and the human relationships of those who shared her confinement. Anne’s father, Otto Frank, the only family member surviving the camps, supervised the publications and dramatizations of his daughter’s journals, and he perceived very clearly the relation between Anne’s personal focus and the Diary’s potentially universalizing appeal. Writing to Meyer Shapiro, a potential dramatist who insisted, by contrast, on the specifically Jewish quality of the reminiscence, Otto Frank replied that “as to the Jewish side you are right that I do not feel the same you do. . . . I always said, that Anne’s book is not a war book. War is the background. It is not a Jewish book either, though [a] Jewish sphere, sentiment and surrounding is the background. . . . It is read and understood more by gentiles than in Jewish circles. So do not make a Jewish play out of it” (quoted in Doneson, 1987: 152).61 When dramatists for the Diary were finally chosen—Francis Goodrich and Albert Hackett—Frank criticized their initial drafts on similar grounds.

Having read thousands of reviews and hundreds of personal letters about Anne’s book from different countries in the world, I know what creates the impression of it on people and their impressions ought to be conveyed by the play to the public. Young people identify themselves very frequently with Anne in their struggle during puberty and the problems of the relations [between] mother-daughter are existing all over the world. These and the love affair with Peter attract young people, whereas parents, teachers, and psychologists learn about the inner feelings of the young generation. When I talked to Mrs. [Eleanor] Roosevelt about the book, she urged me to give permission [for] the play and film as only then we could reach the masses and influence them by the mission of the book which she saw in Anne’s wish to work for mankind, to achieve something valuable still after her death, her horror against war and discrimination. (quoted in Doneson, 1987: 153)

This impulse to facilitate identification and moral extension prompted the dramatists to translate into English the Diary’s pivotal Hanukkah song, which was sung, and printed, in the original Hebrew in the earlier book version. They explained their reasoning in a letter to Frank. To have left the song in its original Hebrew, they wrote,

would set the characters in the play apart from the people watching them . . . for the majority of our audience is not Jewish. And the thing that we have striven for, toiled for, fought for throughout the whole play is to make the audience understand and identify themselves . . . to make them one with them . . . that will make them feel “that, but for the grace of God, might have been I.” (quoted in Doneson, 1987: 154)

Frank agreed, affirming that it “was my point of view to try to bring Anne’s message to as many people as possible even if there are some who think it a sacrilege” from a religious point of view (quoted in Doneson, 1987: 154). Years later, after the unprecedented success of both the theatre and screen plays, the dramatists continued to justify their decision to abandon Hebrew in the dramaturgic terms of facilitating psychological identification and symbolic extension.

What we all of us hoped, and prayed for, and what we are devoutly thankful to have achieved, is an identification of the audience with the people in hiding. They are seen, not as some strange people, but persons like themselves, thrown into this horrible situation. With them they suffer the deprivations, the terrors, the moments of tenderness, of exaltation and courage beyond belief. (quoted in Doneson, 1987: 155)

In the course of the 1960s, Anne Frank’s tragic story laid the basis for psychological identification and symbolic extension on a mass scale. In 1995, the director of Jewish Studies at Indiana University reported that

The Diary of a Young Girl is . . . widely read in American schools, and American youngsters regularly see the stage and film versions as well. Their teachers encourage them to identify with Anne Frank and to write stories, essays, and poems about her. Some even see her as a kind of saint and pray to her. During their early adolescent years, many American girls view her story as their story, her fate as somehow bound up with their fate. (Rosenfeld, 1995: 37)

The symbolic transformation effected by Anne Frank’s Diary established the dramatic parameters and the stage for the rush of books, television shows, and movies that in the decades following crystallized the mass murder of the Jews as the central episode in a tragic rather than progressive social narrative. As this new genre became institutionalized, representation of Nazism and World War II focused less and less on the historical actors who had once been considered central. In 1955 the acclaimed Billy Wilder movie Stalag 17 had portrayed the grueling plight of U.S. soldiers in a German prisoner-of-war camp. It never mentioned the Jews (Shapiro, 1992: 4). In the early 1960s, a widely popular
evening television show, *Hogan's Heroes* also portrayed American soldiers in a Nazi prison. It didn't mention "Jews" either. Indeed, the prison camp functioned as a site for comedy, lampooning the misadventures arising from the casual intermixing of Americans with Nazi camp guards and often portraying the latter as bemusing, well-intended buffoons. By the late 1960s, neither comedy nor romance were genres that audiences felt comfortable applying to that earlier historical time. Nor was it possible to leave out of any dramatization what by then were acknowledged to be the period's central historical actor, the concentration camp Jews.62

This transition was solidified in Western popular culture by the miniseries *Holocaust*, the stark family drama that unfolded over successive evening nights to a massive American audience in April 1978. This four-part, nine-and-a-half-hour drama, watched by nearly one hundred million Americans, personalized the grisly and famous landmarks of the Third Reich, following ten years in the lives of two fictional families, one assimilated Jews, the other that of a high-ranking SS official.

This extraordinary public attention was repeated, to even greater cathartic effect, when the pathetic drama was later broadcast to recordbreaking television audiences in Germany.63 German critics, commentators, and large sections of the public at large were transfixed by what German commentators described as "the most controversial series of all times" and "as the series that moved the world." During and after this German broadcast, which was preceded by careful public preparation and accompanied by extensive private and public discussion, German social scientists conducted polls and interviews to trace its remarkable effects. They discovered that the resulting shift in public opinion had put a stop to a burgeoning "Hitler revival" and quelled longstanding partisan demands for "balance" in the presentation of the Jewish mass murder. In the wake of the drama, neutralizing terms like "the Final Solution" gave way in German popular and academic discussion to the English term *Holocaust*, and the German Reichstag removed the statute of limitations on Nazis who had participated in what were now defined not as war crimes but as crimes against humanity. The trauma drama thus continued to work its universalizing effects.64

**Enlarging the Circle of Perpetrators**

Corresponding to the personalization that expanded identification with the victims of the tragedy, a new understanding developed of the perpetrators of the Holocaust that removed them from their historically specific particularities and made them into universal figures with whom members of widely diverse groups felt capable not of sympathizing but of identifying. The critical event initiating this reconsideration was undoubtedly the 1961 trial of Adolph Eichmann in Jerusalem. Here was a personal and singular representation of the Nazis' murders brought back into the present from the abstract mists of historical time, compelled to "face the music" after being captured by Israeli security forces in a daring extralegal mission right out of a spy novel or science fiction book. The trial received extraordinary press coverage in the United States. That summer, Gallup conducted a series of in-depth interviews with five hundred randomly selected residents of Oakland, California, and found that 84 percent of those sampled met the minimum criterion for awareness of this faraway event, a striking statistic, given American indifference to foreign affairs (Lipstadt, 1996: 212, n. 54). At least seven books were published about Eichmann and his trial in the following year (196).

The first legal confrontation with the Holocaust since Nuremberg, the trial was staged by Israel not to generalize away from the originating events but to get back to them. As Prime Minister Ben-Gurion put it, the trial would give "the generation that was born and educated after the Holocaust in Israel ... an opportunity to get acquainted with the details of this tragedy about which they knew so little" (Braun, 1994: 183). The lessons were to be drawn from, and directed to, particular places and particular peoples, to Germany, the Nazis, Israel, and the Jews—in Ben-Gurion's words, to "the dimensions of the tragedy which our people experienced" (Lipstadt, 1996: 213, italics added). By the time it was over, however, the Eichmann trial paradoxically had initiated a massive universalization of Nazi evil, best captured by Hannah Arendt's enormously controversial insistence that the trial compelled recognition of the "banality of evil." This framing of Nazi guilt became highly influential, even as it was sharply and bitterly disputed by Jews and non-Jews alike. For as a banally evil person, Eichmann could be "everyman." Arendt herself had always wanted to make just such a point. In her earliest reaction to the Nazi murderers, the philosopher had expressed horror and astonishment at the Nazis' absolute inhumanity. For this she was rebuked by her mentor and friend Karl Jaspers, who cautioned against making the Nazis into "monsters" and "supermen." To do so, Jaspers warned, would merely confirm the Nazis in their grandiose Nietzschean fantasies and relieve others of responsibility as well.65 Because of Arendt's singular influence, the antagonists in the trauma began to seem not so different from anybody else.66 The trial and its aftermath eventually became framed in a manner that narrowed the once great distance between postwar democratic audience and evil Nazis, connecting them rather than isolating them from one another. This connection between audience and antagonist intensified the trauma's tragic dramaturgy.

During this same period, other forces also had the effect of widening the circle of "perpetrators." Most spectacularly, there was Stanley Milgram's experiment demonstrating that ordinary, well-educated college students would "just follow the orders" of professional authority, even to the point of gravely endangering the lives of innocent people. These findings raised profoundly troubling questions about the "good nature" of all human beings and the democratic capacity of any human society. Milgram appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine, and "the Milgram experiment" became part of the folklore of the 1960's. It general-
ized the capacity for radical evil, first demonstrated by the Nazis, to the American population at large, synergistically interacting with the symbolic reconstruction of perpetrators that Arendt on Eichman had begun. In one interview Milgram conducted with a volunteer after he had revealed to him the true nature of the experiment, the volunteer remarked: "As my wife said: 'You can call yourself Eichmann'" (quoted in Novick, 1999: 137).

In the decades that followed, other powerful cultural reconstructions of the perpetrators followed in this wake. In 1992, Christopher Browning published a widely discussed historical ethnography called Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland (Browning, 1992), which focused on the everyday actions and motives of Germans who were neither members of the professional military nor particularly ideological but who nonetheless carried out systematic and murderous cleansings of the Jews. When four years later Daniel Goldhagen published Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust (Goldhagen, 1996), his aim was to shift blame back to what he described as the unprecedented and particular kind of anti-Semitism, what he called "eliminationist," of the Germans themselves. Browning's critical response to Goldhagen was based on historical evidence, but it also decried the moral particularity that Goldhagen's argument seemed to entail. Indeed, Browning connected his empirical findings about the "ordinariness" of perpetrators to the necessity for universalizing the moral implications of Nazi crimes, and in doing so he pointed all the way back to Milgram's earlier findings.

What allowed the Nazis to mobilize and harness the rest of society to the mass murder of European Jewry? Here I think that we historians need to turn to the insights of social psychology—the study of psychological reactions to social situations. . . . We must ask, what really is a human being? We must give up the comforting and distancing notions that the perpetrators of the Holocaust were fundamentally a different kind of people because they were products of a radically different culture. (Browning, 1996: A72)

In the realm of popular culture, Steven Spielberg's blockbuster movie Schindler's List must also be considered in this light. In a subtle but unmistakable manner, the movie depersonalizes the perpetrators by showing the possibilities that "even Germans" could be good.

Lossing Control of the Means of Symbolic Production

It was in this context of tragic transformation—as personalization of the drama increased identification beyond the Jewish victims themselves, and as the sense of moral culpability became fundamentally widened beyond the Nazis themselves—that the United States government, and the nation's authoritative interlocutors, lost control over the telling of the Holocaust story. When the American government and its allies defeated Nazi Germany in 1945 and seized control over strategic evidence from the death camps, they had taken control of the representation process away from the Nazis and assured that the Jewish mass murder would be presented an anti-Nazi way. In this telling of this story, naturally enough, the former Allies—America most powerfully but Britain and France as well—presented themselves as the moral protagonists, purifying themselves as heroic carriers of the good. As the 1960s unfolded, the Western democracies were forced to concede this dominant narrative position. This time around, however, control over the means of symbolic production changed hands as much for cultural reasons as by the force of arms.

In the "critical years" from the mid-1960s to the end of the 1970s, the United States experienced a sharp decline in its political, military, and moral prestige. It was during this period that, in the eyes of tens of millions of Americans and others, the domestic and international opposition to America's prosecution of the Vietnam War transformed the nation, and especially its government and armed forces, into a symbol not of salvationary good but of apocalyptic evil. This transformation was intensified by other outcroppings of "the sixties," particularly the revolutionary impulses that emerged out of the student and black power movements inside the United States and guerrilla movements outside it. These "real-world" problems caused the United States to be identified in terms that had, up until that time, been reserved exclusively for the Nazi perpetrators of the Holocaust. According to the progressive narrative, it could only be the Allies' World War II enemy who represented radical evil. As America became "Amerika," however, napalm bombs were analogized with gas pellets and the flaming jungles of Vietnam with the gas chambers. The powerful American army that claimed to be prosecuting a "good war" against Vietnamese communists—in analogy with the lessons that Western democracies had learned in their earlier struggle against Nazism—came to be identified, by influential intellectuals and a wide swath of the educated Western public, as perpetrating genocide against the helpless and pathetic inhabitants of Vietnam. Bertrand Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre established a kind of counter—"War Crimes Tribunal" to apply the logic of Nuremberg to the United States. Indefensible incidents of civilian killings, like the My Lai massacre of 1968, were represented, not as anomalous incidents, but as typifications of this new American-made tragedy.

This process of material deconstruction and symbolic inversion further contributed to the universalization of the Holocaust: It allowed the moral criteria generated by its earlier interpretation to be applied in a less nationally specific and thus less particularistic way. This inversion undermined still further the progressive narrative under which the mass killings of the Jews had early been framed. For the ability to leave the trauma drama behind, and to press ahead toward the future, depended on the material and symbolic existence of an unsullied protagonist who could provide salvation for survivors by leading them into the promised land. "Vietnam" and "the sixties" undercut the main agent of this
progressive narrative. The result was a dramatic decline in the confidence that a new world order could be constructed in opposition to violence and coercion; if the United States itself committed war crimes, what chance could there be for modern and democratic societies ever to leave mass murder safely behind?

As a result of these material and symbolic events, the contemporary representatives of the historic enemies of Nazism lost control over the means of symbolic production. The power to present itself as the purified protagonist in the worldwide struggle against evil slipped out of the hands of the American government and patriotic representatives more generally, even as the framing of the drama’s triggering trauma shifted from progress to tragedy. The ability to cast and produce the trauma drama, to compel identification and channel catharsis, spread to other nations and to antigovernment groups, and even to historic enemies of the Jewish people. The archetypical trauma drama of the twentieth century became ever more generalized and more accessible, and the criteria for moral responsibility in social relations, once closely tied to American perspectives and interests, came to be defined in a more evenhanded, more egalitarian, more self-critical, in short a more universalistic, way.

Perhaps the most visible and paradoxical effect of this loss of the American government’s control over the means of symbolic production control was that the morality of American leadership in World War II came to be questioned in a manner that established polluting analogies with Nazism. One issue that now became “troubling,” for example, was the justification for the Allied firebombings of Dresden and Tokyo. The growing climate of relativism and reconfiguration threatened to undermine the coding, weighting, and narrating that once had provided a compelling rationale for those earlier events that were in themselves so massively destructive of civilian life. In a similar manner, but with much more significant repercussions, the symbolic implications of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki began to be fundamentally reconfigured. From being conceived as stages in the unfolding of the progressive narrative, influential groups of Westerners came to understand the atomic bombings as vast human tragedies. Younger generations of Americans, in fact, were increasingly responsive to the view of these events that had once been promoted exclusively by Japan, the fascist Axis power against which their elders had waged war. The interpretation of the suffering caused by the atomic bombings became separated from the historical specifics of time and place. With this generalization, the very events that had once appeared as high points of the progressive narrative came to constructed as unjustifiable, as human tragedies, as slaughters of hundreds of thousands of innocent and pathetic human beings—in short, as typifications of the “Holocaust.”

Perhaps the most pointed example of what could happen after America lost control over the Holocaust story was the way in which its redemptive role in the narrative was challenged. Rather than being portrayed as the chief prosecutor of Nazi perpetrators—as chief prosecutor, the narrative’s protagonist along with the victims themselves—the American and the British wartime governments were accused of having at least indirect responsibility for allowing the Nazis to carry out their brutal work. A steady stream of revisionist historical scholarship emerged, beginning in the 1970s, suggesting that the anti-Semitism of Roosevelt and Churchill and of American and British citizens had prevented them from acting to block the mass killings; for they had received authenticated information about German plans and activities as early as June 1942. This analogical linkage between the Allies and the perpetrators quickly became widely accepted as historical fact.

On September 27, 1979, when the President’s Commission on the Victims of the Holocaust issued a report recommending the American establishment of a Holocaust Museum, it listed as one of its primary justifications that such a public construction would give the American nation an opportunity to compensate for its early, “disastrous” indifference to the plight of the Jews (quoted in Linenthal, 1995: 37). When the museum itself was eventually constructed, it enshrined this inversion of the progressive narrative in the exhibitions themselves. The third floor of the museum is filled with powerfully negative images of the death camps, and is attached by an internal bridge to a tower whose rooms display actual artifacts from the camps. As visitors approach this bridge, in the midst of the iconic representations of evil, they confront a photomural of an U.S. Air Force intelligence photograph of Auschwitz-Birkenau, taken on May 31, 1944. The text attached to the mural informs visitors: “Two freight trains with Hungarian Jews arrived in Birkenau that day, the large-scale gassing of these Jews was beginning. The four Birkenau crematoria are visible at the top of the photograph” (quoted in Linenthal, 1995: 217). Placed next to the photomural is what the principal ethnographer of the museum project, Edward Linenthal, has called “an artificial indictment of American indifference.” It is a letter, dated August 14, 1944, from John J. McCloy, assistant secretary of war. According to the text, McCloy “rejected a request by the World Jewish Congress to bomb the Auschwitz concentration camp.” This rejection is framed in the context not of physical impossibility, or in terms of the vicissitudes of a world war, but as the result of moral diminution. Visitors are informed that the U.S. Air Force “could have bombed Auschwitz as early as May 1944,” since U.S. bombers had “struck Buna, a synthetic-rubber works relying on slave labor, located less than five miles east of Auschwitz-Birkenau.” But despite this physical possibility, the text goes on to note, the death camp “remained untouched.” The effective alignment of Allied armies with Nazi perpetrators is more than implicit: “Although bombing Auschwitz would have killed many prisoners, it would also have halted the operation of the gas chambers and, ultimately, saved the lives of many more” (quoted in Linenthal, 1995: 217–8). This authoritative reconstruction, it is important to emphasize, is not a brute empirical fact, any more than the framework that had earlier previous sway. In fact, within the discipline of American history, the issue of Allied indifference remains subject to intensive debate (quoted in Linenthal, 1995: 217–8).
At every point in the construction of a public discourse, however, factual chronicles must be encased in symbolically coded and narrated frames. Eventually, this revision of the progressive narrative about exclusively Nazi perpetrators extended, with perhaps even more profound consequences, to other Allied powers and to the neutrals in that earlier conflict as well. As the charismatic symbol of French resistance to German occupation, Charles de Gaulle had woven a narrative, during and after the war, that purified his nation by describing his nation as first the victim and later the courageous opponent of Nazi domination and the "foreign" collaborators in Vichy. By the late 1970s and 1980s, however, a younger generation of French and non-French historians challenged this definition, seriously polluting the earlier Republican government, and even some of its postwar socialist successors, by documenting massive French collaboration with the antidemocratic, anti-Semitic regime.

In the wake of these reversals, it seemed only a matter of time until the nations who had been "neutral" during the earlier conflict would also be forced to relinquish symbolic control over how the telling of their own stories, at least in the theatre of Western opinion if not on their own national stage. Austria, for example, had long depicted itself as a helpless victim of Nazi Germany. When Kurt Waldheim ascended to the position of secretary-general of the United Nations, however, his hidden association with the Hitler regime was revealed, and the symbolic status of the Austrian nation, which rallied behind their ex-president, began to be publicly polluted as a result. Less than a decade later, Switzerland became subject to similar inversion of its symbolic fortunes. The tiny republic had prided itself on its long history of decentralized canton democracy and the benevolent, universalizing neutrality of its Red Cross. In the midnineties, journalists and historians documented that the wartime Swiss government had laundered, for example, "purified," Nazi gold. In return for gold that had been plundered from the bodies of condemned and already dead Jews, Swiss bankers gave to Nazi authorities acceptable, unmarked currency that could much more readily be used to finance the war.

This discussion of how the non-Jewish agents of the progressive narrative were undercut by "real-world" developments would be incomplete without some mention of how the Israeli government, which represented the other principal agent of the early, progressive Holocaust story, also came to be threatened with symbolic reconfiguration. The rise of Palestinian liberation movements inverted the Jewish nation's progressive myth of origin, for it suggested, at least to more liberally inclined groups, an equation between Nazi and Israeli treatment of subordinate ethnic and religious groups. The battle for cultural position was not, of course, given up without a fight. When Helmut Schmidt, chancellor of West Germany, spoke of Palestinian rights, Menachem Begin, prime minister of Israel, retorted that Schmidt, a Wehrmacht officer in World War II, had "remained faithful to Hitler until the last moment," insisting that the Palestine Liberation Organization was a "neo-Nazi organization" (quoted in Novick, 1994: 161). This symbolic inversion vis-à-vis the newly generalized and reconfigured Holocaust symbol was deepened by the not-unrelated complicity of Israel in the massacres that followed the Lebanon invasion and by the documented reports of Palestinian torture and occasional death in Israeli prisons.

THE HOLOCAUST AS BRIDGING METAPHOR

Each of the cultural transformations and social processes I have described has had the effect of universalizing the moral questions provoked by the mass killings of the Jews, of detaching the issues surrounding the systematic exercise of violence against ethnic groups from any particular ethnicity, religion, nationality, time, or place. These processes of detachment and deepening emotional identification are thoroughly intertwined. If the Holocaust were not conceived as a tragedy, it would not attract such continuous, even obsessive attention; this attention would not be rewarded, in turn, if the Holocaust were not understood in a detached and universalizing way. Symbolic extension and emotional identification both are necessary if the audience for a trauma, and its social relevance, are to be dramatically enlarged. I will call the effects of this enlargement the "engorgement of evil."

Norms provide standards for moral judgment. What is defined as evil in any historical period provides the most transcendent content for such judgments. What Kant called radical evil, and what I have called here, drawing on Durkheim, sacred-evil, refers to something considered absolutely essential to defining the good "in our time." Insofar as the "Holocaust" came to define inhumanity in our time, then, it served a fundamental moral function. "Post-Holocaust morality" could perform this role, however, only in a sociological way: it became a bridging metaphor that social groups of uneven power and legitimacy applied to parse ongoing events as good and evil in real historical time. What the "Holocaust" named as the most fundamental evil was the intentional, systematic, and organized employment of violence against members of a stigmatized collective group, whether defined in a primordial or an ideological way. Not only did this representation identify as radical evil the perpetrators and their actions but it polluted as evil nonactors as well. According to the standards of post-Holocaust morality, one became normatively required to make an effort to intervene against any Holocaust, regardless of personal consequences and cost. For as a crime against humanity, a "Holocaust" is taken to be a threat to the continuing existence of humanity itself. It is impossible, in this sense, to imagine a sacrifice that would be too great when humanity itself is at stake.

Despite the moral content of the Holocaust symbol, then, the primary, first-order effects of this sacred-evil do not work in a ratiocinative way. Radical evil is a philosophical term, and it suggests that evil's moral content can be defined and discussed rationally. Sacred-evil, by contrast, is a sociological term, and it suggests that defining radical evil, and applying it, involves motives and rela-
tionships, and institutions, that work more like those associated with religious institutions than with ethical doctrine. In order for a prohibited social action to be powerfully moralized, the symbol of this evil must become engorged. An engorged evil overflows with badness. Evil becomes labile and liquid; it drips and seeps, ruining everything it touches. Under the sign of the tragic narrative, the Holocaust became engorged, and its seepage polluted everything with which it came into contact.

Metonymy

This contact pollution established the basis for what might be called metonymic guilt. Under the progressive narrative, guilt for the genocidal mass killings depended on being directly and narrowly responsible in the legal sense worked out and applied at the Nuremberg trials. It wasn’t simply a matter of being “associated” with mass murders. In this legal framework, any notion of collective responsibility, the guilt of the Nazi party, the German government, much less the German nation was ruled as unfair, as out of bounds. But as the Holocaust became engorged with evil, and as post-Holocaust morality developed, guilt could no longer be so narrowly confined. Guilt now came from simple propriety, in semiotic terms from metonymic association.

To be guilty of sacred-evil did not mean, any more, that one had committed a legal crime. It was about the imputation of a moral one. One cannot defend oneself against an imputed moral crime by pointing to exculpatory circumstances or lack of direct involvement. The issue is one of pollution, guilt by actual association. The solution is not the rational demonstration of innocence but ritual cleansing: purification. In the face of metonymic association with evil, one must engage in performative actions, not only in ratiocinative, cognitive arguments. As the “moral conscience of Germany,” the philosopher Jürgen Habermas, put it during the now famous Historikerstreit among German historians during the 1980s, the point is to “attempt to expel shame,” not to engage in “empty phrases” (quoted in Kampe, 1987: 63). One must do justice and be righteousness. This performative purification is achieved by returning to the past, entering symbolically into the tragedy, and developing a new relation to the archetypal characters and crimes. Habermas wrote that it was “only after and through Auschwitz” that postwar Germany could once again attach itself “to the political culture of the West” (quoted in Kampe, 1987: 63). Retrospection is an effective path toward purification because it provides for catharsis, although of course it doesn’t guarantee it. The evidence for having achieved catharsis is confession. If there is neither the acknowledgment of guilt nor sincere apology, punishment in the legal sense may be prevented, but the symbolic and moral taint will always remain.

Once the trauma had been dramatized as a tragic event in human history, the engorgement of evil compelled contemporaries to return to the originating trauma drama and to rejudge every individual or collective entity who was, or might have been, even remotely involved. Many individual reputations became sullied in this way. The list of once admired figures who were “outed” as apologists for, or participants in, the anti-Jewish mass murders stretched from such philosophers as Martin Heidegger to such literary figures as Paul de Man and such political leaders as Kurt Waldheim. In the defenses mounted by these tarnished figures or their supporters, the suggestion was never advanced that the Holocaust does not incarnate evil—a self-restraint that implicitly reveals the trauma’s engorged, sacred quality. The only possible defense was that the accused had, in fact, never been associated with the trauma in any way.

More than two decades ago, the U.S. Justice Department established the Office of Special Investigation, the sole purpose of which was to track down and expel not only major but minor figures who had been associated in some manner with Holocaust crimes. Since then, the bitter denunciations of deportation hearings have echoed throughout virtually every Western country. In such proceedings, the emotional-cum-normative imperative is to assert the moral requirements for humanity. Media stories revolve around questions of the “normal,” as in how could somebody who seems like a human being, who since World War II has been an upstanding member of the (French, American, Argentinian) community, have ever been involved in what now is universally regarded as an anti-human event? Issues of legality are often overlooked, for the issue is purification of the community through expulsion of a polluted object. Frequently, those who are so polluted give up without a fight. In the spate of recent disclosures about Jewish art appropriated by Nazis and currently belonging to Western museums, directors have responded simply by asking for time to catalogue the marked holdings to make them available to be retrieved.

Analogy

The direct, metonymic association with Nazi crimes is the most overt effect of the way evil seeps from the engorged Holocaust symbol, but it is not the cultural process most often employed. The bridging metaphor works much more typically, and profoundly, through the device of analogy.

In the 1960s and 1970s, such analogical bridging powerfully contributed to a fundamental revision in moral understandings of the historical treatment of minorities inside the United States. Critics of earlier American policy, and representatives of minority groups themselves, began to suggest analogies between various minority "victims" of white American expansion and the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. This was particularly true of Native Americans, who argued that genocide had been committed against them, an idea that gained wide currency and that eventually generated massive efforts at legal repair and monetary payments. Another striking example of this domestic inversion was the dramatic reconfiguration, in the 1970s and 1980s, of the American government's
internment of Japanese-American citizens during World War II. Parallels between this action and Nazi prejudice and exclusion became widespread, and the internment camps became reconfigured as concentration camps. What followed from this symbolic transformation were not only formal governmental “apologies” to the Japanese-American people but actual monetary “repatriations.”

In the 1980s, the engorged, free-floating Holocaust symbol became analogically associated with the movement against nuclear power and nuclear testing and, more generally, with the ecological movements that emerged during that time. Politicians and intellectuals gained influence in their campaigns against the testing and deployment of nuclear weapons by telling stories about the “nuclear holocaust” that would be unleashed if their own, democratic governments continued their nuclear policies. By invoking this Holocaust-inspired narrative, they were imaging a disaster that would have such generalized, supranational effects that the historical particularities of ideological rightness and wrongness, winners and losers, would no longer matter. In a similar manner, the activists’ evocative depictions of the “nuclear winter” that would result from the nuclear holocaust gained striking support from the images of “Auschwitz,” the iconic representations of which were rapidly becoming a universal medium for expressing demented violence, abject human suffering, and “meaningless” death. In the environmental movement, claims were advanced that the industrial societies were committing ecological genocide against species of plant and animal life and that there was a danger that Earth itself would be exterminated.

In the 1990s, the evil that seeped from the engorged metaphor provided the most compelling analogical framework for framing the Balkan events. While there certainly was dispute over which historical signifier of violence would provide the “correct” analogical reference—dictatorial purge, ethnic rape, civil war, ethnic cleansing, or genocide—it was the engorged Holocaust symbol that propelled first American diplomatic and then American-European military intervention against Serbian ethnic violence. The part played by this symbolic analogy was demonstrated during the early U.S. Senate debate in 1992. Citing “atrocities” attributed to Serbian forces, Senator Joseph Lieberman told reporters that “we hear echoes of conflicts in Europe little more than fifty years ago.” During the same period, the Democratic presidential nominee, Bill Clinton, asserted that “history has shown us that you can’t allow the mass extermination of people and just sit by and watch it happen.” The candidate promised, if elected, to “begin with air power against the Serbs to try to restore the basic conditions of humanity,” employing antipathy to distance himself from the polluting passivity that had retrospectively been attributed to the Allies during the initial trauma drama itself (quoted in Congressional Quarterly, August 8, 1992: 2374). While President Bush initially proved more reluctant than candidate Clinton to put this metaphorical linkage into material form—with the resulting deaths of tens of thousands of innocents—it was the threat of just such military deployment that eventually forced Serbia to sign the Dayton Accords and to stop what were widely represented, in the American and European media, as its genocidal activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

When the Serbs threatened to enter Kosovo, the allied bombing campaign was initiated and justified by evoking the same symbolic analogies and the antipathies they implied. The military attacks were represented as responding to the widely experienced horror that the trauma drama of the Holocaust was being reenacted “before our very eyes.” Speaking to a veterans’ group at the height of the bombing campaign, President Clinton engaged in analogical bridging to explain why the current Balkan confrontation should not be understood, and thus tolerated, as “the inevitable result . . . of centuries-old animosities.” He insisted that these murderous events were unprecedented because they were a “systematic slaughter,” carried out by “people with organized, political and military power,” under the exclusive control of a ruthless dictator, Slobodan Milosevic. “You think the Germans would have perpetrated the Holocaust on their own without Hitler? Was there something in the history of the German race that made them do this? No. We’ve got to get straight about this. This is something political leaders do” (New York Times, May 14, 1999: A 12).

The same day in Germany, Joschka Fischer, foreign minister in the coalition “Red-Green” government, appeared before a special congress of his Green Party to defend the allied air campaign. He, too, insisted on that the uniqueness of Serbian evil made it possible to draw analogies with the Holocaust. Fischer’s deputy foreign minister and party ally, Ludger Volmer, drew rousing applause when, in describing President Milosevic’s systematic cleansing policy, he declared: “my friends, there is only one word for this, and that word is Fascism.” A leading opponent of the military intervention tried to block the bridging process by symbolic antipathy. “We are against drawing comparisons between the murderous Milosevic regime and the Holocaust,” he proclaimed, because “doing so would mean an unacceptable diminishment of the horror of Nazi Fascism and the genocide against European Jews.” Arguing that the Kosovars were not the Jews and Milosevic nor Hitler protected the sacred-evil of the Holocaust, but the attempted antipathy was ultimately unconvincing. About 60 percent of the Green Party delegates believed the analogies were valid and voted to support Fischer’s position.

Two weeks later, when the allied bombing campaign had not yet succeeded in bringing Milosevic to heel, President Clinton asked Elie Wiesel to make a three-day tour of the Kosovo Albanians’ refugee camps. A spokesperson for the U.S. embassy in Macedonia explained that “people have lost focus on why we are doing what we are doing” in the bombing campaign. The proper analogy, in other words, was not being consistently made. The solution was to create direct, metonymic association. “You need a person like Wiesel,” the spokesperson continued, “to keep your moral philosophy on track.” In the lead sentence of its report on the tour, the New York Times described Wiesel as “the Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner.” Despite Wiesel’s own assertion that “I don’t be-
lieve in drawing analogies," after visiting the camps analogizing was precisely the rhetoric in which he engaged. Wiesel declared that "I've learned something from my experiences as a contemporary of so many events." What he had learned was to apply the post-Holocaust morality derived from the originating trauma drama: "When evil shows its face, you don't wait, you don't let it gain strength. You must intervene" (Royle, 1999: 1).

During that tour of a camp in Macedonia, Elie Wiesel had insisted that "the world had changed fifty years after the Holocaust" and that "Washington's response in Kosovo was far better than the ambivalence it showed during the Holocaust." When, two weeks later, the air war, and the growing threat of a ground invasion, finally succeeded in expelling the Serbian forces from Kosovo, the New York Times "Week in Review" section reiterated the famous survivor's confidence that the Holocaust trauma had not been in vain, that the drama erected on its ashes had fundamentally changed the world, or at least the West. The Kosovo war had demonstrated that analogies were valid and that the lessons of post-Holocaust morality could be carried out in the most utterly practical way.

It was a signal week for the West, no doubt about it. Fifty-four years after the Holocaust revelations, America and Europe had finally said "enough," and struck a blow against a revival of genocide. Serbian ethnic cleansers were now routed; ethnic Albanians would be spared further murders and rapes. Germany was exorcising a few of its Nazi ghosts. Human rights had been elevated to a military priority and a pre-eminent Western value. (Wines, 1999: 1)

Twenty-two months later, after Western support has facilitated the electoral defeat of Milosevic and the accession to the Yugoslav presidency of the reformer Vojislav Kostunica, the former president and accused war criminal was arrested and forcibly taken to jail. While President Kostunica did not personally subscribe to the authority of the war crimes tribunal in the Hague, there was little doubt that he had authorized Milosevic's imprisonment under intensive American pressure. Though initiated by the Congress rather than the U.S. president, George W. Bush responded to the arrest by Holocaust typification. He spoke of the "chilling images of terrified women and children herded into trains, emaciated prisoners interned behind barbed wire and mass graves unearthed by United Nations investigators," all traceable to Milosevic's "brutal dictatorship" (quoted in Perlez, 2001: 6). Even among those Serbian intellectuals, like Aleksa Djilas, who criticized the Hague tribunal as essentially a political and thus particularistic court, there was recognition that the events took place within a symbolic framework that would inevitably universalize them and contribute to the possibility of a new moral order on a less particularist scale. "There will be a blessing in disguise through his trial," Djilas told a reporter on the day after Milosevic's arrest. "Some kind of new international order is being constructed, intentionally or not. . . . Something will crystallize: what kinds of nationalism are justified or not, what kinds of intervention are justified or not, how much are great powers entitled to respond, and how. It will not be a sterile exercise" (Erlanger, 2001: 8).

In the 1940s, the mass murder of the Jews had been viewed as a typification of the Nazi war machine, an identification that had limited its moral implications. Fifty years later, the Holocaust itself had displaced its historical context. It had itself become the master symbol of evil in relation to which new instances of grievous mass injury would be typified.85

Legality

As the rhetoric of this triumphant declaration indicates, the generalization of the Holocaust trauma drama has found expression in the new vocabulary of "universal human rights." In some part, this trope has simply degendered the Enlightenment commitment to "the universal rights of man" first formulated in the French Revolution. In some other part, it blurs the issue of genocide with social demands for health and basic economic subsistence. Yet from the beginning of its systemic employment in the postwar period, the phrase has also referred specifically to a new legal standard for international behavior that would simultaneously generalize and make more precise and binding what came to be regarded as the "lessons" of the Holocaust events. Representatives of various organizations, both governmental and nongovernmental, have made sporadic but persistent efforts to formulate specific, morally binding codes, and eventually international laws, to institutionalize the moral judgments triggered by metonymic and analogic association with the engorged symbol of evil. This possibility has inspired the noted legal theorist Martha Minow to suggest an unorthodox answer to the familiar question: "Will the twentieth century be most remembered for its mass atrocities?" "A century marked by human slaughter and torture, sadly, is not a unique century in human history. Perhaps more unusual than the facts of genocides and regimes of torture marking this era is the invention of new and distinctive legal forms of response" (Minow, 1998: 1).

This generalizing process began at Nuremberg in 1945, when the long-planned trial of Nazi war leaders was expanded to include the moral principle that certain heinous acts are "crimes against humanity" and must be recognized as such by everyone (Drinan, 1987: 334). In its first report on those indictments, the New York Times insisted that while "the authority of this tribunal to inflict punishment is directly derived from victory in war," it derived "indirectly from an intangible but nevertheless very real factor which might be called the dawn of a world conscience" (October 9, 1945: 20). This universalizing process continued the following year, when the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 95, committing the international body to "the principles of international law recognized by the charter of the Nuremberg Tribunal and the
judgment of the "Tribunal" (quoted in Drinan, 1987: 334). Two years later, the United Nations issued the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose opening preamble evoked the memory of "barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind." In 1950, the International Law Commission of the United Nations adopted a statement spelling out the principles that the Declaration implied: "The core of these principles states that leaders and nations can be punished for their violations of international law and for their crimes against humanity. In addition, it is not a defense for a person to state that he or she was required to do what was done because of an order from a military or civilian superior" (quoted in Drinan, 1987: 334).

In the years since, despite President Clinton's recommendation that the United States draft a code of international criminal law around these principles, despite the "human rights" foreign policy of a later Democratic president, Jimmy Carter, and despite the nineteen UN treaties and covenants condemning genocide and exalting the new mandate for human rights, new international legal codes were never drafted (Drinan, 1987: 334). Still, over the same period, an increasingly thick body of "customary law" was developed that mitigated against nonintervention in the affairs of sovereign states when they engage in systematic human rights violations.

The long-term historical significance of the rights revolution of the last fifty years is that it has begun to erode the sanctity of state sovereignty and to justify effective political and military intervention. Would there have been American intervention in Bosnia without nearly fifty years of accumulated international opinion to the effect that there are crimes against humanity and violations of human rights which must be punished wherever they arise? Would there be a safe haven for the Kurds in northern Iraq? Would we be in Kosovo? (Ignatieff, 1999: 62).88

When the former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet was arrested in Britain and detained for more than a year in response to an extradition request by a judge in Spain, the reach of this customary law and its possible enforcement by national police first became crystallized in the global public sphere. It was at about the same time that the first internationally sanctioned War Crimes Tribunal since Nuremberg began meeting in the Hague to prosecute those who had violated human rights on any and all sides of the decade's Balkan wars.

The Dilemma of Uniqueness

As the engorged symbol bridging the distance between radical evil and what at some earlier point was considered normal or normally criminal behavior, the reconstructed Holocaust trauma became enmeshed in what might be called the dilemma of uniqueness. The trauma could not function as a metaphor of archetypal tragedy unless it were regarded as radically different from any other evil act in modern times. Yet it was this very status—as a unique event—that eventually compelled it to become generalized and departicularized. For as a metaphor for radical evil, the Holocaust provided a standard of evaluation for judging the evil of other threatening acts. By providing such a standard for comparative judgment, the Holocaust became a norm, initiating a succession of metonymic, analogic, and legal evaluations that deprived it of "uniqueness" by establishing its degrees of likeness or unlikeness to other possible manifestations of evil.

In this regard, it is certainly ironic that this bridging process, so central to universalizing critical moral judgment in the post-Holocaust world, has time after time been attacked as depriving the Holocaust of its very significance. Yet these very attacks have often revealed, despite themselves, the trauma drama's new centrality in ordinary thought and action. One historically oriented critic, for example, mocked the new "Holocaust consciousness" in the United States, citing the fact that the Holocaust "is invoked as reference point in discussions of everything from AIDS to abortion" (Novick, 1994: 159). A literature professor complained about the fact that "the language of 'Holocaust'" is now "regularly invoked by people who want to draw public attention to human-rights abuses, social inequalities suffered by racial and ethnic minorities and women, environmental disasters, AIDS, and a whole host of other things" (Rosenfeld, 1995: 35). Another scholar decried the fact that "any evil that befalls anyone anywhere becomes a Holocaust" (quoted in Rosenfeld, 1995: 35).

While no doubt well-intentioned in a moral sense, such complaints miss the sociological complexities that underlie the kind of cultural-moral process I am exploring here. Evoking the Holocaust to measure the evil of a non-Holocaust event is nothing more, and nothing less, than to employ a powerful bridging metaphor to make sense of social life. The effort to qualify as the referent of this metaphor is bound to entail sharp social conflict, and in this sense social relativization, for successful metaphorical embodiment brings to a party legitimacy and resources. The premise of these relativizing social conflicts is that the Holocaust provides an absolute and nonrelative measure of evil. But the effects of the conflict are to relativize the application of this standard to any particular social event. The Holocaust is unique and not-unique at the same time. This insoluble dilemma marks the life history of the Holocaust, since it became a tragic archetypal and a central component of moral judgment in our time. Inga Clendinnen has recently described this dilemma in a particularly acute way, and her observations exemplify the metaphorical bridging process I have tried to describe here.

There have been too many recent horrors, in Rwanda, in Burundi, in one-time Yugoslavia, with victims equally innocent, killers and torturers equally devoted, to ascribe uniqueness to any one set of atrocities on the grounds of their exempl-
play cruelty. I find the near-random terror practiced by the Argentinean military, especially their penchant for torturing children before their parents, to be as horrible, as "unimaginable," as the horrible and unimaginable things done by Germans to their Jewish compatriots. Certainly the scale is different—but how much does scale matter to the individual perpetrator or the individual victim? Again, the willful obliteration of long-enduring communities is surely a vast offense, but for three years we watched the carpet-bombings of Cambodia, when the bombs fell on villagers who could not have had the least understanding of the nature of their offense. When we think of innocence afflicted, we see those unforgettable children of the Holocaust staring wide-eyed into the camera of their killers, but we also see the image of the little Vietnamese girl, naked, screaming, running down a dusty road, her back aflame with American napalm. If we grant that "holocaust," the total consumption of offerings by fire, is sinisterly appropriate for the murder of those millions who found their only graves in the air, it is equally appropriate for the victims of Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Dresden [and for] Picasso's horses and humans screaming [in Guernica] under attack from untouchable murderers in the sky. (Clendinnen, 1999: 14, italics added)

FORGETTING OR REMEMBERING?

Routinization and Institutionalization

As the sense that the Holocaust was a unique event in human history crystallized and its moral implications became paradoxically generalized, the tragic trauma drama became increasingly subject to memorialization. Special research centers were funded to investigate its most minute details and to sponsor debates about its wider applications. College courses were devoted to it, and everything, from university chairs to streets and parks, was named for it. Monuments were constructed to honor the tragedy's victims. Major urban centers in the United States, and many outside it as well, constructed vasty expensive, and vastly expansive, museums to make permanent its moral lessons. The U.S. military distributed instructions for conducting "Days of Remembrance," and commemorative ceremonies were held annually in the Capitol Rotunda.

Because of the dilemma of uniqueness, all of these generalizing processes were controversial; they suggested to many observers that the Holocaust was being instrumentalized and commodified, that its morality and affect were being displaced by specialists in profit-making on the one hand and specialists in merely cognitive expertise on the other. In recent years, indeed, the idea has grown that the charisma of the original trauma drama is being routinized in a regrettable, but predictably, Weberian way.91

The moral learning process that I have described in the preceding pages does not necessarily deny the possibility that instrumentalization develops after a trauma drama has been created and after its moral lessons have been externalized and internalized. In American history, for example, even the most sacred of the founding national traumas, the Revolution and the Civil War, have faded as objects of communal affect and collective remembering, and the dramas associated with them have become commodified as well. Still, the implications of what I have presented here suggest that such routinization, even when it takes a monetized and commodity form, does not necessarily indicate meaninglessness. Metaphorical bridging shifts symbolic significance, and audience attention, from the originating trauma to the traumas that follow in a sequence of analogical associations. But it does not, for that, inevitably erase or invert the meanings associated with the trauma that was first in the associational line. Nor does the effort to concretize the cultural meanings of the trauma in monumental forms have this effect. The American Revolution and the Civil War both remain resources for triumphant and tragic narration, in popular and high culture venues. It is only very infrequently, and very controversially, that these trauma dramas are subjected to the kind of comic framing that would invert their still sacred place in American collective identity. As I have mentioned earlier, it is not commodification, but "comedization"—a change in the cultural framing, not a change in economic status—that indicates trivialization and forgetting.

Memorials and Museums: Crystallizing Collective Sentiment

A less Weberian, more Durkheimian understanding of routinization is needed.92 When they are first created, sacred-good and sacred-evil are labile and liquid. Objectification can point to the sturdiest embodiment of the values they have created, and even of the experiences they imply. In this period, the intensifying momentum to memorialize the Holocaust indicates a deepening institutionalization of its moral lessons and the continued recalling of its dramatic experiences rather than to their routinization and forgetting. When, after years of conflict, the German parliament approved a plan for erecting a vast memorial of two thousand stone pillars to the victims of the Holocaust at the heart of Berlin, a leading politician proclaimed: "We are not building this monument solely for the Jews. We are building it for ourselves. It will help us confront a chapter in our history" (Cohen, 1999: 3).

In the Holocaust museums that are sprouting up throughout the Western world, the design is not to distance the viewer from the object in a dry, deracinated, or "purely factual" way. To the contrary, as a recent researcher into this phenomenon has remarked, "Holocaust museums favor strategies designed to arouse strong emotions and particular immersion of the visitor into the past" (Baer, unpublished).93 The informational brochure to the Simon Wiesenthal Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, which houses the West Coast's largest Holocaust exhibition, promotes itself as a "high tech, hands-on experiential
museum that focuses on themes through interactive exhibits" (Baer, unpublished).

From its very inception in 1979, the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., was metonymically connected to the enoged symbolism of evil. According to the official Report submitted to President Jimmy Carter by the President's Commission on the Victims of the Holocaust, the purpose of the museum was to "protect against future evil" (quoted in Linenthal, 1995: 37). The goal was to create a building through which visitors would reexperience the original tragedy, to find "a means," as some central staff members had once put it, "to convey both dramatically and soberly the enormity of the human tragedy in the death camps" (quoted in Linenthal, 1995: 212). Rather than instrumentalizing or commodifying, in other words, the construction was conceived as a critical means for deepening psychological identification and broadening symbolic extension. According to the ethnographer of the fifteen-year planning and construction process, the design team insisted that the museum's interior mood should be so "visceral" that, as the ethnographer of the construction put it, museum visitors "would gain no respite from the narrative."

The feel and rhythm of space and the setting of mood were important. (The designers) identified different qualities of space that helped to mediate the narrative: constructive space on the third floor, for example, where as visitors enter the world of the death camps, the space becomes tight and mean, with a feeling of heavy darkness. Indeed, walls were not painted, pipes were left exposed, and, except for fire exits and hidden elevators on the fourth and third floors for people who, for one reason or another, had to leave, there is no escape. (quoted in Linenthal, 1995: 169)

According to the Museum's head designer,

the exhibition was intended to take visitors on a journey. . . . We realized that if we followed those people under all that pressure as they moved from their normal lives into ghettos, out of ghettos onto trains, from trains to camps, within the pathways of the camps, until finally to the end. . . . If visitors could take that same journey, they would understand the story because they will have experienced the story. (quoted in Linenthal, 1995: 174)

The dramatization of the tragic journey was in many respects quite literal, and this fosters identification. The visitor receives a photo passport/identity card representing a victim of the Holocaust, and the museum's permanent exhibition is divided into chronological sections. The fourth floor is "The Assault: 1933–39," the third floor "The Holocaust: 1940–44," and the second floor "Bearing Witness: 1945." At the end of each floor, visitors are asked to insert their passports to find out what happened to their identity-card "alter egos"

during that particular phase of the Holocaust tragedy. By the time visitors have passed through the entire exhibit, they will know whether or not the person with whom they have been symbolically identified survived the horror or perished (Linenthal, 1995: 169).

The identification process is deepened by the dramatic technique of personalization. The key, in the words of the project director, was connecting museum visitors to "real faces of real people" (Linenthal, 1995: 181).96

Faces of Holocaust victims in the exhibition are shattering in their power. . . . Polish school teachers, moments before their execution, look at visitors in agony, sullen anger, and despair. . . . Two brothers, dressed alike in matching coats and caps, fear etched on their faces, gaze at the camera, into the eyes of the visitors. . . . The Faces . . . assault, challenge, accuse, and profoundly sadden visitors throughout the exhibition. (174)

At every point, design decisions about dramatization were made with the narrative of tragedy firmly in mind. Exhibits designers carefully avoided displaying any of the camp prisoners' "passive resistance," for fear it would trigger progressive narratives of heroism and romance. As a historian associated with such decisions remarked, the fear was that such displays might contribute to an "epic" Holocaust narrative in which resistance would gain "equal time" with the narrative of destruction (Linenthal, 1995: 192). This dark dramatization, however, could not descend into a mere series of grossly displayed horrors, for this would undermine the identification on which the very communication of the tragic lessons of the Holocaust would depend.

The design team faced a difficult decision regarding the presentation of horror. Why put so much effort into constructing an exhibition that was so horrible that people would not visit? They worried about word-of-mouth evaluation after opening, and feared that the first visitors would tell family and friends, "Don't go, it's too horrible." . . . The museum's mission was to teach people about the Holocaust and bring about civic transformation; yet . . . the public had to desire to visit. (198, italics in original)

It seems clear that such memorializations aim to create structures that dramatize the tragedy of the Holocaust and provide opportunities for contemporaries, now so far removed from the original scene, powerfully to reexperience it. In these efforts, personalization remains an immensely important dramatic vehicle, and it continues to provide the opportunity for identification so crucial to the project of universalization. In each Holocaust museum, the fate of the Jews functions as a metaphorical bridge to the treatment of other ethnic, religious, and racial minorities.98 The aim is manifestly not to "promote" the Holocaust
as an important event in earlier historical time, but to contribute to the possibilities of pluralism and justice in the world of today.

From Liberators to Survivors: Witness Testimonies

Routinization of charisma is certainly an inevitable fact of social life, and memorialization a much-preferred way to understand that it can institutionalize, and not only undermine, the labile collective sentiments that once circulated in a liquid form. It is important also not to view the outcome of such processes in a naturalistic, noncultural way. It is not "meaning" that is crystallized but particular meanings. In terms of Holocaust memorialization and routinization, it is the objectification of a narrative about tragedy that has been memorialized over the last decade, not a narrative about progress.

The postwar memorials to World War II were, and are, about heroism and liberation. They centered on American GIs and the victims they helped. If the Holocaust had continued to be narrated within the progressive framework of the anti-Nazi war, it would no doubt have been memorialized in much the same way. Of course, the very effect of the progressive narrative was to make the Holocaust less visible and central, with the result that, as long as the representation of contemporary history remained within the progressive framework, few efforts to memorialize the Holocaust were made. For that very reason, the few that were attempted are highly revealing. In Liberty State Park, in New Jersey, within visual sight of the proud and patriotic Statue of Liberty, there stands a statue called Liberation. The metal sculpture portrays two figures. The larger, a solemn American GI, walks deliberately forward, his eyes on the ground. He cradles a smaller figure, a concentration camp victim, whose skeletal chest, shredded prison garb, outstretched arms, and vacantly staring eyes exemplify his helplessness (Young, 1993: 320–32). Commissioned not only by the State of New Jersey but also by a coalition of American Legion and other veterans' organizations, the monument was dedicated only in 1985. During the ceremony, the state's governor made a speech seeking to reconnect the progressive narrative still embodied by the "last good war" to the growing centrality of the Holocaust narrative, whose symbolic and moral import had by then already begun to far outstrip it. The defensive and patriotic tone of the speech indicates that, via this symbolic linkage, the state official sought to resist the skepticism about America's place in the world, the very critical attitude that had helped frame the Holocaust in a narrative of tragedy.

To me, this monument is an affirmation of my American heritage. It causes me to feel deep pride in my American values. The monument says that we, as a collective people, stand for freedom. We, as Americans, are not oppressors, and we, as Americans, do not engage in military conflict for the purpose of conquest.

Our role in the world is to preserve and promote that precious, precious thing that we consider to be a free democracy. Today we will remember those who gave their lives for freedom. (321)

The Liberation monument, and the particularist and progressive sentiments it crystallized, could not be further removed from the memorial processes that have crystallized in the years since. Propelled by the tragic transformation of the Jewish mass murder, in these memorials the actions and beliefs of Americans are often implicitly analogized with those of the perpetrators, and the U.S. army's liberation of the camps plays only a minimal role, if any. In these more universalized settings, the focus is on the broader, world-historical causes and moral implications of the tragic event, on creating symbolic extension by providing opportunities for contemporaries to experience emotional identification with the suffering of the victims.

It was in the context of this transformation that there emerged a new genre of Holocaust writing and memorializing, one that focuses on a new kind of historical evidence, direct "testimony," and a new kind of historical actor, the "survivor." Defined as persons who lived through the camp experiences, survivors provide a tactile link with the tragic event. As their social and personal role was defined, they began to write books, give speeches to local and national communities, and record their memories of camp experiences on tape and video. These testimonies have become sacralized repositories of the core tragic experience, with all the moral implications that this suffering has come to entail. They have been the object of two amply funded recording enterprises. One, organized by the Yale University Video Archive of the Holocaust, was already begun in 1981. The other, the Shoah Visual History Foundation, was organized by the film director Steven Spielberg in 1994, in the wake of the worldwide effects of his movie Schindler's List.

Despite the publicity these enterprises have aroused and the celebrity that has accrued to the new survivor identity, what is important to see is that this new genre of memorialization has inverted the language of liberation that was so fundamental to the earlier, progressive form. It has created not heroes, but anti-heroes. Indeed, those who have created and shaped this new genre are decidedly critical of what they see as the "style of revisionism" that crept into Holocaust writing after the liberation of the camps. They describe this style as a "natural but misguided impulse to romanticize staying alive and to interpret painful endurance as a form of defiance or resistance" (Langer, 2000: xiv). Arguing that survivor testimony reveals tragedy, not triumph, they suggest that it demands the rejection of any progressive frame.

No one speaks of having survived through bravery or courage. These are hard assessments for us to accept. We want to believe in a universe that rewards good character and exemplary behavior. We want to believe in the power of the human spirit to overcome adversity. It is difficult to live with the thought that human
nature may not be noble or heroic and that under extreme conditions we, too, might turn brutal, selfish, "too inhuman." (Greene & Kumar, 2000: xxv–xxvi)

In reacting against the heroic, progressive frame, some of these commentators go so far as to insist on the inherent "meaninglessness" of the Holocaust, suggesting that the testimonies reveal "uncompensated and unredeemable suffering" (Langer, 2000: xv). Yet it seems clear that the very effort to create survivor testimony is an effort to maintain the vitality of the experience by objectifying and, in effect, depersonalizing it. As such, it helps to sustain the tragic trauma drama, which allows an ever-wider audience redemption through suffering. It does so by suggesting the survival not of a few scattered and particular victims but of humanity as such.

The power of testimony is that it requires little commentary, for witnesses are the experts and they tell their own stories in their own words. The perpetrators work diligently to silence their victims by taking away their names, homes, families, friends, possessions, and lives. The intent was to deny their victims any sense of humanness, to erase their individuality and rob them of all personal voice. Testimony reestablishes the individuality of the victims who survived—and in some instances of those who were killed—and demonstrates the power of their voices. (Greene & Kumar, 2000: xxiv)

Those involved directly in this memorializing process see their own work in exactly the same way. Geoffrey Hartman, the director of the Yale Video Archive, speaks about a new "narrative that emerges through the alliance of witness and interviewer" (Hartman, 1996: 153), a narrative based on the reconstruction of a human community.

However many times the interviewer may have heard similar accounts, they are received as though for the first time. This is possible because, while the facts are known, while historians have labored—and are still laboring—to establish every detail, each of these histories is animated by something additional to historical knowledge: there is a quest to recover or reconstruct a recipient, an "affective community"... and [thus] the renewal of compassionate feelings. (153–4)

However "grim its contents," Hartman insists, testimony does not represent an "impersonal historical digest" but rather "that most natural and flexible of human communications, a story—a story, moreover, that, even if it describes a universe of death, is communicated by a living person who answers, recalls, thinks, cries, carries on" (Hartman, 1996: 154). The president of the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, Michael Berenbaum, suggesting that the goal of the Spielberg group is "to catalogue and to disseminate the testimonies to as many remote sites as technology and budget will permit, [a]ll in the service of education," ties the contemporary moral meaning of the historical events to the opportunity for immediate emotional identification that testimonies provide: "In classrooms throughout the world, the encounter between survivors and children [has] become electrifying, the transmission of memory, a discussion of values, a warning against prejudice, antisemitism, racism, and indifference" (Berenbaum, 1999: ix).

IS THE HOLOCAUST WESTERN?

While the rhetoric of Holocaust generalization refers to its weltgeschichte relevance—its world-historical relevance—throughout this essay I have tried to be careful in noting that this universalization has primarily been confined to the West. Universalization, as I have described it, depends on symbolically generated, emotionally vicarious participation in the trauma drama of the mass murder of the Jews. The degree to which this participation is differentially distributed throughout the West is itself a question that further research will have to pursue. This "remembering" is much more pronounced in western Europe and North America than in Latin America. Mexicans, preoccupied with their national traumas dating back to the European conquest, are much less attached to the "Holocaust" than their northern neighbors—against whose very mythologies Mexicans often define themselves. The result may be that Mexican political culture is informed to a significantly lesser degree by "post-Holocaust morality." On the other hand, it is also possible that Mexicans translate certain aspects of post-Holocaust morality into local terms, for example, being willing to limit claims to national sovereignty in the face of demands by indigenous groups who legitimate themselves in terms of broadly human rights.

Such variation is that much more intense when we expand our assessment to non-Western areas. What are the degrees of attachment to, vicarious participation in, and lessons drawn from the "Holocaust" trauma in non-Western civilizations? In Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Islamic, African, and still-communist regions and regimes, reference to the "Holocaust," when made at all, is by literary and intellectual elites with markedly atypical levels of participation in the global discourse dominated by the United States and Western Europe. Of course, non-Western regions and nations, as I indicate in chapter 3, have their own identity-defining trauma dramas. What is unclear is the degree to which the cultural work that constructs these traumas, and responds to them, reaches beyond issues of national identity and sovereignty to the universalizing, supranational ethical imperatives increasingly associated with the "lessons of post-Holocaust morality" in the West.

The authorized spokespersons for Japan, for example, have never acknowledged the empirical reality of the horrific mass murder their soldiers inflicted on native Chinese in Nanking, China, during the runup to World War II—the "Rape of Nanking." Much less have they apologized for it, or made any effort to share in the suffering of the Chinese people in a manner that would point to a
universalizing ethic by which members of different Asian national and ethnic groupings could be commonly judged. Instead, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima have become an originating trauma for postwar Japanese identity. While producing an extraordinary commitment to pacifism, the dramatization of this trauma, which was inflicted on Japan by its wartime enemy, the United States, has had the effect of confirming rather than dislodging Japan in its role as narrative agent. The trauma has functioned, in other words, to steadfastly oppose any effort to widen the circle of perpetrators, which makes it less likely that the national history of Japan will be submitted to some kind of supranational standard of judgment.

Such submission is very difficult, of course, in any strongly national context, in the West as well as in the East. Nonetheless, the analysis presented in this chapter compels us to ask this question: Can countries or civilizations that do not acknowledge the Holocaust develop universalistic political moralities? Obviously, non-Western nations cannot "remember" the Holocaust, but in the context of cultural globalization they certainly have become gradually aware of its symbolic meaning and social significance. It might also be the case that non-Western nations could develop trauma dramas that are functional equivalents to the Holocaust. It has been the thesis of this essay that moral universalism rests on social processes that construct and channel cultural trauma. If this is indeed the case, then globalization will have to involve a very different kind of social process than the ones that students of this supranational development have talked about so far: East and West, North and South must learn to share the experiences of one another's traumas and to take vicarious responsibility for the other's affictions.

Geoffrey Hartman has recently likened the pervasive status of the Holocaust in contemporary society to a barely articulated but nonetheless powerful and pervasive legend. "In Greek tragedy . . . with its moments of highly condensed dialogue, the framing legend is so well known that it does not have to be emphasized. A powerful abstraction, or simplification, takes over. In this sense, and in this sense only, the Holocaust is on the way to becoming a legendary event" (Hartman, 2000: 16).

Human beings are story-telling animals. We tell stories about our triumphs. We tell stories about tragedies. We like to believe in the verisimilitude of our accounts, but it is the moral frameworks themselves that are real and constant, not the factual material that we employ them to describe. In the history of human societies, it has often been the case that narrative accounts of the same event compete with one another, and that they eventually displace one another over historical time. In the case of the Nazis' mass murder of the Jews, what was once described as a prelude and incitement to moral and social progress has come to be reconstructed as a decisive demonstration that not even the most "modern" improvements in the condition of humanity can ensure advancement in anything other than a purely technical sense. It is paradoxical that a decided increase in moral and social justice may eventually be the unintended result.
Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks on their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.¹

As I develop it here, cultural trauma is first of all an empirical, scientific concept, suggesting new meaningful and causal relationships between previously unrelated events, structures, perceptions, and actions. But this new scientific concept also illuminates an emerging domain of social responsibility and political action. It is by constructing cultural traumas that social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations not only cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering but "take on board" some significant responsibility for it. Insofar as they identify the cause of trauma, and thereby assume such moral responsibility, members of collectivities define their solidarity relationships in ways that, in principle, allow them to share the sufferings of others. Is the suffering of others also our own? In thinking that it might in fact be, societies expand the circle of the we. By the same token, social groups can, and often do, refuse to recognize the existence of others' trauma, and because of their failure they cannot achieve a moral stance. By denying the reality of other's suffering, they not only diffuse their own responsibility for other's suffering but often project the responsibility for their own suffering on these others. In other words, by refusing to participate in what I will later describe as the process of trauma creation, social groups restrict solidarity, leaving others to suffer alone.

ORDINARY LANGUAGE AND REFLEXIVITY

One of the great advantages of this new theoretical concept is that it partakes so deeply of everyday life. Throughout the twentieth century, first in Western soci-
eties and then, soon after, throughout the rest of the world, people have spoken continually about being traumatized by an experience, by an event, by an act of violence or harassment, or even, simply, by an abrupt and unexpected, and sometimes not even particularly malevolent, experience of social transformation and change. People also have continually employed the language of trauma to explain what happens, not only to themselves but to the collectivities they belong to. We often speak of an organization being traumatized when a leader departs or dies, when a governing regime falls, when an unexpected reversal of fortune is suffered by an organization. Actors describe themselves as traumatized when the environment of an individual or a collectivity suddenly shifts in an unforeseen and unwelcome manner.

We know from ordinary language, in other words, that we are onto something widely experienced and intuitively understood. Such rootedness in the lifeworld is the soil that nourishes every social scientific concept. The trick is to gain reflexivity, to move from the sense of something commonly experienced to the sense of strangeness that allows us to think sociologically. For trauma is not something naturally existing; it is something constructed by society.

In this task of making trauma strange, its embeddedness in everyday life and language, so important for providing an initial intuitive understanding, now presents itself as a challenge to be overcome. In fact, the scholarly approaches to trauma developed thus far actually have been distorted by the powerful, common-sense understandings of trauma that have emerged in everyday life. Indeed, it might be said that these common-sense understandings constitute a kind of "lay trauma theory" in contrast to which a more theoretically reflexive approach to trauma must be erected.

LAY TRAUMA THEORY

According to lay theory, traumas are naturally occurring events that shatter an individual or collective actor's sense of well-being. In other words, the power to shatter—the "trauma"—is thought to emerge from events themselves. The reaction to such shattering events—"being traumatized"—is felt and thought to be an immediate and unreflective response. According to the lay perspective, the trauma experience occurs when the traumatizing event interacts with human nature. Human beings need security, order, love, and connection. If something happens that sharply undermines these needs, it hardly seems surprising, according to the lay theory, that people will be traumatized as a result.

ENLIGHTENMENT THINKING

There are "Enlightenment" and "psychoanalytic" versions of this lay trauma theory. The Enlightenment understanding suggests that trauma is a kind of rational response to abrupt change, whether at the individual or social level. The objects or events that trigger trauma are perceived clearly by actors; their responses are lucid; and the effects of these responses are problem-solving and progressive. When bad things happen to good people, they become shocked, outraged, indignant. From an Enlightenment perspective, it seems obvious, perhaps even unremarkable, that political scandals are cause for indignation; that economic depressions are cause for despair; that lost wars create a sense of anger and aimlessness; that disasters in the physical environment lead to panic; that assaults on the human body lead to intense anxiety; that technological disasters create concerns, even phobias, about risk. The responses to such traumas will be efforts to alter the circumstances that caused them. Memories about the past guide this thinking about the future. Programs for action will be developed, individual and collective environments will be reconstructed, and eventually the feelings of trauma will subside.

This Enlightenment version of lay trauma theory has recently been exemplified by Arthur Neal in his National Trauma and Collective Memory. In explaining whether or not a collectivity is traumatized, Neal points to the quality of the event itself. National traumas have been created, he argues, by "individual and collective reactions to a volcano-like event that shook the foundations of the social world" (Neal, 1998: ix). An event traumatizes a collectivity because it is "an extraordinary event," an event that has such "an explosive quality" that it creates "disruption" and "radical change... within a short period of time" (Neal, 1998: 3, 9–10, italics added). These objective empirical qualities "command the attention of all major subgroups of the population," triggering emotional response and public attention because rational people simply cannot react in any other way (9–10). "Dismissing or ignoring the traumatic experience is not a reasonable option," nor is "holding an attitude of benign neglect" or "cynical indifference" (4, 9–10). It is precisely because actors are reasonable that traumatic events typically lead to progress: "The very fact that a disruptive event has occurred" means that "new opportunities emerge for innovation and change" (18).

It is hardly surprising, in other words, that "permanent changes were introduced into the [American] nation as a result of the Civil War, the Great Depression, and the trauma of World War II" (5).

Despite what I will later call the naturalistic limitations of such an Enlightenment understanding of trauma, what remains singularly important about Neal's approach is its emphasis on the collectivity rather than the individual, an emphasis that sets it apart from the more individually oriented, psychoanalytically informed approaches discussed below. In focusing on events that create trauma for national, not individual identity, Neal follows the pathbreaking sociological model developed by Kai Erikson in his widely influential book, Everything in Its Path. While this heartwrenching account of the effects on a small Appalachian community of a devastating flood is likewise constrained by a naturalistic perspective, it established the groundwork for the distinctively sociological approach I follow here. Erikson's theoretical innovation was to conceptualize the
difference between collective and individual trauma. Both the attention to collectively emergent properties, and the naturalism with which such collective traumas are conceived, are evident in the following passage.

By individual trauma I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one’s defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively. . . . By collective trauma, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works in a way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with “trauma.” But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared. . . . “We” no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body. (Erikson, 1976: 153–4, italics added)

As Smelser suggests (Alexander et al., forthcoming), trauma theory began to enter ordinary language and scholarly discussions alike in the efforts to understand the “shell shock” that affected so many soldiers during World War I, and it became expanded and elaborated in relation to other wars that followed in the course of the twentieth century. When Glen Elder created “life course analysis” to trace the cohort effects on individual identity of these and other cataclysmic social events in the twentieth century, he and his students adopted a similar Enlightenment mode of trauma (Elder, 1974). Similar understandings have long informed approaches in other disciplines, for example the vast historiography devoted to the far-reaching effects on nineteenth-century Europe and the United States of the “trauma” of the French Revolution. Elements of the lay Enlightenment perspective have also informed contemporary thinking about the Holocaust (see chapter 2, above) and responses to other episodes of mass murder in the twentieth century.

**PSYCHOANALYTIC THINKING**

Such realist thinking continues to permeate everyday life and scholarly thought alike. Increasingly, however, it has come to be filtered through a psychoanalytic perspective that has become central to both contemporary lay common sense and academic thinking. This approach places a model of unconscious emotional fears and cognitively distorting mechanisms of psychological defense between the external shattering event and the actor’s internal traumatic response. When bad things happen to good people, according to this academic version of lay theory, they can become so frightened that they can actually repress the experience of trauma itself. Rather than direct cognition and rational understanding, the traumatizing event becomes distorted in the actor’s imagination and memory. The effort to accurately attribute responsibility for the event, and the progressive effort to develop an ameliorating response, are undermined by displacement. This psychoanalytically mediated perspective continues to maintain a naturalistic approach to traumatic events, but it suggests a more complex understanding about the human ability consciously to perceive them. The truth about the experience is perceived, but only unconsciously. In effect, truth goes underground, and accurate memory and responsible action are its victim. Traumatic feelings and perceptions, then, come not only from the originating event but from the anxiety of keeping it repressed. Trauma will be resolved, not only by setting things right in the world, but by setting things right in the self. According to this perspective, the truth can be recovered, and psychological equanimity restored only as the Holocaust historian Saul Friedlander once put it, “when memory comes.”

This phrase actually provides the title of Friedlander’s memoir about his childhood during the Holocaust years in Germany and France. Recounting, in evocative literary language, his earlier experiences of persecution and displacement, Friedlander suggests that conscious perception of highly traumatic events can emerge only after psychological introspection and “working through” allows actors to recover their full capacities for agency (Friedlander, 1978, 1992b). Emblematic of the intellectual framework that has emerged over the last three decades in response to the Holocaust experience, this psychoanalytically informed theorizing particularly illuminated the role of collective memory, insisting on the importance of working backward through the symbolic residues that the originating event has left on contemporary recollection.

Much as these memory residues surface through free association in psychoanalytic treatment, they appear in public life through the creation of literature. It should not be surprising, then, that literary interpretation, with its hermeneutical approach to symbolic patterns, has been offered as a kind of academic counterpart to the psychoanalytic intervention. In fact, the major theoretical and empirical statements of the psychoanalytic version of lay trauma theory have been produced by scholars in the various disciplines of the humanities. Because within the psychoanalytic tradition it has been Lacan who has emphasized the importance of language in emotional formation, it has been Lacanian theory, often in combination with Derridean deconstruction, that has informed these humanities-based studies of trauma.

Perhaps the most influential scholar in shaping this approach has been Cathy Caruth, in her own collection of essays, Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History, and in her edited collection Trauma: Explorations in Memory (Caruth, 1995, 1996). Caruth focuses on the complex permutations that unconscious emotions impose on traumatic reactions, and her work has certainly been helpful in my own thinking about cultural trauma. In keeping with the psychoanalytic tradition, however, Caruth roots her analysis in the power and objectivity of the originating traumatic event, saying that “Freud’s intuition of, and his
passionate fascination with, traumatic experiences" related traumatic reactions to "the unwrithing reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind" (Caruth, 1995: 2). The event cannot be left behind because "the breach in the mind's experience," according to Caruth, "is experienced too soon." This abruptness prevents the mind from fully cognizing the event. It is experienced "too unexpectedly . . . to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness." Buried in the unconscious, the event is experienced irrationally, "in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor." This shows how the psychoanalytic version of lay trauma theory goes beyond the Enlightenment one: "Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on." When Caruth describes these traumatic symptoms, however, she returns to the theme of objectivity, suggesting that they "tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (3-4).7

The enormous influence of this psychoanalytic version of lay trauma theory can be seen in the way it has informed the recent efforts by Latin American scholars to come to terms with the traumatic brutalities of their recent dictatorships. Many of these discussions, of course, are purely empirical investigations of the extent of repression and/or normative arguments that assign responsibilities and demand reparations. Yet there is an increasing body of literature that addresses the effects of the repression in terms of the traumas it caused.

The aim is to restore collective psychological health by lifting societal repression and restoring memory. To achieve this, social scientists stress the importance of finding—through public acts of commemoration, cultural representation, and public political struggle—some collective means for undoing repression and allowing the pent-up emotions of loss and mourning to be expressed. While thoroughly laudable in moral terms, and without doubt also very helpful in terms of promoting public discourse and enhancing self-esteem, this advocacy literature typically is limited by the constraints of lay common sense. The traumatized feelings of the victims, and the actions that should be taken in response, are both treated as the unmediated, common-sense reactions to the repression itself. Elizabeth Jelin and Susana Kaufman, for example, directed a large-scale project on "Memory and Narrativity" sponsored by the Ford Foundation, involving a team of investigators from different South American countries. In their powerful report on their initial findings, "Layers of Memories: Twenty Years After in Argentina,"8 they contrast the victims' insistence on recognizing the reality of traumatizing events and experiences with the denials of the perpetrators and their conservative supporters, denials that insist on looking to the future and forgetting the past: "The confrontation is between the voices of those who call for commemoration, for remembrance of the disappearances and the torment, for denunciation of the repressors, and those who make it their business to act 'as if nothing has happened here.'" Jelin and Kaufman call these conservative forces the "bystanders of horror" who claim they "did not know" and "did not see." But because the event—the traumatizing repression—was real, these denials will not work: "The personalized memory of people cannot be erased or destroyed by decree or by force." The efforts to memorialize the victims of the repression are presented as efforts to restore the objectivity reality of the brutal events, to separate them from the unconscious distortions of memory: "Monuments, museums and memorials are . . . attempts to make statements and affirmations [to create] a materiality with a political, collective, public meaning [and] a physical reminder of a conflictive political past" (unpublished, 5-7).

THE NATURALISTIC FALLACY

It is through these Enlightenment and psychoanalytic approaches that trauma has been translated from an idea in ordinary language into an intellectual concept in the academic languages of diverse disciplines. Both perspectives, however, share the "naturalistic fallacy" of the lay understanding from which they derive. It is on the rejection of this naturalistic fallacy that my own approach rests. First and foremost, I maintain that events do not, in and of themselves, create collective trauma. Events are not inherently traumatic. Trauma is a socially mediated attribution. The attribution may be made in real time, as an event unfolds; it may also be made before the event occurs, as an adumbration, or after the event has concluded, as a post hoc reconstruction. Sometimes, in fact, events that are deeply traumatizing may not actually have occurred at all; such imagined events, however, can be as traumatizing as events that have actually occurred.

This notion of an "imagined" traumatic event seems to suggest the kind of process that Benedict Anderson describes in Imagined Communities (Anderson, 1991). Anderson's concern, of course, is not with trauma per se but with the kinds of self-consciously ideological narratives of nationalist history. Yet these collective beliefs often assert the existence of some national trauma. In the course of defining national identity, national histories are constructed around injuries that cry out for revenge. The twentieth century was replete with examples of angry nationalist groups and their intellectual and media representatives asserting that they were injured or traumatized by agents of some putatively antagonistic ethnic and political group, which must then be battled against in turn. The Serbsians inside Serbia, for example, contended that ethnic Albanians in Kosovo did them traumatic injury, thus providing justification for their own "defensive" invasion and ethnic cleansing. The type case of such militarist construction of primordial national trauma was Adolph Hitler's grotesque assertion that the international Jewish conspiracy had been responsible for Germany's traumatic loss in World War I.

But what Anderson means by "imagined" is not, in fact, exactly what I have in mind here. For he makes use of this concept in order to point to the com-
pletely illusory, nonempirical, nonexistent quality of the original event. Anderson is horrified by the ideology of nationalism, and his analysis of imagined national communities partakes of “ideology critique.” As such, it applies the kind of Enlightenment perspective that mars lay trauma theory, which I am criticizing here. It is not that traumas are never constructed from nonexistent events. Certainly they are. But it is too easy to accept the imagined dimension of trauma when the reference is primarily to claims like these, which point to events that either never did occur or to events whose representation involve exaggerations that serve obviously aggressive and harmful political force. Our approach to the idea of “imagined” is more like what Durkheim meant in The Elementary Forms of Religious Life when he wrote of the “religious imagination.” Imagination is intrinsic to the very process of representation. It seizes on an iframe experience from life and forms it, through association, condensation, and aesthetic creation, into some specific shape.

Imagination informs trauma construction just as much when the reference is to something that has actually occurred as to something that has not. It is only through the imaginative process of representation that actors have the sense of experience. Even when claims of victimhood are morally justifiable, politically democratic, and socially progressive, these claims still cannot be seen as automatic, or natural, responses to the actual nature of an event itself. To accept the constructivist position in such cases may be difficult, for the claim to verisimilitude is fundamental to the very sense that a trauma has occurred. Yet, while every argument about trauma claims ontological reality, as cultural sociologists we are not primarily concerned with the accuracy of social actors’ claims, much less with evaluating their moral justification. We are concerned only with how and under what conditions the claims are made, and with what results. It is neither ontology nor morality, but with epistemology, that we are concerned.

Traumatic status is attributed to real or imagined phenomena, not because of their actual harmfulness or their objective abruptness, but because these phenomena are believed to have abruptly, and harmfully, affected collective identity. Individual security is anchored in structures of emotional and cultural expectations that provide a sense of security and capability. These expectations and capabilities, in turn, are rooted in the stubbornness of the collectivities of which individuals are a part. At issue is not the stability of a collectivity in the material or behavioral sense, although this certainly plays a part. What is at stake, rather, is the collectivity’s identity, its stability in terms of meaning, not action.

Identity involves a cultural reference. Only if the patterned meanings of the collectivity are abruptly dislodged is traumatic status attributed to an event. It is the meanings that provide the sense of shockingsness and fear, not the events in themselves. Whether or not the structures of meaning are destabilized and shocked is not the result of an event but the effect of a sociocultural process. It is the result of an exercise of human agency, of the successful imposition of a new system of cultural classification. This cultural process is deeply affected by power structures and by the contingent skills of reflexive social agents.

THE SOCIAL PROCESS OF CULTURAL TRAUMA

At the level of the social system, societies can experience massive disruptions that do not become traumatic. Institutions can fail to perform. Schools may fail to educate, failing miserably even to provide basic skills. Governments may be unable to secure basic protections and may undergo severe crises of legitimation. Economic systems may be profoundly disrupted, to the extent that their allocative functions fail even to provide basic goods. Such problems are real and fundamental, but they are not, by any means, necessarily traumatic for members of the affected collectivities—much less for the society at large. For traumas to emerge at the level of the collectivity, social crises must become cultural crises. Events are one thing, representations of these events quite another. Trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity’s sense of its own identity. Collective actors “decide” to represent social pain as a fundamental threat to their sense of who they are, where they came from, and where they want to go. In this section I lay out the processes that the nature of these collective actions and the cultural and institutional processes that mediate them.

Claim-Making: The Spiral of Signification

The gap between event and representation can be conceived as the “trauma process.” Collectivities do not make decisions as such; rather, it is agents who do (Alexander, 1987; Alexander, Giesen, Munch, & Smelser, 1987; Szontagh, 1991, 1993). The persons who compose collectivities broadcast symbolic representations—characterizations—of ongoing social events, past, present, and future. They broadcast these representations as members of a social group. These group representations can be seen as “claims” about the shape of social reality, its causes, and the responsibilities for action such causes imply. The cultural construction of trauma begins with such a claim (Thompson, 1998). It is a claim to some fundamental injury, an exclamatory of the terrifying profanation of some sacred value, a narrative about a horribly destructive social process, and a demand for emotional, institutional, and symbolic reparation and reconstitution.

Carrier Groups

Such claims are made by what Max Weber, in his sociology of religion, called “carrier groups” (Weber, 1968: 468–517). The collective agents of the trauma process. Carrier groups have both ideal and material interests; they are situated
in particular places in the social structure; and they have particular discursive talents for articulating their claims—for what might be called "meaning making"—in the public sphere. Carrier groups may be elites, but they may also be denigrated and marginalized classes. They may be prestigious religious leaders or groups whom the majority has designated as spiritual pariahs. A carrier group can be generational, representing the perspectives and interests of a younger generation against an older one. It can be national, pitting one's own nation against a putative enemy. It can be institutional, representing one particular social sector or organization against others in a fragmented and polarized social order.

Audience and Situation: Speech Act Theory

The trauma process can be likened, in this sense, to a speech act (Austin, 1962; Habermas, 1984; Pia Lara, 1998; Searle, 1969). Traumas, like speech acts, have the following elements:

1. **Speaker:** the carrier group
2. **Audience:** the public, putatively homogeneous but sociologically fragmented
3. **Situation:** the historical, cultural, and institutional environment within which the speech act occurs

The goal of the speaker is persuasively to project the trauma claim to the audience-public. In doing so, the carrier group makes use of the particularities of the historical situation, the symbolic resources at hand, and the constraints and opportunities provided by institutional structures. In the first place, of course, the speaker's audience must be members of the carrier group itself. If there is illocutionary success, the members of this originating collectivity become convinced that they have been traumatized by a singular event. Only with this success can the audience for the traumatic claim be broadened to include other publics within the "society at large."

Cultural Classification: The Creation of Trauma as a New Master Narrative

Bridging the gap between event and representation depends on what Kenneth Thompson has called, in reference to the topic of moral panics, a "spiral of signification" (Thompson, 1998: 20–4). Representation of trauma depends on constructing a compelling framework of cultural classification. In one sense, this is simply telling a new story. Yet this story-telling is, at the same time, a complex and multivalent symbolic process that is contingent, highly contested, and sometimes highly polarizing. For the wider audience to become persuaded that they, too, have become traumatized by an experience or an event, the carrier group needs to engage in successful meaning work.

Four critical representations are essential to the creation of a new master narrative. While I will place these four dimensions of representations into an analytical sequence, I do not mean to suggest temporality. In social reality, these representations unfold in an interlarded manner that is continuously crosreferential. The causality is symbolic and aesthetic, not sequential or developmental but "value-added" (Smelser, 1963).

The questions to which a successful process of collective representation must provide compelling answers are as follows.

*The nature of the pain.* What actually happened—to the particular group and to the wider collectivity of which it is a part?

- Did the denouement of the Vietnam War leave a festering wound on the American psyche or was it incorporated in a more or less routine way? If there was a shattering wound, in what exactly did it consist? Did the American military lose the Vietnam War or did the Vietnam trauma consist of the pain of having the nation's hands "tied behind its back"?
- Did hundreds of ethnic Albanians die in Kosovo, or was it tens and possibly even hundreds of thousands? Did they die because of starvation or displacement in the course of a civil war, or were they deliberately murdered?
- Was slavery a trauma for African Americans? Or was it, as some revisionist historians have claimed, merely a highly profitable mode of economic production? If the latter, then slavery may not have produced traumatic pain. If the former, it certainly involved brutal and traumatizing physical domination (Eyerman, 2002).
- Was the internecine ethnic and religious conflict in Northern Ireland, these last thirty years, "civil unrest and terrorism," as Queen Elizabeth once described it, or a "bloody war," as claimed by the IRA (quoted in Maillot, unpublished manuscript)?
- Did less than a hundred persons die at the hands of Japanese soldiers in Nanking, China, in 1938, or three hundred thousand? Did these deaths result from a one-sided "massacre" or a "fierce contest" between opposing armies? (Chang, 1997: 206)

*The nature of the victim.* What group of persons was affected by this traumatizing pain? Were they particular individuals or groups, or the much more all-encompassing "people" as such? Did one singular and delimited group receive the brunt of the pain, or were several groups involved?

- Were the German Jews the primary victims of the Holocaust or did the victim group extend to the Jews of the Pale, European Jewry, or the Jewish people as a whole? Were the millions of Polish people who died at the hands of German Nazis also victims of the Holocaust? Were communists, socialists, homosexuals, and handicapped persons also victims of the Nazi Holocaust?
Were Kosovar Albanians the primary victims of ethnic cleansing, or were Kosovar Serbs also significantly, or even equally victimized?

Are African-American blacks the victims of the brutal, traumatizing conditions in the desolate inner cities of the United States, or are the victims of these conditions members of an economically defined "underclass"?

Were North American Indians the victims of European colonizers or were the victims particularly situated, and particularly "aggressive," Indian nations?

Are non-Western or third world nations the victims of globalization, or only the least developed, or least well equipped, among them?

Relation of the trauma victim to the wider audience. Even when the nature of the pain has been crystallized and the identity of the victim established, there remains the highly significant question of the relation of the victim to the wider audience. To what extent do the members of the audience for trauma representations experience an identity with the immediately victimized group? Typically, at the beginning of the trauma process, most audience members see little if any relation between themselves and the victimized group. Only if the victims are represented in terms of valued qualities shared by the larger collective identity will the audience be able to symbolically participate in the experience of the originating trauma.

Gypsies are acknowledged by contemporary Central Europeans as trauma victims, the bearers of a tragic history. Yet insofar as large numbers of central Europeans represent the "Roman people" as deviant and uncivilized, they have not made that tragic past their own.

Influential groups of German and Polish people have acknowledged that Jews were victims of mass murder, but they have often refused to experience their own national collective identities as being affected by the Jews' tragic fate.

Did the police brutality that traumatized black civil rights activists in Selma, Alabama, in 1965, create identification among the white Americans who watched the events on their television in the safety of the nonsegregated North? Is the history of white American racial domination relegated to an entirely separate time, or is it conceived, by virtue of the reconstruction of collective memory, as a contemporary issue?

Attribution of responsibility. In creating a compelling trauma narrative, the identity of the perpetrator—the "antagonist"—is critical to establish. Who actually injured the victim? Who caused the trauma? This issue is always a matter of symbolic and social construction.

Did "Germany" create the Holocaust or was it the Nazi regime? Was the crime restricted to special SS forces or was the Wehrmacht, the entire Nazi army, also deeply involved? Did the crime extend to ordinary soldiers, to ordi-

nary citizens, to Catholic as well as Protestant Germans? Was it only the older generation of Germans who were responsible, or later generations as well?

Institutional Arenas

This representational process creates a new master narrative of social suffering. Such cultural (re)classification is critical to the process by which a collectivity becomes traumatized. But it does not unfold in what Habermas would call a transparent speech situation (Habermas, 1984). The notion of transparency is postulated by Habermas as a normative ideal essential to the democratic functioning of the public sphere, not as an empirical description. In actual social practice, speech acts never unfold in an unmediated way. Linguistic action is powerfully mediated by the nature of the institutional arenas within which it occurs. While by no means exhaustive, some examples of this institutional mediation are provided here.

1. If the trauma process unfolds inside the religious arena, its concern will be to link trauma to theology.

The Torah's story of Job, for example, asks "why did God allow this evil?" The answers to such questions will generate searching discussions about whether and how human beings strayed from divinely inspired ethics and sacred law, or whether the existence of evil means that God does not exist.

2. Insofar as meaning work takes place in the aesthetic realm, it will be channeled by specific genres and narratives that aim to produce imaginative identification and emotional catharsis.

In the early representations of the Holocaust, for example, the tragic Diary of Anne Frank played a vital role, and in later years an entirely new genre called "survivor literature" developed (Hayes, 1999, and chapter 2, above).

In the aftermath of ethnicocide in Guatemala, in which two hundred thousand Mayan Indians were killed and entire villages destroyed, an ethnographer recorded how, in the town of Santa Maria Tzeja, theatre was "used to publicly confront the past."

"A group of teenagers and a North American teacher and director of the community's school write a play that documents what Santa Maria Tzeja has experienced. They call the play, There Is Nothing Concealed That Will Not Be Disclosed Matthew (10:26), and the villagers themselves perform it. The play not only recalls what happened in the village in a stark, unflinching manner but also didactically lays out the laws and rights that the military violated. The play pointedly and precisely cites articles of the Guatemalan constitution that were trampled on, not normally the text of great drama. But in
Guatemala, reading the constitution can be a profoundly dramatic act. Performances inevitably lead to moving and at times heated discussions. [The production] had a cathartic impact on the village. (Manz, 2002)

As this example suggests, mass media are significant, but not necessary, in this aesthetic arena.

- In the aftermath of the 80-day NATO bombing that forced Yugoslavian Serbs to abandon their violent, decade-long domination of Albanian Kosovo, Serbian films provided mass channels for reexperiencing the period of suffering even while they narrated the protagonists, the victims, and the very nature of the trauma in strikingly different ways.

It is hard to see why anyone who survived 78 traumatic days of air-strikes in 1999 would want to relive the experience in a theater, bringing back memories as well of a murderous decade that ended in October with the fall of President Slobodan Milosevic. Yet Yugoslavia's feature film industry has done little else in the past year but turn out NATO war movies [some of which] have begun to cut through the national façade that Milosevic's propagandists had more than 10 years to build. [In one movie, the protagonist recounts that] 'it is dead easy to kill. . . . They stare at you, weep and wail, and you shoot 'em and that's the end—end of story. Later, of course, they all come back and you want to set things right, but it's too late. That's why the truth is always returning to judge men. (Paul Watson, "War's Over in Yugoslavia, but Box-Office Battles Have Begun," Los Angeles Times, January 3, 2001, A1–6)

3. When the cultural classification enters the legal realm, it will be disciplined by the demand to issue a definitive judgment of legally binding responsibilities and to distribute punishments and material reparations. Such a demonstration may have nothing at all to do with the perpetrators themselves accepting responsibility or a broader audience identifying with those who suffered as the trauma drama plays out.

- In regard to binding definitions of war crimes and crimes against humanity, the 1945 Nuremberg trials were critical. They created revolutionary new law and resulted in dozens of successful prosecutions, yet they did not, by any means, succeed in compelling the German people themselves to recognize the existence of Nazi traumas, much less their responsibilities for them. Nonetheless, the legal statutes developed at Nuremberg were elaborated in the decades following, laying the basis for dozens highly publicized lawsuits that in recent years have created significant dramaturgy and unleashed profound moral effects. These trials for "crimes against humanity" have implicated not only individuals but national organizations.

- Because neither postwar Japanese governments nor the most influential Japanese publics have even recognized the war crimes committed by its Imperial war policies, much less taken moral responsibility for them, no suit seeking damages for Imperial atrocities has, until recently, ever made any substantial headway in Japan's courts. In explaining why one suit against the Imperial government's biological warfare unit has finally made substantial progress, observers have pointed to the specificity and autonomy of the legal arena.

As a member of the Japanese biological warfare outfit, known as United 731, Mr. Shinozuka was told that if he ever faced capture by the Chinese, his duty to Emperor Hirohito was to kill himself rather than compromise the secrecy of a program that so clearly violated international law. . . . Now, 55 years later, he is a hale 77-year-old. But still haunted by remorse, he has spoken—providing the first account before a Japanese court by a veteran about the workings of the notorius unit. . . . That this case, now in its final stages, has not been dismissed like so many others is due in part to painstaking legal research and to cooperation over strategy by some of Japan's leading lawyers. Lawyers who have sued the government say the fact that this case has become the first in which a judge has allowed the extensive introduction of evidence instead of handing down a quick dismissal may also attest to an important shift under way on the issue of reparations. (Howard W. French, "Japanese Veteran Testifies in War Atrocity Lawsuit," New York Times, December 21, 2000: A3)

4. When the trauma process enters the scientific world, it becomes subject to evidentiary stipulations of an altogether different kind, creating scholarly controversies, "revelations," and "revisions." When historians endeavor to define an historical event as traumatic, they must document, by acceptable scholarly methods, the nature of the pain, the victims, and the responsibility. In doing so, the cultural classification process often triggers explosive methodological controversies.

- What were the causes of World War I? Who was responsible for initiating it? Who were its victims?
- Did the Japanese intend to launch a "sneak" attack on Pearl Harbor, or was the late-arriving message to Washington, D.C., from the Japanese Imperial government, delayed by inadvertence and diplomatic confusion?
- The German Historichritieten controversy captured international attention in the 1980s, questioning the new scholarly conservatives' emphasis on anticommu-

nism as a motivation for the Nazi seizure of power and its anti-Jewish policies. In the 1990s, Daniel Goldhagen's book Hitler's Willing Executioners was attacked by mainstream historians for overemphasizing the uniqueness of German anti-Semitism.
5. When the trauma process enters the mass media, it is gains opportunities and at the same time becomes subject to distinctive kinds of restrictions. Mediated mass communication allows traumas to be expressively dramatized, and some of the competing interpretations to gain enormous persuasive power over others. At the same time, however, these representational processes become subject to the restrictions of news reporting, with their demands for concision, ethical neutrality, and perspectival balance. Finally, there is the competition for readership that often inspires the sometimes exaggerated and distorted production of “news” in mass circulation newspapers and magazines. As an event comes to be reported as a trauma, a particular group as “traumatized,” and another group as the perpetrators, politicians and other elites may attack the media, its owners, and often the journalists whose reporting established the trauma facts.

- During the traumas of the late 1960s, American television news brought evocative images of terrible civilian suffering from the Vietnam War into the living rooms of American citizens. These images were seized on by antwar critics. The conservative American politician, vice-president Spiro Agnew, initiated virulent attacks against the “liberal” and “Jewish-dominated” media for their insistence that the Vietnamese civilian population was being traumatized by the American-dominated war.

6. When the trauma process enters the state bureaucracy, it can draw on the governmental power to channel the representational process. Decisions by the executive branches of governments to create national commissions of inquiry, votes by parliaments to establish investigative committees, the creation of state-directed police investigations and new directives about national priorities—all such actions can have decisive effects on handling and channeling the spiral of signification that marks the trauma process (Smelser, 1963). In the last decade, blue-ribbon commissions have become a favored state vehicle for such involvement. By arranging and balancing the participation on such panels, forcing the appearance of witnesses, and creating carefully choreographed public dramaturgy, such panels tilt the interpretative process in powerful ways, expanding and narrowing solidarity, creating or denying the factual and moral basis for reparations and civic repair.

- Referring to hundreds of thousands of Mayan Indians who died at the hands of Guatemalan counterinsurgency forces between 1981 and 1983, an ethnographer of the region asserts that “without question, the army’s horrific actions ripped deep psychological wounds into the consciousness of the inhabitants of this village [who were also] involved in a far larger trauma” (Manz, 2002: 294). Despite the objective status of the trauma, however, and the pain and suffering it had caused, the ability to collectively recognize and process it was inhibited because the village was “a place hammered into silence and accustomed to impunity.” In 1994, as part of the negotiation between the Guatemalan government and the umbrella group of insurgent forces, the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) was created to hear testimony from the affected parties and to present an interpretation. Five years later, its published conclusion declared that “agents of the State of Guatemala . . . committed acts of genocide against groups of Mayan people” (quoted in Manz, 2002: 293). According to the ethnographer, the report “stunned the country.” By publicly representing the nature of the pain, defining victim and perpetrator, and assigning responsibility, the trauma process was enacted within the governmental arena: “It was as if the whole country burst into tears, tears that had been repressed for decades and tears of vindication” (Manz, 2002: 294).

- In the middle 1990s, the post-apartheid South African government established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Composed of widely respected blacks and whites, the group called witnesses and conducted widely broadcast hearings about the suffering created by the repression that marked the preceding Afrikaner government. The effort succeeded, to some significant degree, in generalizing the trauma process beyond racially polarized audiences, making it into a shared experience of the new, more solidary, and more democratic South African society. Such a commission could not have been created until blacks became enfranchised and became the dominant racial power.

- By contrast, the postfascist Japanese government has never been willing to create official commissions investigate the war crimes committed by its Imperial leaders and soldiers against non-Japanese during World War II. In regard to the Japanese enslavement of tens and possibly hundreds of thousands of “comfort women,” primarily Korean, who provided sexual services for Imperial soldiers, the Japanese government finally agreed in the late 1990s to disperse relatively token monetary reparation to the Korean women still alive. Critics have continued to demand that an officially sanctioned commission hold public hearings into the trauma, a dramaturgical and legally binding process that, despite its ambiguous, and brief, public apology to the “comfort women,” the Japanese government has never been willing to allow. It is revealing of the significance of such a governmental arena that these critics eventually mounted an unofficial tribunal themselves.

Last week in Tokyo, private Japanese and international organizations convened a war tribunal that found Japan’s military leaders, including Emperor Hirohito, guilty of crimes against humanity for the sexual slavery imposed on tens of thousands of women in countries controlled by Japan during World War II. The tribunal has no legal power to exact reparations for the survivors among those so-called comfort women. But with its judges and lawyers drawn from official international tribunals for the countries that once were part of Yugoslavia and for Rwanda, it brought unparalleled moral authority to an issue scarcely discussed or taught about in Japan. (Howard W. French, “Japanese

Stratificational Hierarchies
The constraints imposed by institutional arenas are themselves mediated by the uneven distribution of material resources and the social networks that provide differential access to them.

1. Who owns the newspapers? To what degree are journalists independent of political and financial control?
2. Who controls the religious orders? Are they internally authoritarian or can congregants exercise independent influence?
3. Are courts independent? What is the scope of action available to entrepreneurial legal advocates?
4. Are educational policies subject to mass movements of public opinion or are they insulated by bureaucratic procedures at more centralized levels?
5. Who exercises controls over the government?

As I have indicated in my earlier reference to the governmental arena, local, provincial, and national governments deploy significant power over the trauma process. What must be considered here is that these bodies might occupy a position of dominance over the traumatized parties themselves. In these cases, the commissions might whitewash the perpetrators' actions rather than dramatize them.

- In the 1980s, the conservative American and British governments of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher initially did little to dramatize the dangers of the virulent AIDS epidemic because they did not wish to create sympathy or identification with the homosexual practices their ideologies so stigmatized. The failure allowed the epidemics to spread more rapidly. Finally, the Thatcher government launched a massive public education campaign about the dangers of HIV. The effort quickly took the steam out of the moral panic over the AIDS epidemic that had swept through British society and helped launch appropriate public health measures (Thompson, 1998).
- In 2000, reports surfaced in American media about a massacre of several hundred Korean civilians by American soldiers at No Gun Ri early in the Korean War. Suggestions from Korean witnesses, and newfound testimony from some American soldiers, suggested the possibility that the firings had been intentional, and allegations about racism and war crimes were made. In response, President Clinton assigned the U.S. army itself to convene its own official, in-house investigation. While a senior army official claimed "we have worked closely with the Korean government to investigate the circumstances surrounding No Gun Ri," the power to investigate and interpret the evidence clearly rested with the perpetrators of the trauma alone. Not surprisingly, when its findings were announced several months later, the U.S. army declared itself innocent of the charges that had threatened its good name:

We do not believe it is appropriate to issue an apology in this matter. [While] some of those civilian casualties were at the hand of American soldiers, that conclusion is very different from the allegation that was made that this was a massacre in the classic sense that we lined up innocent people and gunned them down. (New York Times, December 22, 2000: A5)

Identity Revision, Memory, and Routinization
"Experiencing trauma" can be understood as a sociological process that defines a painful injury to the collectivity, establishes the victim, attributes responsibility, and distributes the ideal and material consequences. Insofar as traumas are so experienced, and thus imagined and represented, the collective identity will become significantly revised. This identity revision means that there will be a searching re-remembering of the collective past, for memory is not only social and fluid but deeply connected to the contemporary sense of the self. Identities are continuously constructed and secured not only by facing the present and future but also by reconstructing the collectivity's earlier life.

Once the collective identity has been so reconstructed, there will eventually emerge a period of "calming down." The spiral of signification flattens out, affect and emotion become less inflamed, preoccupation with sacrality and pollution fades. Charisma becomes routinized, effervescence evaporates, and liminality gives way to reaggregation. As the heightened and powerfully affecting discourse of trauma disappears, the "lessons" of the trauma become objectified in monuments, museums, and collections of historical artifacts. The new collective identity will be rooted in sacred places and structured in ritual routines. In the late 1970s, the ultra-Maoist Khmer Rouge government was responsible for the deaths of more than one-third of Cambodia's citizens. The murderous regime was deposed in 1979. While fragmentation, instability, and authoritarianism in the decades following prevented the trauma process from fully playing itself out, the processes of reconstruction, representation, and working-through produced significant commemoration, ritual, and reconstruction of national identity.

Vivid reminders of the DK (Khmer Rouge)'s horrors are displayed in photographs of victims, paintings of killings, and implements used for torture at the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes, a former school that had become a
deadly interrogation center's . . . as well as in a monumental display of skulls and bones at Bhoeng Ek, a former killing field where one can still see bits of bone and cloth in the soil of what had been mass graves. The PRK [the new Cambodian government] also instituted an annual observance called The Day of Hate, in which people were gathered at various locales to hear invectives heaped on the Khmer Rouge. State propaganda played on this theme with such slogans as: "We must absolutely prevent the return of this former black darkness" and "We must struggle ceaselessly to protect against the return of the . . . genocidal clique." These formulaic and state-sanctioned expressions were genuine and often expressed in conversations among ordinary folk. (Ebihara & Ledgerwood in Hinton, 2002: 282–3)

In this routinization process, the trauma process, once so vivid, can become subject to the technical, sometimes desiccating attention of specialists who detach affect from meaning. This triumph of the mundane is often noted with regret by audiences that had been mobilized by the trauma process, and it is sometimes forcefully opposed by carrier groups. Often, however, it is welcomed with a sense of public and private relief. Created to remember and commemorate the trauma process, efforts to institutionalize the lessons of the trauma will eventually prove unable to evoke the strong emotions, the sentiments of betrayal, and the affirmations of sacrality that once were so powerfully associated with it. No longer deeply preoccupying, the reconstructed collective identity remains, nevertheless, a fundamental resource for resolving future social problems and disturbances of collective consciousness.

The inevitability of such routinization processes by no means neutralizes the extraordinary social significance of cultural traumas. Their creation and routinization have, to the contrary, the most profound normative implications for the conduct of social life. By allowing members of wider publics to participate in the pain of others, cultural traumas broaden the realm of social understanding and sympathy, and they provide powerful avenues for new forms of social incorporation.18

The elements of the trauma process I have outlined in this section can be thought of as social structures, if we think of this term in something other than its materialist sense. Each element plays a role in the social construction and deconstruction of a traumatic event. Whether any or all of these structures actually come into play is not itself a matter of structural determination. It is subject to the unstructured, unforeseeable contingencies of historical time. A war is lost or won. A new regime has entered into power or a discredited regime remains stubbornly in place. Hegemonic or counterpublics may be empowered and enthusiastic or undermined and exhausted by social conflict and stalemate. Such contingent historical factors exercise powerful influence on whether a consensus will be generated that allows the cultural classification of trauma to be set firmly in place.

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TRAUMA CREATION AND PRACTICAL-MORAL ACTION: THE NON-WESTERN RELEVANCE

In the preceding pages, I have elaborated a middle-range theory of the complex causes propelling the trauma process. In illustrating this analytical argument, I have referred to traumatic situations in Western and non-Western, developed and less-developed societies—in Northern Ireland and Poland, the United Kingdom and Cambodia, Japan and Yugoslavia, South Africa, Guatemala, and Korea.

It would be a serious misunderstanding if trauma theory were restricted in its reference to Western social life. True, it has been Western societies that have recently provided the most dramatic apologies for traumatic episodes in their national histories; yet the victims of these traumas have disproportionately been members of subaltern and marginalized groups. It should hardly be surprising, in other words, that the theory developed in relation to these empirical cases can so fluidly be extended to the experiences of trauma outside of Western societies. In the course of this introduction, I have mentioned also gypsies, Mayan Indians, American Indians, Kosovar Albanians, Chinese city dwellers, and Cambodian peasants. In fact, it is clear that the non-Western regions of the world, and the most defenseless segments of the world's population, that have recently been subjected to the most terrifying traumatic injuries.

The anthropologist Alexander Hinton has suggested that "while the behaviors it references have an ancient pedigree, the concept of genocide is thoroughly modern." (Hinton, 2002: 27). Indeed, it is the very premise of the contributions he and his fellow anthropologists make to their collective work, Annihilating Difference: The Anthropology of Genocide, that by the latter half of the twentieth century this modern framework had thoroughly penetrated non-Western societies (Hinton, 2002). "On the conceptual level," Hinton writes, terms like trauma, suffering, and cruelty are linked to the discourses of modernity . . . (Hinton, 2002: 25). Furthermore, in the mass media, the victims of genocide are frequently condensed into an essentialized portrait of the universal sufferer, an image that can be (re)broadcast to global audiences who see their own potential trauma reflected in this simulation of the modern subject.

Refugees frequently epitomize this modern trope of human suffering; silent and anonymous, they signify both a universal humanity and the threat of the premodern and uncivilized, which they have supposedly barely survived . . . Particularly in the global present, as such diverse populations and images flow rapidly across national borders, genocide . . . creates diasporic communities that threaten to undermine its culminating political incarnation. (26, italics added)

There is no more excruciating example of the universal relevance of trauma theory than the way it can help illuminate the tragic difficulties that non-
Western societies have often experienced in coming to terms with genocide. Because genocide is more likely to occur in collective arenas that are neither legally regulated and democratic nor formally egalitarian (Kuper, 1981), it is hardly surprising that, in the last half century, the most dramatic and horrifying examples of mass murder have emerged from within the more fragmented and impoverished areas of the non-Western world: the Hutu massacre of more than five hundred thousand Tutsis in less than three weeks in Rwanda, the Guatemalan military’s ethnocide of two hundred thousand Mayan Indians during the dirty civil war in the early 1980s, the Maoist Khmer Rouge’s elimination of almost one-third of Cambodia’s entire population in its revolutionary purges in the late 1970s.

The tragic reasons for these recent outpourings of mass murder in the non-Western world cannot be our concern here. A growing body of social scientific work is devoted to this question, although a great deal more needs to be done (Kleinman, Das, & Lock, 1997). What cultural trauma theory helps us understand, instead, is a central paradox, about not the causes of genocide but its aftereffects: Why have these genocidal actions, so traumatic to their millions of immediate victims, so rarely branded themselves on the consciousness of the wider populations? Why have these horrendous phenomena of mass suffering not become compelling, publicly available narratives of collective suffering to their respective nations, let alone to the world at large? The reasons, I suggest, can be found in the complex patterns of the trauma process I have outlined here.

In fact, several years before the Nazi massacre of the Jews, which eventually branded Western modernity as the distinctive bearer of collective trauma in the twentieth century, the most developed society outside the West had itself already engaged in systematic atrocities. In early December 1938, invading Japanese soldiers slaughtered as many as three hundred thousand Chinese residents of Nanking, China. Under orders from the highest levels of the Imperial government, they carried out this massacre in six of the bloodiest weeks of modern history, without the technological aids later developed by the Nazis in their mass extermination of the Jews. By contrast with the Nazi massacre, this Japanese atrocity was not hidden from the rest of the world. To the contrary, it was carried out under the eyes of critical and highly articulate Western observers and reported on massively by respected members of the world’s press. Yet in the sixty years that have transpired since that time, the memorialization of the “rape of Nanking” has never extended beyond the regional confines of China, and eventually barely beyond the confines of Nanking itself. The trauma contributed scarcely at all to the collective identity of the People’s Republic of China, left alone to the self-conception of the postwar democratic government of Japan. As the most recent narrator of the massacre puts it, “even by the standards of history’s most destructive war, the Rape of Nanking represents one of the worst instances of mass extermination.” Yet, though extraordinary traumatic for the contemporary residents of Nanking, it became “the forgotten Holocaust of World War II.” It remains an “obscure incident” today (Chang, 1997: 5–6), the very existence of which is routinely and successfully denied by some of Japan’s most powerful and esteemed public officials.

As I have suggested in this chapter, such failures to recognize collective traumas, much less to incorporate their lessons into collective identity, do not result from the intrinsic nature of the original suffering. This is the naturalistic fallacy that follows from lay trauma theory. The failure stems, rather, from an inability to carry through what I have called here the trauma process. In Japan and China, just as in Rwanda, Cambodia, and Guatemala, claims have certainly been made for the central relevance of these “distant sufferings” (Boltanski, 1999). But for both social-structural and culture reasons, carrier groups have not emerged with the resources, authority, or interpretive competence to powerfully disseminate these trauma claims. Sufficiently persuasive narratives have not been created, or they have not been successfully broadcast to wider audiences. Because of these failures, the perpetrators of these collective sufferings have not been compelled to accept moral responsibility, and the lessons of these social traumas have been neither memorialized nor ritualized. New definitions of moral responsibility have not been generated. Social solidarities have not been extended. More primordial and more particularistic collective identities have not been changed.

In this concluding section, I have tried to underscore my earlier contention that the theory presented here is not merely technical and scientific. It is normatively relevant and significantly illuminates processes of moral-practical action. However tortuous the trauma process, it allows collectivities to define new forms of moral responsibility and to redirect the course of political action. This open-ended and contingent process of trauma creation, and the assigning of collective responsibility that goes along with it, is as relevant to non-Western as Western societies. Collective traumas have no geographical or cultural limitations. The theory of cultural trauma applies, without prejudice, to any and all instances when societies have, or have not, constructed and experienced cultural traumatic events, and to their efforts to draw, or not to draw, the moral lessons that can be said to emanate from them.