In the course of the last two decades, there has emerged a new recognition of the independent structuring power of culture. Yet it turns out that this new disciplinary self-consciousness has not been any more successful in addressing evil than its reductionist predecessor. In thinking about culture—values and norms, codes and narratives, rituals and symbols—"negativity" has been set off to one side and treated as a residual category. While it has not been treated naturalistically, it has been presented merely as a deviation from cultural constructions of the good. Thus, in social scientific formulations of culture, a society's "values" are studied primarily as orientations to the good, as efforts to embody ideals. Social notions of evil, badness, and negativity are explored only as patterned deviations from normatively regulated conduct. If only this were the case! It seems to me that this cultural displacement of evil involves more moralizing wish fulfillment than empirical realism. Not only does it detract from our general understanding of evil but it makes the relation of evil to modernity much more difficult to comprehend. Thinking of evil as a residual category camouflages the destruction and cruelty that has accompanied enlightened efforts to institutionalize the good and the right. The definition of social evil and the systematic effort to combat it have everywhere accompanied the modern pursuit of reason and moral right. That is the central and most legitimate meaning of Michel Foucault's lifework, despite its simplifications, one-sidedness, and undermining relativism. It is the salvageable, saving remnant of the postmodern critique of modernity.

Culture cannot be understood only as value and norm, which can be defined as conceptual glosses on social efforts to symbolize, narrate, code, and ritualize the good. Culturalizing evil is, in sociological terms, every bit as important as such
efforts to define and institutionalize the good. In semiotic terms, evil is the necessary cognitive contrast for “good.” In moral terms, exploring heinous evil is the only way to understand and experience the pure and the upright. In terms of narrative dynamics, only by creating anticharacters can we implicate the dramatic tension between protagonist and antagonist that is transformed by Bildung or resolved by catharsis. In ritual terms, it is only the crystallization of evil, with all its stigmatizing and polluting potential, that makes rites of purification culturally necessary and sociologically possible. Religiously, the sacred is incompressible without the profane, the promise of salvation meaningless without the threat of damnation. What I am suggesting here, in other words, is that for every value there is an equal and opposite antivalue, for every norm an anti-norm. For every effort to institutionalize comforting and inspiring images of the socially good and right, there is an interconnected and equally determined effort to construct social evil in a horrendous, frightening, and equally realistic way. Drawing Durkheim back to Nietzsche, and writing under the impact of the trauma of early twentieth-century modernity, Bataille articulated this point in a typically pungent and literary way.

Evil seems to be understandable, but only to the extent to which Good is the key to it. If the luminous intensity of Good did not give the night of Evil its blackness, Evil would lose its appeal. This is a difficult point to understand. Something flinches in him who faces up to it. And yet we know that the strongest effects on the sense are caused by contrasts. . . . Without misfortune, bound to it as shade is to light, indifferences would correspond to happiness. Novels describe suffering, hardly ever satisfaction. The virtue of happiness is ultimately its rarity. Were it easily accessible it would be despised and associated with boredom. . . . Would truth be what it is if it did not assert itself generously against falsehood? (Bataille, 1990 [1957]: 14)

Actors, institutions, and societies systematically crystallize and elaborate evil. They do so, ironically, in pursuit of the good. To these paradoxical and immensely depressing facts attention must be paid.

THE INTELLECTUAL ROOTS OF THE DISPLACEMENT OF EVIL

To appreciate the pervasiveness of this truncated conception of culture, it is important to recognize that, while deeply affecting contemporary social science, it is rooted in earlier forms of secular and religious thought. From the Greeks onward, moral philosophy has been oriented to justifying and sustaining the good and to elaborating the requirements of the just society. Plato associated his ideal forms with goodness. To be able to see these forms, he believed, was to be able to act in accordance with morality. In dramatizing Socrates’ teachings in the Republic, Plato made use of the figure of Thrasy machus to articulate the evil forces that threatened ethical life. Rather than suggesting that Thrasy machus embodied bad values, Plato presented Thrasy machus as denying the existence of values as such: “In all states alike, ‘right’ has the same meaning, namely what is for the interest of the party established in power, and that is the strongest.” Thrasy machus is an egoist who calculates every action with an eye not to values but to the interests of his own person. Plato makes a homology between self/collectivity, interest/value, and evil/good. In doing so, he establishes the following analogical relationship:

Self/collectivity::interest/value::evil: good
Self is to collectivity, as interest is to value, as evil is to good.

The commitment to values is the same as the commitment to collective beliefs; beliefs and values are the path to the good. Evil should be understood not as the product of bad or negatively oriented values but as the failure to connect to collective values. Evil comes from being self-interested.

In elaborating what came to be called the republican tradition in political theory, Aristotle followed this syllogism, equating a society organized around values with an ethical order: “The best way of life, for individuals severally, as well as for states collectively, is the life of goodness duly equipped with such a store of requisites as makes it possible to share in the activities of goodness” (Aristotle, 1962: 7. 1. 13). Republics contained virtuous citizens, who were defined as actors capable of orienting to values outside of themselves. As individuals become oriented to the self rather than the collectivity, republics are endangered; desensitized to values, citizens become hedonistic and materialistic. According to this stark and binary contrast between morality and egoism, value commitments in themselves contribute to the good; evil occurs not because there are commitments to bad values but because of a failure to orient to values per se. While it is well known that Hegel continued the Aristotelian contrast between what he called the system of needs and the world of ethical regulation, it is less widely appreciated that pragmatism endorsed the same dichotomy in its own way. For Dewey, to value is to value the good. Interpersonal communication is bound to produce altruistic normative orientation. Cress materialism and selfishness occur when social structures prevent communication.

This philosophical equation of values with goodness and the lack of values with evil informs contemporary communitarianism, which might be described as a marriage between republican and pragmatic thought. Identifying contemporary social problems with egoism and valuelessness, communitarians ignore the possibility that communal values are defined by making pejorative contrasts with other values, with others’ values, and, in fact, often with the values of “the other.” Empirically, I want to suggest that the issue is not values versus interests or having values as compared with not having them. There are always
"good" values and "bad." In sociological terms, good values can be crystallized only in relation to values that are feared or considered repugnant. This is not to recommend that values should be relativized in a moral sense, to suggest that they can or should be "transvalued" or inverted in Nietzschean terms. It is rather to insist that social thinkers recognize how the social construction of evil has been, and remains, empirically and symbolically necessary for the social construction of good.12

In the Enlightenment tradition, most forcefully articulated by Kant, concern about the parochial (we would today say communitarian) dangers of an Aristotelian "ethics" led to a more abstract and universalistic model of a "moral" as compared to a good society.13 Nonetheless, one finds in this Kantian tradition the same problem of equating value commitments in themselves with positivity in the normative sense.14 To be moral is to move from selfishness to the categorical imperative, from self-reference to a collective orientation resting on the ability to put yourself in the place of another. What has changed in Kantianism is, not the binary of value-versus-no-value, but the contents of the collective alternative; it has shifted from the ethical to the moral, from the particular and local to the universal and transcendent. The range of value culture has been expanded and generalized because more substantive and more metaphysical versions came to be seen as particularist, antimodern, and antidemocratic.

If communitarianism is the contemporary representation of the republican and pragmatic traditions, Habermas's "theory of communicative action" represents—for social theory at least—the most influential contemporary articulation of this Kantian approach. Underlying much of Habermas's empirical theory one can find a philosophical anthropology that reproduces the simplistic splitting of good and evil. Instrumental, materialistic, and exploitative "labor," for example, is contrasted with altruistic, cooperative, ideal-oriented "communication." These anthropological dichotomies in the early writings are linked in Habermas's later work with the sociological contrast between system and lifeworld, the former producing instrumental efficiency, domination, and materialism, the latter producing ideals and, therefore, making possible equality, community, and morality. According to Habermas's developmental theory, the capacity for communication and moral self-regulation is enhanced with modernity, which produces such distinctive values as autonomy, solidarity, rationality, and criticism. The possibility of connecting to such values, indeed of maintaining value commitments per se, is impeded by the systems-rationality of modern economic and political life, the materialism of which "colonizes" and undermines the culture-creating, solidifying possibilities of the lifeworld.15 In arguing that it is recognition, not communication, that creates value commitments and mutual respect, Axel Honneth (1995) similarly ignores the possibility that pleasurable and cooperative interaction can be promoted by immoral and particularistic values that are destructive of ethical communities.16

This deracinated approach to culture-as-the-good can also be linked, in my view, to the Western religious tradition of Judaism and Christianity. In order to achieve salvation, the believer must overcome the temptations of the earthly, the material, and the practical in order to establish transcendental relations with an otherworldly source of goodness. According to this dualistic consciousness, evil is presented as an alternative to the transcendent commitments that establish value. As Augustine put it, "evil is the absence of the good."17 The "original sin" that has marked humanity since the Fall was stimulated by the earthly appetites, by lust rather than idealism and value commitment. This sin can be redeemed only via a religious consciousness that connects human beings to higher values, either those of an ethical, law-governed community (Judaism) or the moral universalism of a church (Christianity). In this religious universe, in other words, evil is connected to nonculture, to passions and figures associated with the earth in contrast with the heavens. According to recent historical discussions (e.g., Macoby, 1992) in fact, devil symbolism first emerged as a kind of iconographic residual category. Radical Jewish sects created it as a deus ex machina to explain the downward spiral of Jewish society, allowing these negative developments to be attributed to forces outside the "authentic" Jewish cultural tradition. This nascent iconography of evil was energetically elaborated by early Christian sects who were similarly attracted to the possibility of attributing evil to forces outside their own cultural system. The Christian devil was a means of separating the "good religion" of Jesus from the evil (primarily Jewish) forces from which it had emerged.

THE DISPLACEMENT OF EVIL
IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL SCIENCE

Given these philosophical and religious roots,18 it is hardly surprising that, as I have indicated earlier, contemporary social science has conceived culture as composed of values that establish highly esteemed general commitments and norms as establishing specific moral obligations to pursue the good. This is as true for social scientists, such as Bellah (1985) and Lasch (1978), who engage in cultural criticism as it is in more mainstream work. While issuing withering attacks on contemporary values as degenerate, narcissistic, and violent, such culture critics conceive these values as misguided formulations of the good—stupid, offensive, and pitiable but at the same time fundamentally revealing of how "the desirable" is formulated in the most debased modern societies.

On the basis of the identification of values with the good, mainstream social scientists and culture critics alike assume that a shared commitment to values is positive and beneficial to society. Functionalism is the most striking example of this tendency, and Talcott Parsons its classic representative. According to Parsons, value internalization leads not only to social equilibrium but to mutual respect, solidarity, and cooperation. If common values are not internalized, then the social system is not regulated by value, and social conflict, coercion, and
even violence are the probable results. In this sociological version of republicanism, Parsons follows the early- and middle-period Durkheim, who believed that shared values are essential to solidarity and social health. The lack of attachment to values marks the condition Durkheim defined as egoism, and it was by this standard that he defined social pathology. Durkheim emphasized education because he regarded it as the central means for attaching individuals to values.

Since the simple attachment to culture is valued so highly, it is clear that neither Durkheim nor Parsons seriously considered the theoretical or empirical possibility that evil might be valued as energetically as the good.

Because sociological folklore has so often pitted the functionalist "equilibrium" theory against the more critical "conflict" theory, it is well to ask whether, in fact, Parsonsian functionalism is the only guilty party here. Have the theoretical alternatives to functionalism provided a truly different approach to the problem of evil? Let us consider, as a case in point, how Marx conceptualized the depravity of capitalism. Rather than pointing to the social effects of bad values, Marx argued that capitalism destroyed their very possibility. As he put it so eloquently in the Communist Manifesto, "All that is holy is profaned, all that is solid melts into air." The structural pressures of capitalism create alienation and egoism; they necessitate an instrumental and strategic action orientation that suppresses values and destroys ideals. Because materialism destroys normativity, there is no possibility for shared understanding, solidarity, or community. Only after socialism removes the devastating forces of capitalist competition and greed does value commitment become possible and solidarity flourish.

The notion that it is not evil values but the absence of values that creates a bad society continues to inform the neo-Marxism of the early Frankfurt School. For Horkheimer and Adorno (e.g., 1972 [1947]), late capitalism eliminates authentic values. Culture exists only as an industry; it is a completely contingent set of expressive symbols, subject to continuous manipulation according to materialistic exigencies. While Habermas's later theory of discourse ethics avoids this kind of mechanism and reduction, it continues to be organized around the pragmatic notion that communicatively generated value commitment leads to mutual understanding, tolerance, and solidarity.

The apotheosis of this "critical" approach to evil-as-the-absence-of-value—evil as the displacement of culture by power—is Zygmunt Bauman's explanation of the Holocaust in his highly praised book Modernity and the Holocaust (1989). He writes that Nazi genocide has largely been ignored by social theory, suggesting that it has troubling implications for any positive evaluation of modernity. Bauman is right about this, but for the wrong reasons. He attributes the social evil of the Holocaust not to motivated cultural action but to the efficiency of the Nazis' bureaucratic killing machine. There is no indication in his explanation that this genocide was also caused by valuations of evil, by general representations of the polluted other that were culturally fundamental to Germany and its folkish, romantic traditions, and more specifically by representa-

GIVING EVIL ITS DUE

We need to elaborate a model of social good and evil that is more complex, more sober, and more realistic than the naturalistic or idealistic models. Symbolically, evil is not a residual category, even if those who are categorized by it are marginalized socially. From the merely distasteful and sickening to the truly heinous, evil is deeply implicated in the symbolic formulation and institutional maintenance of the good. Because of this, the institutional and cultural vitality of evil must be continually sustained. The line dividing the sacred from profane must be drawn and redrawn time and time again; this demarcation must retain its vitality, or all is lost. Evil is not only symbolized cognitively but experienced in a vivid and emotional way—as I am suggesting in virtually every chapter of this book. Through such phenomena as scandals, moral panics, public punishments, and wars, societies provide occasions to reexperience and recrystallize the enemies of the good. Wrenching experiences of horror, revulsion, and fear create opportunities for purification that keep what Plato called the "memory of justice" alive. Only through such direct experiences—provided via interaction or symbolic communication—do members of society come to know evil and to fear it. The emotional-cum-moral catharsis that Aristotle described as the basis for tragic experience and knowledge is also at the core of such experiences of knowing and fearing evil. Such knowledge and fear triggers denunciation of evil in others and confession about evil intentions in oneself, and rituals of punishment and purification in collectivities. In turn, these renew the sacred, the moral, and the good.

Evil is produced, in other words, not simply to maintain domination and power, as Foucault and Marx would argue, but in order to maintain the possibility of making positive valuations. Evil must be coded, narrated, and embodied in every social sphere—in the intimate sphere of the family, in the world of science, in religion, in the economy, in government, in primary communities.
In each sphere, and in every national society considered as a totality, there are deeply elaborated narratives about how evil develops and where it is likely to appear, about epochal struggles that have taken place between evil and the good, and about how good can triumph over evil once again.

This perspective has profound implications for the way we look at both cultural and institutional processes in contemporary societies. In the various substantive essays in this book, I discuss the former in terms of “binary representations.” I would like at this point to discuss the latter—the institutional processes of evil—in terms of “punishments.”

PUNISHMENT: SOCIAL PROCESS AND INSTITUTIONS

If it is vital to understand the cultural dimension of society as organized around evil as much as around good, this by no means suggests that the problem of social evil can be understood simply in discursive terms. On the contrary, organizations, power, and face-to-face confrontations are critical in determining how and to whom binary representations of good and evil are applied. While these social processes and institutional forces do not invent the categories of evil and good—that they are not responsive purely to interest, power, and need has been one of my central points—they do have a strong influence on how they are understood. Most important, however, they determine what the “real” social effects of evil will be in time and space.

The social processes and institutional forces that specify and apply representations about the reality of evil can be termed “punishment.” In the Division of Labor in Society, (1933), Durkheim first suggested that crime is “normal” and necessary because it is only punishment that allows society to separate normative behavior from that which is considered deviant. In my terms, I can suggest that punishment is the social medium through which the practices of actors, groups, and institutions are meaningfully and effectively related to the category of evil. It is through punishment that evil is naturalized. Punishment “essentializes” evil, making it appear to emerge from actual behaviors and identities rather than being culturally and socially imposed on them.

Punishment takes both routine and more spontaneous forms. The bureaucratic iterations of evil are called “crimes.” In organizational terms, the situational references of criminal acts are precisely defined by civil and criminal law, whose relevance to particular situations is firmly decided by courts and police. Polluting contact with civil law brings monetary sanctions; stigmatization by contact with criminal law brings incarceration, radical social isolation, and sometimes even death.

The nonroutine iterations of evil are less widely understood and appreciated. They refer to processes of “stigmatization” rather than to crimes. What Cohen first identified as moral panics represent fluid, rapidly formed crystallizations of evil in relation to unexpected events, actors, and institutions. Historical witch trials and more contemporary anticommunist witch hunts, for example, are stimulated by the sudden experience of weakness in group boundaries. Panics over “crime waves,” by contrast, develop in response to the chaotic and disorganizing entrance of new, formerly disreputable social actors into civil society. Whatever their specific cause, and despite their evident irrationality, moral panics do have a clear effect, both in a cultural and a social sense. By focusing on new sources of evil, they draw an exaggerated line between social pollution and the good. This cultural clarification prepares the path for a purging organizational response, for trials of transgressors, for expulsion, and for incarceration.

Scandals represent a less ephemeral but still nonroutine form of social punishment. Scandals are public degradations of individuals and groups for behavior that is considered polluting to their status or office. In order to maintain the separation between good and evil, the behavior of an individual or group is “clarified” by symbolizing it as a movement from purity to danger. The religious background of Western civil society makes such declension typically appear as a “fall from grace,” as a personal sin, a lapse created by individual corruption and the loss of individual responsibility. In the discourse of civil society, the greatest “sin” is the inability to attain and maintain one’s autonomy and independence. In terms of this discussion, scandal is created because civil society demands more or less continuous “revivifications” of social evil. These rituals of degradation range from the apparently trivial—the gossip sheets that, nonetheless, demand systematic sociological consideration—to the kinds of deeply serious, civil-religious events that create national convulsions: The Dreyfus Affair that threatened to undermine the Third Republic in France and the Watergate affair that toppled the Nixon regime in the United States represented efforts to crystallize and punish social evil on this systematic level. Once again, scandals, like moral panics, have not only cultural but fundamental institutional effects, repercussions that range from the removal of specific persons from status or office to deep and systematic changes in organizational structure and regime.

There is nothing fixed or determined about scandals and moral panics. Lines of cultural demarcation are necessary but not sufficient to their creation. Whether or not this or that individual or group comes to be punished is the outcome of struggles for cultural power, struggles that depend on shifting coalitions and the mobilization of resources of a material and not only ideal kind. This applies not only to the creation of panics and scandals but to their denouements. They are terminated by purification rituals reestablishing the sharp line between evil and good, a transition made possible by the act of punishment.

TRANSGRESSION AND THE AFFIRMATION OF EVIL AND GOOD

Once we understand the cultural and institutional “autonomy” of evil, we can see how the experience and practice of evil become, not simply frightening and
repulsive, but also desirable. The sociological creation of evil results not only in the avoidance of evil but also in the pursuit of it. Rather than a negative that directs people toward the good, in other words, social evil can be and often is sought as an end in itself. As Bataille (1990: 29, 21) observed, “evil is always the object of an ambiguous condemnation”; it is “not only the dream of the wicked” but “to some extent the dream of [the] Good.”

Attraction to the idea and experience of evil motivates the widespread practice that Bataille called transgression and that Foucault, following Bataille, termed the “limit experience.”

Sacred simultaneously has two contradictory meanings. . . . The taboo gives a negative definition of the sacred object and inspires us with awe. . . . Men are swayed by two simultaneous emotions: they are driven away by terror and drawn by an awed fascination. Taboo and transgression reflect these two contradictory urges. The taboo would forbid the transgression but the fascination compels it. . . . The sacred aspect of the taboo is what draws men towards it and transfigures the original interdiction. (Bataille, 1986 [1957]: 68)

In particular situations, evil comes to be positively evaluated, creating a kind of inverted liminality. Transgression takes place when actions, associations, and rhetoric—practices that would typically be defined and sanctioned as serious threats to the good—become objects of desire and sometimes even social legitimation. Bataille believed that transgression occurred mainly in the cultural imagination, that is, in literature, although he also wrote extensively about eroticism and was personally motivated by a desire to comprehend the dark social developments of the early and midcentury period—Nazism, war, and Stalinism. Transgression, however, also takes a decidedly social-structural form. In criminal activity and popular culture, evil provides the basis of complex social institutions that provide highly sought-after social roles, careers, and personal identities. Without evoking the term, Jack Katz certainly was investigating transgression in his profound phenomenological reconstruction of the “badass syndrome,” as was Richard Strivers in his earlier essay on the apocalyptic dimension of 1960s rock and roll concerts. The latter embodied the long-standing “noir” strain of popular culture that has transmogrified into the “bad raper” phenomenon of today.

It seems that every social thinker and artist who sets out to explore the attractions of this dark side, whether in the moral imagination or in social action and structure, risks being tarred by self-proclaimed representatives of social morality with a polluting brush. This tendency is fueled by the apparent fact that those who are personally attracted to transgressive practices are those who are most drawn to exploring them in art and social thought. The analysis set forth in this book suggests, however, that those who are seriously interested in maintaining moral standards should refrain from this kind of knee-jerk response. It confuses causes with effects. Societies construct evil so that there can be punishment; for it is the construction of, and the response to, evil that defines and revivifies the good. One should not, then, confuse the aesthetic imagining of evil, the vicarious experiencing of evil, much less the intellectual exploration of evil with the actual practice of evil itself.

Modern and postmodern societies have always been beset by socially righteous fundamentalism, both religious and secular. These moralists wish to purge the cultural imagination of references to eros and violence; they condemn frank discussions of transgressive desires and actions in schools and other public places; they seek to punish and sometimes even to incarcerate those who practice “victimless” crimes on the grounds that they violate the collective moral conscience. The irony is that, without the imagination and the social identification of evil, there would be no possibility for the attachment to the good that these moralists so vehemently uphold. Rather than undermining conventional morality, transgression underlines and vitalizes it. Bataille, whom James Miller pejoratively called the philosophe maudit of French intellectual life, never ceased to insist on this point. “Transgression has nothing to do with the primal liberty of animal life. It opens the door into what lies beyond the limits usually observed, but it maintains these limits just the same. Transgression is complementary to the profane [i.e., the mundane] world, exceeding its limits but not destroying it.” (Bataille, 1986 [1957]: 67).

Amnesty International, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, has been one of the world’s most effective nongovernmental democratic organizations, exposing and mobilizing opposition against torture and other heinous practices of authoritarian and even democratic governments. It is all the more relevant to note, therefore, that at the heart of the internal and external discourse of this prototypically “do-gooder” organization one finds an obsessive concern with defining, exploring, and graphically presenting evil, the success of which efforts allows members and outsiders vicariously to experience evil’s physical and emotional effects. In the Amnesty logo, good and evil are tensely intertwined. At the core is a candle, representing fervent attention, patience, and the sacrality of Amnesty’s commitment to life. Surrounding the candle is barbed wire, indicating concentration camps and torture. This binary structure is iterated throughout the persuasive documents that Amnesty distributes to the public and also in the talk of Amnesty activists themselves. They revolve around narratives that portray, often in graphic and gothic detail, the terrible things that are done to innocent people and, in a tone of almost incomprehending awe, the heroism of the prisoner to endure unspeakable suffering and remain in life and at the point of death a caring, dignified human being. Amnesty’s attention to evil, to constructing the oppressor and graphically detailing its actions, in this way contributes to maintaining the ideals of moral justice and sacralizing the human spirit, not only in thought but in practice. It is in order to explain and illuminate such a paradox that a cultural sociology of evil must be born.
In June 1972, employees of the Republican party made an illegal entry and burglary into the Democratic party headquarters in the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C. Republicans described the break-in as a "third-rate burglary," neither politically motivated nor morally relevant. Democrats said it was a major act of political espionage, a symbol, moreover, of a demagogic and amoral Republican president, Richard Nixon, and his staff. Americans were not persuaded by the more extreme reaction. The incident received relatively little attention, generating no real sense of outrage at the time. There were no cries of outrage. There was, in the main, deference to the president, respect for his authority, and belief that his explanation of this event was correct, despite what in retrospect seemed like strong evidence to the contrary. With important exceptions, the mass news media decided after a short time to play down the story, not because they were coercively prevented from doing otherwise but because they genuinely felt it to be a relatively unimportant event. Watergate remained, in other words, part of the profane world in Durkheim's sense. Even after the national election in November of that year, after Democrats had been pushing the issue for four months, 80 percent of the American people found it hard to believe that there was a "Watergate crisis"; 75 percent felt that what had occurred was just plain politics; 84 percent felt that what they had heard about it did not influence their vote. Two years later, the same incident, still called "Watergate," had initiated the most serious peacetime political crisis in American history. It had become a riveting moral symbol, one that initiated a long passage through sacred time and space and wrenching conflict between pure and impure sacred forms. It was responsible for the first voluntary resignation of a president.

How and why did this perception of Watergate change? To understand this
one must see first what this extraordinary contrast in these two public perceptions indicates, namely that the actual event, "Watergate," was in itself relatively inconsequential. It was a mere collection of facts, and, contrary to the positive persuasion, facts do not speak. Certainly, new "facts" seem to have emerged in the course of the two-year crisis, but it is quite extraordinary how many of these "revelations" actually were already leaked and published in the pre-election period. Watergate could not, as the French might say, tell itself. It had to be told by society; it was, to use Durkheim's famous phrase, a social fact. It was the context of Watergate that had changed, not so much the raw empirical data themselves.

To understand how this telling of a crucial social fact changed, it is necessary to bring to the sacred/profane dichotomy the Parsonian concept of generalization. There are different levels at which every social fact can be told (Smelser, 1959, 1963). These levels are linked to different kinds of social resources, and the focus on one level or another can tell us much about whether a system is in crisis—and subject, therefore, to the sacralizing process—or is operating routinely, or profanely, and in equilibrium.

First and most specific is the level of goals. Political life occurs most of the time in the relatively mundane level of goals, power, and interest. Above this, as it were, at a higher level of generality, are norms—the conventions, customs, and laws that regulate this political process and struggle. At still a higher point there are values: those very general and elemental aspects of the culture that inform the codes that regulate political authority and the norms within which specific interests are resolved. If politics operates routinely, the conscious attention of political participants is on goals and interests. It is a relatively specific attention. Routine, "profane" politics means, in fact, that these interests are not seen as violating more general values and norms. Nonroutine politics begins when tension between these levels is felt, either because of a shift in the nature of political activity or a shift in the general, more sacred commitments that are held to regulate them. In this situation, a tension between goals and higher levels develops. Public attention shifts from political goals to more general concerns, to the norms and values that are now perceived as in danger. In this instance we can say there has been the generalization of public consciousness that I referred to earlier as the central point of the ritual process.

It is in light of this analysis that we can understand the shift in the telling of Watergate. It was first viewed merely as something on the level of goals, "just politics," by 75 percent of the American people. Two years after the break-in, by summer 1974, public opinion had sharply changed. Now Watergate was regarded as an issue that violated fundamental customs and morals, and eventually—by 50 percent of the population—as a challenge to the most sacred values that sustained political order itself. By the end of this two-year crisis period, almost half of those who had voted for Nixon changed their minds, and two-thirds of all voters thought the issue had now gone far beyond politics. What had happened was a radical generalization of opinion. The facts were not that different, but the social context in which they were seen had been transformed.

If we look at the two-year transformation of the context of Watergate, we see the creation and resolution of a fundamental social crisis, a resolution that involved the deepest ritualization of political life. To achieve this "religious" status, there had to be an extraordinary generalization of opinion vis-a-vis a political threat that was initiated by the very center of established power and a successful struggle not just against that power in its social form but against the powerful cultural rationales it mobilized. To understand this process of crisis creation and resolution, we must integrate ritual theory with a more muscular theory of social structure and process. Let me lay these factors out generally before I indicate how each relates to Watergate.

What must happen for an entire society to experience fundamental crisis and ritual renewal?

First, there has to be sufficient social consensus so that an event will be considered polluting (Douglas, 1966), or deviant, by more than a mere fragment of the population. Only with sufficient consensus, in other words, can "society" itself be aroused and indignant.

Second, there has to be the perception by significant groups who participate in this consensus that the event is not only deviant but threatens to pollut the "center" (Shils, 1975: 3–16) of society.

Third, if this deep crisis is to be resolved, institutional social controls must be brought into play. However, even legitimate attacks on the polluting sources of crisis are often viewed as frightening. For this reason, such controls also mobilize instrumental force and the threat of force to bring polluting forces to heel.

Fourth, social control mechanisms must be accompanied by the mobilization and struggle of elites and publics that are differentiated and relatively autonomous (e.g., Eisenstadt, 1971; Keller, 1963) from the structural center of society. Through this process there the formation of countercenters begins.

Finally, fifth, there has to be effective processes of symbolic interpretation, that is, ritual and purification processes that continue the labeling process and enforce the strength of the symbolic, sacred center of society at the expense of a center that is increasingly seen as merely structural, profane, and impure. In so doing, such processes demonstrate conclusively that deviant or "transgressive" qualities are the sources of this threat.

In elaborating how each one of these five factors came into play in the course of Watergate, I will indicate how, in a complex society, reintegration and symbolic renewal are far from being automatic processes. Durkheim's original ritual theory was developed in the context of simple societies. The result was that "ritualization" was confidently expected. In contemporary fragmented societies, political reintegration and cultural renewal depend on the contingent outcomes of specific historical circumstances. The successful alignment of these forces is very rare indeed.
First, there must emerge the capacity for consensus. Between the Watergate break-in in June 1972 and the Nixon-McGovern election contest in November, the necessary social consensus did not emerge. This was a time during which Americans experienced intense political polarization, though most of the actual social conflicts of the 1960s had significantly cooled. Nixon had built his presidency, in part, on a backlash against these 1960s conflicts, and the Democratic candidate, George McGovern, was the very symbol of this "leftism" to many. Both candidates thought that they, and the nation, were continuing the battles of the 1960s. McGovern's active presence during this period, therefore, allowed Nixon to continue to promote the authoritarian politics that could justify Watergate. One should not suppose, however, because there was not significant social reintegration during this period that no significant symbolic activity occurred. Agreement in complex societies occurs at various levels. There may be extremely significant cultural agreement (e.g., complex and systematic agreement about the structure and content of language) while more socially or structurally related areas of subjective agreement (e.g., rules about political conduct) do not exist. Symbolic agreement without social consensus can exist, moreover, within more substantive cultural arenas than language.

During the summer of 1972 one can trace a complex symbolic development in the American collective conscience, a consensual development that laid the basis for everything that followed even while it did not produce consensus at more social levels. It was during this four-month period that the meaning complex "Watergate" came to be defined. In the first weeks that followed the break-in at the Democratic headquarters, "Watergate" existed, in semiotic terms, merely as a sign, as a denotation. This word simply referred, moreover, to a single event. In the weeks that followed, the sign "Watergate," became more complex, referring to a series of interrelated events touched off by the break-in, including charges of political corruption, presidential denials, legal suits, and arrests. By August 1972, "Watergate" had become transformed from a mere sign to a redent symbol, a word that rather than denoting actual events connoted multifold moral meanings.

Watergate had become a symbol of pollution, embodying a sense of evil and impurity. In structural terms, the facts directly associated with Watergate—those who were immediately associated with the crime, the office and apartment complex, the persons implicated later—were placed on the negative side of a system of symbolic classification. Those persons or institutions responsible for ferreting out and arresting these criminal elements were placed on the other, positive side. This bifurcated model of pollution and purity was then superimposed onto the traditional good/evil structure of American civic discourse, whose relevant elements appeared in the form indicated in Table 6.1. It is clear, then, that while significant symbolic structuring had occurred, the "center" of the American social structure was in no way implicated.

Table 6.1  Symbolic classification system as of August 1972

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evil</th>
<th>Good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watergate Hotel</td>
<td>Nixon and staff/White House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The burglars</td>
<td>FBI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirty Tricksters</td>
<td>Courts/Justice Department's prosecution team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money raisers</td>
<td>Federal &quot;watchdog&quot; bureaucracy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>American Civil Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communism/fascism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadowy enemies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad presidents (e.g., Harding/Grant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great scandals (e.g., Teapot Dome)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

mind. Few Americans would have disagreed about the moral meanings of "Watergate" as a collective representation. Yet while the social basis of this symbol was widely inclusive, the symbol just about exhausted the meaning complex of Watergate as such. The term identified a complex of events and people with moral evil, but the collective consciousness did not connect this symbol to significant social roles or institutional behaviors. Neither the Republican party nor President Nixon's staff nor, least of all, President Nixon himself had yet been polluted by the symbol of Watergate. In this sense, it is possible to say that some symbolic generalization had occurred but that value generalization within the social system had not.

It had not because the social and cultural polarization of American society had not yet sufficiently abated. Because there was continued polarization, there could be no movement upward toward shared social values; because there was no generalization, there could be no societal sense of crisis. Because there was no sense of crisis, in turn, it became impossible for the other forces I have mentioned to come into play. There was no widespread perception of a threat to the center, and because there was none there could be no mobilization against the center. Against a powerful, secure, and legitimate center, social control forces like investigative bodies, courts, and congressional committees were afraid to act. Similarly, there was no struggle by differentiated elites against the threat to (and by) the center, for many of these elites were divided, afraid, and immobilized. Finally, no deep ritual processes emerged—that could have happened only in response to tensions generated by the first four factors.
Yet in the six months following the election the situation began to be reversed. First, consensus began to emerge. The end of an intensely divisive election period allowed a realignment that had been building at least for two years prior to Watergate. The social struggles of the 1960s had long been over, and many issues had been taken over by centrist groups.3

In the 1960s struggles, the Left had invoked critical universalism and rationality, tying these values to social movements for equality and against institutional authority, including, of course, the authority of the patriotic state itself. The Right, for its part, evoked particularism, tradition, and the defense of authority and the state. In the postelection period, critical universalism could now be articulated by centrist forces without being likened to the specific ideological themes or goals of the Left; indeed, such criticism could now be raised in defense of American national patriotism itself. With this emerging consensus, the possibility for a common feeling of moral violation emerged, and with it began the movement toward generalization vis-à-vis political goals and interests. Once this first resource of consensus had become available, the other developments I have mentioned could be activated.

The second and third factors were anxiety about the center and the invocation of institutional social control. Because the postelection developments described above provided a much less “politicized” atmosphere, it became safer to exercise social control. Such institutions as the courts, the Justice Department, various bureaucratic agencies, and special congressional committees could issue regulations in a more legitimate way. The very effectiveness of these social control institutions legitimated the media’s efforts, in turn, to spread Watergate pollution closer to central institutions. The exercise of social control and the greater approximation to the center reinforced public doubt about whether Watergate was, in fact, only a limited crime, forcing more “facts” to surface. While the ultimate generality and seriousness of Watergate remained open, fears that Watergate might pose a threat to the center of American society quickly spread to significant publics and elites. The question about proximity to the center preempted every major group during this early postelection Watergate period. Senator Baker, at a later time, articulated this anxiety with the question that became famous during the summertime Senate hearings: “How much did the President know, and when did he know it?” This anxiety about the threat to the center, in turn, intensified the growing sense of normative violation, increased consensus, and contributed to generalization. It also rationalized the invocation of coercive social control. Finally, in structural terms, it began to realign the “good” and “bad” sides of the Watergate symbolization. Which side of the classification system were Nixon and his staff really on?

The fourth factor was elite conflict. Throughout this period, the generalization process—pushed by consensus, by the fear for the center, and by the activities of new institutions of social control—was fueled by a desire for revenge against Nixon by alienated institutional elites. These elites had represented “leftism” or simply “sophisticated cosmopolitanism” to Nixon during his first four years in office, and they had been the object of his legal and illegal attempts at suppression or control. They included journalists and newspapers, intellectuals, universities, scientists, lawyers, religious groups, foundations, and, last but not least, authorities in various public agencies and the U.S. Congress. Motivated by a desire to get even, to reaffirm their threatened status, and to defend their universalistic values, these elites moved to establish themselves as countercenters in the years of crisis.

By May 1973, almost one year after the break-in and six months after the election, all of these forces for crisis creation and resolution were in motion. Significant changes in public opinion had been mobilized, and powerful structural resources were being brought into play. It is only at this point that the fifth crisis factor could emerge. Only now could there emerge deep processes of ritualization—sacralization, pollution, and purification—though there had certainly already been important symbolic developments.

The first fundamental ritual process of the Watergate crisis involved the Senate Select Committee’s televised hearings, which began in May 1973 and continued through August. This event had tremendous repercussions on the symbolic patterning of the entire affair. The decision to hold and to televise the Senate’s hearings was a response to the anxiety that had built up within important segments of the population. The symbolic process that ensued functioned to canalize this anxiety in certain distinctive, more generalized, and more consensual directions. The hearings constituted a kind of civic rite that reified very general yet nonetheless very crucial currents of critical universalism and rationality in the American political culture. It recreated the sacred, generalized morality on which more mundane conceptions of office are based, and it did so by invoking the mythical level of national understanding in a way that few other events have in postwar history.

These hearings were initially authorized by the Senate on specific political and normative grounds, their mandate being to expose corrupt campaign practices and to suggest legal reforms. The pressure for ritual process, however, soon made this initial mandate all but forgotten. The hearings became a sacred process by which the nation could reach a judgment about the now critically judged Watergate crime. The consensus-building, generalizing aspect of the process was to some extent quite conscious. Congressional leaders assigned membership to the committee on the basis of the widest possible regional and political representation and excluded from the committee all potentially polarizing political personalities. Most of the generalizing process, however, developed much less consciously in the course of the event itself. The developing ritual quality forced committee members to mask their often sharp internal divisions behind commitments to civic universalism. Many of the committee staff, for example, had been radical or liberal activists during the 1960s. They now had to assert patriotic universalism without any reference to specific left-
wing issues. Other staffers, who had been strong Nixon supporters sympathetic to backslash politics, now had to forsake entirely that justification for political action.

The televised hearings, in the end, constituted a liminal experience (Turner, 1969), one radically separated from the profane and mundane grounds of everyday life. A ritual *communitas* was created for Americans to share, and within this reconstructed community none of the polarizing issues that had generated the Watergate crisis, or the historical justifications that had motivated it, could be raised. Instead, the hearings revivified the civic culture on which democratic conceptions of "office" have depended throughout American history. To understand how a liminal world could be created it is necessary to see it as a phenomenological world in the sense that Schutz has described. The hearings succeeded in becoming a world "unto itself." It was *sui generis*, a world without history. Its characters did not have rememberable pasts. It was in a very real sense "out of time." The framing devices of the television medium contributed to the deanimation that produced this phenomenological status. The in-camera editing and the repetition, juxtaposition, simplification, and other techniques that allowed the story to appear mythical were invisible. Add to this "bracketed experience" the hushed voices of the announcers, the pomp and ceremony of the "event," and we have the recipe for constructing, within the medium of television, a sacred time and sacred space.4

At the level of mundane reality, two ferociously competitive political forces were at war during the Watergate hearings. These forces had to translate themselves into the symbolic idioms of the occasion; as a result, they were defined and limited by cultural structures even as they struggled to define and limit these structures in turn. For Nixon and his political supporters, "Watergate" had to be defined politically: what the Watergate burglars and coverups had done was "just politics," and the anti-Nixon senators on the Watergate committee (a majority of whom, after all, were Democratic) were characterized simply as engaged in a political witch hunt. For Nixon's critics on the committee, by contrast, this mundane political definition had to be opposed. Nixon could be criticized and Watergate legitimated as a real crisis only if the issues were defined as being above politics and involving fundamental moral concerns. These issues, moreover, had to be linked to forces near the center of political society.

The first issue was whether the hearings were to be televised at all. To allow something to assume the form of a ritualized event is to give participants in a drama the right to forcibly intervene in the culture of the society; it is to give to an event, and to those who are defining its meaning, a special, privileged access to the collective conscience. In simple societies, ritual processes are ascribed: they occur at predetermined periods and in predetermined ways. In more complex societies, ritual processes are achieved, often, against great odds. Indeed, in a modern society the assumption of ritual status often poses a danger and a threat to vested interests and groups. We know, in fact, that strenuous efforts were made

by the White House to prevent the Senate hearings from being televised, to urge that less television time be devoted to them, and even to pressure the networks to cut short their coverage after it had begun. There were also efforts to force the committee to consider the witnesses in a sequence that was far less dramatic than the one eventually followed.

Because these efforts were unsuccessful, the ritual form was achieved.5 Through television, tens of millions of Americans participated symbolically and emotionally in the deliberations of the committee. Viewing became morally obligatory for wide segments of the population. Old routines were broken, new ones formed. What these viewers saw was a highly simplified drama—heroes and villains formed in due course. But this drama created a deeply serious symbolic occasion.

If achieving the form of modern ritual is contingent, so is explicating the content, for modern rituals are not nearly so automatically coded as earlier ones. Within the context of the sacred time of the hearings, administration witnesses and senators struggled for moral legitimation, for definitional or ritual superiority and dominance. The end result was in no sense preordained. It depended on successful symbolic work. To describe this symbolic work is to embark on the ethnography, or hermeneutics, of televised ritual.

The Republican and Administration witnesses who were "called to account for themselves" pursued two symbolic strategies during the hearings. First, they tried to prevent public attention from moving from the political/profane to the value/sacred level at all. In this way, they repeatedly tried to rob the event of its phenomenological status as a ritual. They tried to cool out the proceedings by acting relaxed and casual. For example, H. R. Haldeman, the president's chief of staff who was compared to a Gestapo figure in the popular press, let his hair grow long so he would look less sinister and more like "one of the boys." These administrative witnesses also tried to rationalize and specify the public's orientation to their actions by arguing that they had acted with common sense according to pragmatic considerations. They suggested that they had decided to commit their crimes only according to standards of technical rationality. The secret meetings that had launched a wide range of illegal activities, and considered many more, were described not as evil, mysterious conspiracies but as technical discussions about the "costs" of engaging in various disruptive and illegal acts.

Yet the realm of values could not really be avoided. The symbol of Watergate was already quite generalized, and the ritual form of the hearings was already in place. It was within this value realm, indeed, that the most portentous symbolic struggles of the hearings occurred, for what transpired was nothing less than a struggle for the spiritual soul of the American republic. Watergate had been committed and initially justified in the name of cultural and political backslash, values that in certain respects contradicted the universalism, critical rationality, and tolerance on which contemporary democracy must be based. Republican and Administration witnesses evoked this subculture of backlash values. They
urged the audience to return to the polarized climate of the 1960s. They sought to justify their actions by appealing to patriotism, to the need for stability, to the "un-American" and thereby deviant qualities of McGovern and the Left. They also justified it by arguing against cosmopolitanism, which in the minds of backlash traditionalists had undermined respect for tradition and neutralized the universalistic constitutional rules of the game. More specifically, Administration witnesses appealed to loyalty as the ultimate standard that should govern the relationship between subordinates and authorities. An interesting visual theme that summed up both of these appeals was the passive reference by Administration witnesses to family values. Each witness brought his wife and children if he had them. To see them lined up behind him, prim and proper, provided symbolic links to the tradition, authority, and personal loyalty that symbolically bound the groups of backlash culture.

The anti-Nixon senators, for their part, faced an enormous challenge. Outside of their own constituencies they were not well known; arrayed against them were representatives of an administration that six months before had been elected by the largest landslide vote in American history. This gigantic vote had been, moreover, partly justified by the particularistic sentiments of the backlash, the very sentiments that the senators were now out to demonstrate were deviant and isolated from the true American tradition.

What was the symbolic work in which the senators engaged? In the first instance, they denied the validity of particularist sentiments and motives. They bracketed the political realities of everyday life, and particularly the critical realities of life in the only recently completed 1960s. At no time in the hearings did the senators refer to the polarized struggles of that day. By making those struggles invisible, they denied any moral context for the witnesses' actions. This strategy of isolating backlash values was supported by the only positive explanation the senators allowed, namely, that the conspirators were just plain stupid. They poked fun at them as utterly devoid of common sense, implying that no normal person could ever conceive of doing such things.

This strategic denial, or bracketing in the phenomenological sense, was coupled with a ringing and unabashed affirmation of the universalistic myths that are the backbone of the American civic culture. Through their questions, statements, references, gestures, and metaphors, the senators maintained that every American, high or low, rich or poor, acts virtuously in terms of the pure universalism of civil society. Nobody is selfish or inhuman. No American is concerned with money or power at the expense of fair play. No team loyalty is so strong that it violates common good or makes criticism toward authority unnecessary. Truth and justice are the basis of American political society. Every citizen is rational and will act in accordance with justice if he is allowed to know the truth. Law is the perfect embodiment of justice, and office consists of the application of just law to power and force. Because power corrupts, office must enforce impersonal obligations in the name of the people's justice and reason.

Narrative myths that embodied these themes were often invoked. Sometimes these were timeless fables, sometimes they were stories about the origins of English common law, often they were the narratives about the exemplary behavior of America's most sacred presidents. John Dean, for example, the most compelling anti-Nixon witness, strikingly embodied the American detective myth (Smith, 1970). This figure of authority is derived from the Puritan tradition and in countless different stories is portrayed as ruthlessly pursuing truth and injustice without emotion or vanity. Other narratives developed in a more contingent way. For Administration witnesses who confessed, the committee's "priests" granted forgiveness in accord with well-established ritual forms, and their conversions to the cause of righteousness constituted fables for the remainder of the proceedings.

These democratic myths were confirmed by the senators' confrontation with family values. Their families were utterly invisible throughout the hearings. We didn't know if they had families, but they certainly were not presented. Like the committee's chairman, Sam Ervin, who was always armed with the Bible and the Constitution, the senators embodied transcendent justice divorced from personal or emotional concerns. Another confrontation that assumed ritual status was the swearing-in of the witnesses. Raising their right hands, each swore to tell the truth before God and man. While this oath did have a formal legal status, it also served the much more important function of ensuring moral degradation. It reduced the famous and powerful to the status of everyman. It placed them in subordinate positions vis-à-vis the overpowering and universalistic law of the land.

In terms of more direct and explicit conflict, the senators' questions centered on three principle themes, each fundamental to the moral anchoring of a civic democratic society. First, they emphasized the absolute priority of office obligations over personal ones: "This is a nation of laws not men" was a constant refrain. Second, they emphasized the embeddedness of such office obligations in a higher, transcendent authority: "The laws of men" must give way to the "laws of God." Or as Sam Ervin, the committee chairman, put it to Maurice Stans, the ill-fated treasurer of Nixon's Committee to Re-Elect the President (CRETP), "Which is more important, not violating laws or not violating ethics?" Finally, the senators insisted that this transcendental anchoring of interest conflict allowed America to be truly solidaristic—in Hegel's terms, a true "concrete universal." As Senator Wicker famously put it: "Republicans do not cover up, Republicans do not go ahead and threaten... and God knows Republicans don't view their fellow Americans as enemies to be harassed [but as] human being[s] to be loved and won."

In normal times many of these statements would have been greeted with derision, with hoots and cynicism. In fact, many of them were lies in terms of the specific empirical reality of everyday political life and especially in terms of the political reality of the 1960s. Yet they were not laughed at or hooted down.
The reason was because this was not everyday life. This had become a ritualized and liminal event, a period of intense generalization that had powerful claims to truth. It was a sacred time, and the hearing chambers had become a sacred place. The committee was evoking luminescent values, not trying to describe empirical fact. On this mythical level, the statements could be seen and understood as true—as, indeed, embodying the normative aspirations of the American people. They were so seen and understood by significant portions of the population.

The hearings ended without making law or issuing specific judgments of evidence, but they nevertheless had profound effects. They helped to establish and fully legitimate a framework that henceforth gave the Watergate crisis its meaning. They accomplished this by continuing and deepening the cultural process that had begun before the election itself. Actual events and characters in the Watergate episode were organized in terms of the higher antitheses between the pure and the impure elements of America's civil culture. Before the hearings, "Watergate" was already a symbol redolent with the structured antitheses of American mythical life, antitheses that were implicitly linked by the American people to the structure of their civil codes. What the hearings accomplished, first, was to make this cultural linkage explicit and pronounced. The "good guys" of the Watergate process—their actions and motives—were purified in the resacralization process through their identification with the Constitution, norms of fairness, and citizen solidarity. The perpetrators of Watergate, and the themes which they evoked as justification, were polluted by association with symbols of civil evil: sectarianism, self-interest, particularistic loyalty. As this description implies, moreover, the hearings also restructured the linkages between Watergate elements and the nation's political center. Many of the most powerful men surrounding President Nixon were now implacably associated with Watergate evil, and some of Nixon's most outspoken enemies were linked to Watergate good. As the structural and symbolic centers of the civil religion were becoming so increasingly differentiated, the American public found the presidential party and the elements of civic sacredness more and more difficult to bring together (see table 6.2).

While this reading of the events is based on ethnography and interpretation, the process of deepening pollution is also revealed by poll data. Between the 1972 election and the very end of the crisis in 1974, there was only one large increase in the percentage of Americans who considered Watergate "serious." This occurred during the first two months of the Watergate hearings, April through early July 1973. Before the hearings, only 31 percent of Americans considered Watergate a "serious" issue. By early July, 50 percent did, and this figure remained constant until the end of the crisis.

Although a fundamental kind of ritual experience had clearly occurred, any contemporary application of cultural theory acknowledges that such modern rituals are never complete. In the first place, the symbols evoked by ritual process must be carefully differentiated. Despite the frequent references to presi-
dential involvement, and despite the president's shadow throughout the hearings, poll data reveal that most Americans did not emerge from the ritual experience convinced of President Nixon's involvement. In the second place, the ritual effects of the hearings were unevenly felt. The Senate hearings were most powerful in their effect on certain centrist and left-wing groups: (1) among McGovern voters whose outrage at Nixon was splendidly confirmed; (2) among moderate Democrats who even if they had voted for Nixon were now outraged at him, particularly after many had crossed party lines to vote for him; (3) among moderate or liberal Republicans and independents who, while disagreeing with many of Nixon's positions, had voted for him anyway. The latter two groups were particularly important to the entire process of Watergate. They were prototypically crosspressured, and it was the crosspressured groups who, along with radical McGovern supporters, became most deeply involved in the hearings. Why? Perhaps they needed the hearings to sort out confused feelings, to clarify crucial issues, to resolve their uncomfortable ambivalence. Certainly such a relative stake can be found in the poll data. In the period mid-April 1973 to late June 1973—the period of the hearings' beginnings and their most dramatic revelations—the growth among Republicans who thought Watergate "serious" was 20 percent and among independents 18 percent; for Democrats, however, the percentage growth was only 15 percent.6

The year-long crisis that followed the hearings, from August 1973 to August 1974, was punctuated by episodes of moral convulsion and public anger, by renewed ritualization, by the further shifting of symbolic classification to include the structural center—the Nixon presidency—and by the further expansion of the solidarity base of this symbolism to include most of the significant segments of American society. In the wake of the Senate hearings, the Special Prosecutor's Office was created. It was staffed, though not chaired, almost entirely by formerly alienated members of the left-wing opposition to Nixon, who with their assumption of office made publicly accepted professions of their commitments to impartial justice, a process that further demonstrated the powerful generalizing and solidarizing phenomenon underway. The first special prosecutor was Archibald Cox, whose Puritan and Harvard background made him the ideal embodiment of the civil religion. Nixon fired Cox in October 1973 because Cox had asked the courts to challenge the president's decision to withhold information from the Special Prosecutor's Office. In response there was a massive outpouring of spontaneous public anger, which newspaper reporters immediately dubbed the "Saturday Night Massacre."

Americans seemed to view Cox's firing as a profanation of the attachments they had built up during the Senate hearings, commitments to newly revivified sacred tenets and against certain diabolical values and tabooed actors. Because Americans had identified their positive values and hopes with Cox, his firing made them fear pollution of their ideals and themselves. This anxiety caused public outrage, an explosion of public opinion during which three million protest letters were sent to the White House over a single weekend. These letters were labeled a "flash flood," a metaphor that played on the precrisis signification of the word "Watergate." The metaphor suggested that the scandal's polluted water had finally broken the river gates and flooded surrounding communities. The term "Saturday Night Massacre" similarly intertwined deeper rhetorical themes. In the 1920s a famous mob killing in gangland Chicago had been called the "St. Valentine's Day Massacre." "Black Friday" was the day in 1929 when the American stock market fell, shattering the hopes and trust of millions of Americans. Cox's firing, then, produced the same kind of symbolic condensation as dream symbolism, but on a mass scale. The anxiety of the citizenry was deepened, moreover, by the fact that pollution had now spread directly to the very figure who was supposed to hold American civil religion together, the president himself. By firing Cox, President Nixon came into direct contact with the molten lava of sacred impurity. The pollution that "Watergate" carried had now spread to the very center of American social structure. While support for Nixon's impeachment had gone up only a few points during the Senate hearings, after the "Saturday Night Massacre" it increased by fully 10 points. From this flash flood came the first congressional motions for impeachment and the instauration of the impeachment process in the House of Representatives.

Another major expansion of pollution occurred when the transcripts of White House conversations secretly taped during the Watergate period were released in April and May 1974. The tapes contained numerous examples of presidential deceit, and they were also laced with presidential expletives and ethnic slurs. Once again, there was tremendous public indignation at Nixon's behavior. By his words and recorded actions he had polluted the very tenets that the entire Watergate process had revivified: the sacredness of truth and the image of America as an inclusive, tolerant community. The symbolic and structural centers of American society were further separated, with Nixon (the representative of the structural center) increasingly pushed into the polluted, evil side of the Watergate dichotomies. This transcript convulsion helped define the symbolic center as a distinct area, and it demonstrated that this center was neither liberal nor conservative. Indeed, most of the indignation over Nixon's foul language was informed by conservative beliefs about proper behavior and civil decorum, beliefs that had been flagrantly violated by Nixon's enemies, the Left, during the polarized period that preceded the Watergate crisis.

In June and July of the year following, legal proceedings began against Nixon in the House of Representatives. These impeachment hearings were conducted by the House Judiciary Committee, and they marked the most solemn and formalized ritual of the entire Watergate episode. This proved to be the closing ceremony, a rite of expulsion in which the body politic rid itself of the last and most menacing source of sacred impurity. By the time of these hearings the symbolization of Watergate was already highly developed; in fact, Watergate
had become not only a symbol with significant referents but also a powerful metaphor whose self-evident meaning itself served to define unfolding events. The meaning structure associated with "Watergate," moreover, now unequivocally placed a vast part of White House and "center" personnel on the side of civil pollution and evil. The only question that remained was whether President Nixon himself would finally be placed alongside them as well. The House hearings recapitulated the themes that had appeared in the Senate hearings one year before. The most pervasive background debate was over the meaning of "high crimes and misdemeanors," the constitutional phrase that set forth the standard for impeachment. Nixon's supporters argued for a narrow interpretation that held that an officer had to have committed an actual civil crime. Nixon's opponents argued for a broad interpretation that would include issues of political morality, irresponsibility, and deceit. Clearly, this was a debate over the level of system crisis: were merely normative, legal issues involved, or did this crisis reach all the way to the most general value underpinnings of the entire system? Given the highly ritualized format of the hearings, and the tremendous symbolization that had preceded the committee's deliberations, it hardly seems possible that the committee could have adopted anything other than the broad interpretation of "high crimes and misdemeanors."

This generalized definition set the tone for the hearings' single most distinctive quality: the ever-recurring emphasis on the members' fairness and the objectivity of its procedures. Journalists frequently remarked on how congressmen rose to the sense of occasion, presenting themselves not as political representatives of particular interests but as embodiments of sacred civil documents and democratic mores. This transcendence of wide partisan division was echoed by the cooperation among the Judiciary Committee's staff, which, in fact, had actually set the tone for the committee's formal, televised deliberations. Key members of the staff had, in the 1960s, been critics of establishment activities like the Vietnam War and supporters of antiestablishment movements like civil rights. Yet this partisan background never publicly surfaced during the vast journalistic coverage of the committee's work; even right-wing conservatives never made an issue of it. Why not? Because this committee, like its Senate counterpart one year before, existed in a liminal, detached place. They, too, operated within sacred time, their deliberations continuous not with the immediate partisan past but with the great constitutive moments of the American republic. They were framed the great patriots who had signed the Declaration of Independence, created the Constitution, and resolved the crisis of the Union that had started the Civil War.

This aura of liminal transcendence moved many of the most conservative members of the committee, southerners whose constituents had voted for Nixon by landslide proportions, to act out of conscience rather than political expediency. The southern bloc, indeed, formed the key to the majority coalition that emerged to support three articles of impeachment. Revealingly, this same coalition purposefully eschewed a fourth article, earlier proposed by liberal Democrats, that condemned Nixon's secret bombing of Cambodia. Though this earlier article did refer to a real violation of law, it was an issue that was interpreted by most Americans in specifically political terms, terms about which they still widely disagreed. The final three impeachment articles, by contrast, referred only to fully generalized issues. At stake was the code that regulated political authority, the question of whether impersonal obligations of office can and should control personal interest and behavior. It was Nixon's violation of the obligations of his office that made the House vote his impeachment.

After Nixon resigned from office, the relief of American society was palpable. For an extended period the political community had been in a liminal state, a condition of heightened anxiety and moral immersion that scarcely allowed time for the mundane issues of political life. When Vice-President Ford ascended to the presidency, there were a series of symbolic transformations that indicated ritualistic reaggregation. President Ford, in his first words after taking office, announced that "our long national nightmare is over." Newspaper headlines proclaimed that the sun had finally broken through the clouds, that a new day was being born. Americans effused about the strength and unity of the country. Ford himself was transformed, through these reaggregating rites, from a rather bumbling partisan leader into a national healer, the incarnation of a "good guy" who embodied the highest standards of ethical and political behavior.

Before continuing with my account of the symbolic process after this reaggregation, I would like to return, once again, to the fact that modern rituals are never complete. Even after the ritual ceremony that consensually voted articles of impeachment and the ritual renewal with President Ford, poll data reveal that a significant segment of American society remained unconvinced. Between 18 and 20 percent of Americans did not find President Nixon guilty, either of a legal crime or of moral turpitude. These Americans, in other words, did not participate in the generalization of opinion that drove Nixon from office. They interpreted the Watergate process, rather, as stimulated by political vengeance by Nixon's enemies. The demographics of this loyalist group are not particularly revealing. They were of mixed education and from every class and occupation. One of the few significant structural correlations was their tendency to be from the South. What did, apparently, really distinguish this group was their political values. They held a rigid and narrow idea of political loyalty, identifying the belief in God, for example, with commitment to Americanism. They also held a deeply personalized view of political authority, tending much more than other Americans to express their allegiance to Nixon as a man and to his family as well. Finally, and not surprisingly, this group had reacted much more negatively than other Americans to the left-wing social movements of the 1960s. The fact that they were committed to a polarized and exclusivist vision of political solidarity reinforced their reluctance to generalize from specifically political issues.
to general moral concerns. Such generalization would have involved not only criticism of Nixon but the restoration of a wider, more inclusive political community. In voting for Nixon they had supported a candidate who promised to embody their backlash sentiments and who had appeared, during his first years in office, inclined to carry out their wishes for a narrow and primordial political community.

The period of reaggregation after Watergate's liminal period—the closure of the immediate ritual episode—raises, once again, the problem of the dichotomizing nature of Western social theory, for it involves the relationship between such categories as charisma/routine, sacred/profane, generalization/institutionalization. (See "The Dilemma of Uniqueness," chapter 2.) On the one hand, it is clear that with Ford's ascension a much more routine atmosphere prevailed. Institutional actors and the public in general seemed to return to the profane level of goal and interest conflict. Political dissensus once again prevailed. Conflicts over the inflationary economy captured the news for the first time in months, and this issue, along with America's dependence on foreign oil, loomed large in the congressional elections of autumn 1974.

According to the theories of routinization and specification, or institutionalization, the end of ritualization ushered in a new, post-symbolic phase, in which there is the institutionalization or crystallization of ritual spirit in a concrete form. The most elaborated theory of this transition is found in the works of Smelser (1959, 1963) and Parsons (Parsons & Bales, 1955: 35–132). Here, post-crisis structures are described as evolving because they are better adapted to deal with the source of initial disequilibrium. Generalization is ended, then, because of the efficiency with which newly created structures deal with concrete role behavior. Now, to a certain extent, such new and more adaptive institutions building did occur in the course of the Watergate process. New structures emerged that allowed the political system to be more differentiated, or insulated, from interest conflict and allowed universalism to be more strongly served. Conflict-of-interest rules were developed and applied to presidential appointments; congressional approval of some of the president's key staff appointments, like director of the Office of Management and Budget, was instituted; a standing special prosecutor's office was created, the attorney general being required to decide within thirty days of any congressional report on impropriety whether a prosecutor should actually be called; finally, federal financing of presidential election campaigns was passed into law. There were, in addition, a range of more informally sanctioned institutional innovations: the post of chief of staff became less powerful; the doctrine of executive privilege was used much more sparingly; Congress was consulted on important matters.

Durkheim and Weber would tend to support this dichotomous picture of crisis resolution. Weber, of course, saw most political interaction not as cultural but as instrumental. When charismatic episodes did occur, they would be deflated by an inevitable process of routinization triggered by the demands for control exerted by the leader's self-interested staff after his "death (Weber, 1968: 246–55)." Durkheim's understanding is more complex. On the one hand, Durkheim saw the nonritual world as thoroughly profane, as nonvaluational, as political or economic, as conflictual, and even in a certain sense as nonsocial (Alexander, 1982: 292–306). At the same time, however, Durkheim clearly overlaid this sharp distinction with a more continuous theory, for he insisted that the effervescence from rituals continued to infuse postritual life for some time after the immediate period of ritual interaction.

Though the crisis model of generalization-specification has been taken from functionalist analysis, the notion of generalization as ritual has been drawn from Durkheim. The analysis of social crisis presented here, therefore, has given much more autonomy to symbolic process than would a purely functionalist one. Generalization and ritualization are not engaged, in my view, purely for psychological or social-structural reasons—either because of anxiety or the inefficiency of social structures—but also because of the violation of ardently adhered-to moral beliefs. Symbolic processes occur as much to work out issues on this level as to provide more efficient structures for addressing specific, "real" disequilibrating problems. It is for this reason that ritualization is succeeded not by merely structural change but also by continued cultural effervescence. The recharged antinomies of the cultural order, and the emotional intensity that underlies them continue to create moral conflict and, often, to support significantly different cultural orientations.

As compared, for example, to the aftershocks of the Dreyfus Affair, the effervescence of Watergate must be understood in terms of relative cultural integration. "Watergate" came to be viewed—and this is extraordinarily significant in comparative terms—not as an issue of the Left or the Right but rather as a national issue about which most parties agreed (see Schudson, 1992). There were, it was universally agreed, certain "lessons of Watergate" from which the nation had to learn. American talked incessantly in the period between 1974 and 1976 about the imperatives of what was referred to as "post-Watergate morality." They experienced this as an imperious social force that laid waste to institutions and reputations. "Post-Watergate morality" was the name given to the effervescence from the ritual event. It named the revivified values of critical rationality, anti-authoritarianism, and civil solidarity, and it named the polluted values of conformity, personalistic deference, and factional strife. For several years after the end of liminality, Americans applied these highly charged moral imperatives to group and interest conflict and to bureaucratic life, demanding radical universalism and heightened solidarity at every turn.

For the adult population, therefore—the case seems to have been somewhat different for children—the effect of Watergate was not increased cynicism or political withdrawal. Quite the opposite. Ritual effervescence increased faith in the political "system" even while the distrust it produced continued to undermine public confidence in particular institutional actors and authorities. Insti-
tutional distrust is different from the delegitimation of general systems per se (Lipset & Schneider, 1983). If there is trust in the norms and values that are con-
ceived of as regulating political life, there may actually be more contention over
the wielding of power and force (see Barber, 1983). In this sense, political
democracy and political efficiency may be opposed, for the first lends itself to
conflict while the second depends on order and control.

In the immediate post-Watergate period, a heightened sensitivity to the gen-
eral meaning of office and democratic responsibility did indeed lead to height-
ened conflict and to a series of challenges to authoritative control. Watergate be-
came more than ever before a highly charged metaphor. It was no longer simply
a referent for naming events that objectively occurred but a moral standard that
helped subjectively to create them. Members of the polity, inspired by its sym-
bolic power, sought out sinful behavior and tried to punish it. The result was a
series of scandals: "Koreagate" and "Billygate" on the American scene, for exam-
ple, and "Winegate" abroad. Indeed, the symbolic power of the metaphor has
proved remarkably durable up to today. It set the narrative framework within
which President Clinton's actions during "Monicagate" were judged.

The giant explosion of Watergate into the American collective conscience in
1973 and 1974 produced aftershocks of populist anti-authoritarianism and criti-
cal rationality.

1. Almost immediately after the reaggregation ceremonies, there unfolded in
close succession a series of unprecedented congressional investigations. Nel-
son Rockefeller, Ford's vice-presidential nominee, was subjected to a long and
heated televised inquiry into the possible misuses of his personal wealth. Enor-
mous televised investigations were also launched by the Congress into the
secret, often antidemocratic working of the CIA and the FBI, institutions whose
patriotic authority had previously been unquestioned. This outpouring of these
"little Watergates," as they were called, extended well into the Carter adminis-
tration of 1976-80. Carter’s chief assistant, Bert Lance, was forced out of office
after highly publicized hearings that badly impugned his financial and political
integrity. Each of these investigations created a scandal in its own right; each
followed, often down to the smallest detail and word, the symbolic form estab-
lished by Watergate.

2. Whole new reform movements were generated from the Watergate spirit.
There The Society for Investigative Reporting emerged, a new organization that
responded to the spirit of morally inspired, critical journalism by those journal-
ists who had internalized the Watergate experience and sought to externalize its
model. Federal crime investigators—lawyers and policemen—formed white-
collar crime units throughout the United States. For the first time in American
history significant prosecutorial resources were shifted away from the conven-
tionally defined, often lower-class criminals to high-status office-holders in the
public and private domains. Inspired by the Watergate model, it became the
established, a priori conviction of many city, state, and federal prosecutors that
office-holders might well commit crimes against the public. By ferreting them
out and prosecuting them, they tried to maintain the moral alertness of all au-
thorities to the responsibility of office as such.

3. In the months subsequent to reaggregation, authority was critically exam-
ined at every institutional level of American society, even the most mundane.
The Boy Scouts, for example, rewrote their constitution to emphasize not just
loyalty and obedience but critical questioning. The judges of the Black Miss
America beauty pageant were accused of personalism and bias. Professional
groups examined and reworded their codes of ethics. Student-body officers of high
schools and universities were called to task after little scandals were created.
City councillors and mayors were "exposed" in every city, great and small.
Through most of these controversies, specific issues of policy and interest were
not significantly considered. It was the codes of office themselves that were at
stake.

These mundane institutional events, in other words, were actually motivated
by the heightened symbolic polarities of post-Watergate culture. This rever-
beration is further demonstrated by the continuation of other, less specifically
Watergate-related themes. There were continuous assertions, for example, that
America was morally unified. Groups that had been previously excluded or
persecuted, most particularly those associated with the Communist Party, were
publicly cleansed. I have already mentioned that those institutions most respon-
sible for political witch hunts, particularly the FBI, were reprimanded for their
un-Americanism. Books, articles, movies, and television shows appeared about
the immorality and tragedies associated with "McCarthyism;" painting perse-
cuted fellow-travelers and communists in a sympathetic and familiar light. The
antiwar movement assumed, through the same retrospective refiguring process,
a respectable, even heroic light. No doubt inspired by this rebirth of commu-
nity, fugitive leaders of New Left underground organizations began to give
themselves up, trusting the state but particularly the American opinion-making
process to give them a fair hearing. It was within the context of this same spirit
of re-integration that the first elected president after Watergate, Jimmy Carter,
issued a full and complete pardon to those who had illegally but peacefully re-
sisted the Vietnam war.

Through it all the vividness of Watergate's impure symbols remained strikingly
intact. Trials of the Watergate conspirators, former cabinet officers, and
high-ranking aides generated large headlines and great preoccupation. Their
published confessions and neea culpas were objects of intensely moral, even spiri-
tual dispute. Richard Nixon, the very personification of evil, was viewed by
alarmed Americans as a continuing source of dangerous pollution. Still a source
of symbolic power, his name and his person became representations of evil
(chapter 4), forms of what Durkheim called the "liquid impure." Americans
tried to protect themselves from this polluting Nixonian lava by building walls.
They sought to keep Nixon out of "good society" and isolated in San Clemente,
his former presidential estate. When Nixon tried to buy an expensive apartment in New York, the building’s tenants voted to bar the sale. When he traveled around the country, crowds followed to boo him and politicians shunned him. When he reappeared on television, viewers sent indignant, angry letters. Indeed, Nixon could escape this calumny only by traveling to foreign countries, though even some foreign leaders refused to associate with him in public. For Americans, there was an extraordinary fear of being touched by Nixon or his image. Such contact was believed to lead to immediate ruin. When President Ford pardoned Nixon several months after assuming office, Ford’s honeymoon with the public abruptly ended. Tarnished by this (however brief) association with Nixon, he alienated such a large body of the electorate that it cost him the subsequent presidential election.

The spirit of Watergate did eventually subside. Much of the structure and process that had stimulated the crisis reappeared, although it did so in a significantly altered form. Nixon had ridden a backlash against leftist modernity into office, and after his departure this conservative movement continued. It now, however, assumed a much more anti-authoritarian form. Social movements like the tax revolt and the anti-abortion movement combined the post-Watergate spirit of critique and challenge with particularistic and often reactionary political themes. Only six years after Watergate ended, Ronald Reagan was swept into office on many of the old backlash issues, yet on the Reagan presidency too there continued to be a noticeable post-Watergate effect. For if Reagan was even more conservative than Nixon, he was committed to carrying out his reaction against the Left in a democratic and consensual way. This commitment may not have been a personal one, but it was enforced unequivocally by the public mood and by the continuing vitality of the potential countercenters to presidential power.

Not only did the rightward movement of American politics reappear, but the authoritarianism of the “imperial presidency” regained much of its earlier force. As the distance from Watergate increased, concrete economic and political problems assumed greater importance. Solving foreign crises, inflation, energy problems—the American people focused more and more on attaining these elusive “goals.” These generated demands for specificity and efficacy, not for generalized morality. Given the structure of the American political system, these demands for efficacy necessitated a stronger executive. The concern about the morality of authority became increasingly blunted by demands for strong and effective authority. Jimmy Carter began his presidency by promising the American people “I will never lie to you.” He ended it by making a strong presidency his principal campaign slogan. By the time Reagan became president, he could openly disdain some conflict-of-interest laws, reemploy some of the less-polled Watergate figures, and move to wrap executive authority once again in a cloak of secrecy and charisma. These later developments do not mean that Watergate had no effect. The codes regulating political authority in America had been forcibly renewed, codes that, even when they are latent, continue to affect concrete political activity. Politics in America had simply, and finally, returned to the “normal” level of interests and roles.

The Iran-Contra affair of 1986–87 demonstrated both sides of the Watergate denouement—social normalization and political conservatism on the one hand and continuing normative vitality and broad democratic conventions on the other. Like Nixon and other presidents who were confronted with institutional blockages, Reagan subverted office obligations to attain his conservative foreign policy goals by illegal means. When the Democrats took back control of the Congress in November 1986, and the conservative mood of American public opinion began to change, the polarized social environment that had legitimated Reagan’s actions weakened. It was in this changed context that “Contragate” crystallized and institutional barriers against the President’s Central American forays put in place. In the midst of the furor in the public media and contentious congressional hearings, Reagan’s actions were transformed for many Americans from a questionable political strategy into an abuse, even usurpation, of power. Because this attack on earthly power was intertwined, once again, with a renewal of ideal codes, this usurpation was described as a dangerous, polluting deviation from the democratic discourse of civil society (chapter 6). These events never reached the crisis proportions of Watergate; few events in a nation’s history ever do. Yet without the “memory of justice” provided by that earlier crisis, it is doubtful that the Administration’s actions would so easily and quickly have been transformed into an affair. Ten years later, another American President learned this lesson again, in a much harder way.

Scandals are not born, they are made.
The oldest prejudice that social theory has held about modern life is that it is not prejudiced at all. Modernity will make people rational because it is scientific, and because it is so scientific, the institutions of and processes of modern society have become "purely technological." This venerable story can be pessimistic or optimistic, but it is always anticultural, for it stresses the utter materialism of the contemporary world. But this is a just-so story. The modern world is indeed technological, but technology is hardly purely material in form. It is religion and antireligion, our god and our devil, the sublime and the cursed. Technology is rooted in the deepest resources and abysses of our imagination. We can penetrate these depths only with the tools of cultural sociology that I have been developing here.

The gradual permeation of the computer into the pores of modern life deepened what Max Weber called the rationalization of the world. The computer converts every message, regardless of its substantive meaning, metaphysical remoteness, or emotional allure, into a series of numerical bits and bytes. These series are connected to others through electrical impulses. Eventually these impulses are converted back into the media of human life.

Can there be any better example of the subjection of worldly activity to impersonal rational control? Can there be any more forceful illustration of the disenchantment of the world that Weber warned would be the result? Much depends on the answer to this portentous question, for discourse about the meaning of advanced technology demarcates one of the central ideological penumbras of the age. If the answer is yes, we are not only trapped inside of Weber's cage of iron but also bound by the laws of exchange that Marx asserted would eventually force everything human into a commodity form.
This query about the rationalization of the world poses theoretical questions, not just existential ones. Can there really exist a world of purely technical rationality? Although this question may be ideologically compelling for critics of the modern world, I will argue that the theory underlying such a proposition is not correct. Because both human action and its environments are indelibly interpenetrated by the nonrational, a pure technically rational world cannot exist. Certainly the growing centrality of the digital computer is an empirical fact. This fact, however, remains to be interpreted and explained.

SOCIological ACCOUNTS OF TECHNOLOGY AS UNMEANINGFUL

Considered in its social reference—its economic and scientific forms—technology is a thing that can be touched, observed, interacted with, and calculated in an objectively rational way. Analytically, however, technology is also part of the cultural order. It is a sign, both a signifier and a signified, in relation to which actors cannot entirely separate their subjective states of mind. Social scientists have not usually considered technology in this more subjective way. Indeed, they have not typically considered it as a cultural object at all. It has appeared as the material variable par excellence, not as a point of sacrality but as the most routine of the routines, not a sign but an ant sign, the essence of a modernity that has undermined the very possibility for cultural understanding itself.

In the postmodern era, Marx has become infamous for his effusive praise in the Communist Manifesto of technology as the embodiment of scientific rationality. Marx believed that modern industrial technique, as the harbinger of progress, was breaking down the barriers of primitive and magical thought. Stripped of its capitalist integument, Marx predicted, advanced technology would be the mainspring of industrial communism, which he defined as the administration of things rather than people.1 Despite the central role he gives to technology, for Marx it is not a form of knowledge, even of the most rational sort. It is a material variable, a "force of production" (Marx, 1962). As an element of the base, technology is something actors relate to mechanistically. It is produced because the laws of the capitalist economy force factory owners to lower their costs. The effects of this incorporation are equally objective. As technology replaces human labor, the organic composition of capital changes and the rate of profit falls; barring mitigating factors, this falling rate causes the collapse of the capitalist system.

While neo-Marxism has revised the determining relationship Marx posits between economy and technology, it continues to accept Marx's view of technology as a purely material fact. In Rueschemeyer's work on the relation between power and the division of labor, for example, neither general symbolic patterns nor the internal trajectory of rational knowledge are conceived of as affecting technological growth. "It is the inexorability of interest and power constellations," Rueschemeyer (1986: 117–8) argues, "which shape even fundamental research and which determine translations of knowledge into new products and new ways of production." We might expect modern functionalism, the political and theoretical antithesis to Marxism, to view technology very differently, but this is true in an only limited sense. Of course, Parsons (1967) criticized Marx for putting technology into the base; functionalists recognized that technology belongs in a more intermediate position in the social system. Still, they never looked at it as anything other than the product of rational knowledge, and they have often conceived of its efficient causes and specific effects in material terms.

In Science, Technology, and Society in Seventeenth-Century England, Merton does emphasize the role that puritanism played in inspiring scientific inventions. Within the context of this inventive climate, however, the immediate cause of technology is economic benefit. The "relation between a problem raised by economic development and technologic endeavor is clear-cut and definite," Merton argues (1970: 144), suggesting that "importance in the realm of technology is often concretely allied with economic estimations." It was the "vigorou economic development" of the time that led to effective inventions, because it "posed the most imperative problems for solution" (146). In Smelser's (1959) later account of the industrial revolution, the perspective is exactly the same. Methodist values form a background input to technological innovation, but they are not involved in the creation or the effects of technology itself. Innovation is problem driven, not culture driven, and the immediate cause is economic demand. The effect of technology is also concrete and material. By resolving strain at the social system level, innovation allows collective behavior to leave the level of generalized behavior—wish fulfillment, fantasy, utopian aspirations—and return to the more mundane and rational attitudes of the everyday (Smelser, 1959: 21–50).

Parsons himself was more sensitive to the subjective environment of technology. While acknowledging that it is "a product of productive processes," he insists (1960: 133) that it depends ultimately on cultural resources. Yet, in a characteristic move, he turns his discussion of technology from economic issues to a focus on the origins of "usable knowledge." He describes the latter as "produced by two processes which, though economic factors play a part, are clearly predominantly noneconomic, namely research and education" (133). In other words, while Parsons recognizes that technology is, in the most important sense, a product of subjective knowledge rather than material force, this recognition leads him not to the analysis of symbolic processes but to the study of institutional processes, namely research and education. When Parsons and Platt explore these processes in The American University (1973), they take the input from culture—the "rationality value"—as a given, focusing instead on how this value becomes institutionalized in the social system.
Frankfurt School critical theory, drawing from Weber's rationalization theme, differs from orthodox Marxism in its attention to the relation between technology and consciousness. But whereas Weber (e.g., 1946b) viewed the machine as the objectification of discipline, calculation, and rational organization, critical theorists reverse the causal relation, asserting that it is technology that creates rationalized culture by virtue of its brute physical and economic power. "If we follow the path taken by labour in its development from handicraft to manufacture to machine industry," writes Lukács (1971: 88), "the school's most significant precursor, we can see a continuous trend toward greater rationalization as the process of labour is progressively broken down into abstract, rational, specialized operations." This technologically driven rationalization eventually spreads to all social spheres, leading to the objectification of society and the "reified mind" (93). Lukács insists that he is concerned "with the principle at work here" (88, italics in original), but the principle is that technology is conceived as a material force.

This shift toward the pivotal ideological role of technology, without giving up its materialist conceptualization or its economic cause, culminates in Marcuse's later work. To explain the reasons for "one-dimensional society," Marcuse actually focuses more on technological production per se than on its capitalist form. Again, that technology is a purely instrumental, rational phenomenon Marcuse takes completely for granted. Its "sweeping rationality," he writes (1963: xiii), "propels efficiency and growth." The problem, once again, is that this "technical progress [is] extended to a whole system of domination and coordination" (xii). When it is, it institutionalizes throughout the society a purely formal and abstract norm of rationality. This technological "culture" suppresses any ability to imagine social alternatives. As Marcuse says (xvi), "technological rationality has become political rationality."

New class and postindustrial theories make this critical theory more nuanced and sophisticated, but they do not overcome its fatal anticultural flaw. Gouldner claims that scientists, engineers, and government planners have a rational worldview because of the technical nature of their work. Technocratic competence depends on higher education, and the expansion of higher education depends in the last analysis on production driven by technology. Indeed, Gouldner finds no fault with technocratic competence in and of itself; he takes it as a paradigm of universalism, criticism, and rationality. When he attacks the technocrats' false consciousness, he does so because they extend this rationality beyond their sphere of technical competence: "The new ideology holds [that] the society's problems are solvable on a technological basis, with the use of educationally acquired technical competence" (1979: 24, italics added). By pretending to understand society at large, the new class can provide a patina of rationality for the entire society. Gouldner also emphasizes, of course, that this very expansion of technical rationality can create a new kind of class conflict and thus become unwittingly a "rational" source of social change. But this is simply the old contradiction between the technological forces and the social relations of production, dressed in postindustrial garb. When Szelenyi and Martin (1987) criticize Gouldner's theory as economistic, they have touched its theoretical core.

Using similar theoretical distinctions, conservative theorists have reached different ideological conclusions. In his postindustrial theory, Bell (1976) also emphasizes the growing cultural rationality of modern societies, a cultural pattern that he, too, ties directly to technological and productive demands. In order to produce and maintain the advanced technologies that are at the basis of postindustrial economic and political institutions, scientific values and scientific education have become central to modern life. In the political and economic spheres of modern societies, therefore, sober, rational, and instrumental culture is the rule. It is only in reaction against this technological sphere that according to Bell (1976), irrational, postmodern values develop, which create the cultural contradictions of capitalist society. Here the old contradiction between (technological) forces and relations is dressed in new garb. Because Ellul, the other, more conservative, theorist of "technological society," wrote before the 1960s, he views the social effects of technology as more thoroughly instrumental and rational than does Bell. Propelled by "the search for greater efficiency" (Ellul, 1964: 19), technique "clarifies, arranges, and rationalizes" (5). It exists in "the domain of the abstract" (5) and has no relation to cultural values or to the real needs of human life.

It is fitting to close this section with Habermas, for the distinction between the world of technique (variously defined as work, organization, or system) and the world of humanity (communication, norms, or lifeworld) has marked a fatal contrast throughout his work. Habermas (1968a: 57) defines technology in the familiar manner. He believes it to be the "scientifically rationalized control of objectified processes" and contrasts it with phenomena that are related to "the practical question of how men can and want to live." With the increasing centrality of technology, the meaningful organization of the world is displaced by purposive-rational organization. "To the extent that technology and science permeate social institutions and thus transform them," Habermas (1968b: 81) insists, "old legitimations are destroyed."

These old legitimations were based on tradition, "the older mythic, religious, and metaphysical worldviews" that addressed "the central questions of men's collective existence [for example] justice and freedom, violence and oppression, happiness and gratification... love and hate, salvation and damnation (1968b: 96)." After technology has done its work, however, these questions can no longer be asked: "The culturally defined self-understanding of a social lifeworld is replaced by the self-reification of men under categories of purposive-rational action and adaptive behavior" (105-6). There has ensued a "horizontal extension of subsystems of purposive-rational action" such that "traditional
structures are increasingly subordinated to conditions of instrumental or strategic rationality" (98). In this particular sense, Habermas argues, the ideology of technology has displaced all previous ideologies. Because it is so stubbornly rationalistic, this new ideology does not exhibit "the opaque force of a delusion" or a "wish-fulfilling fantasy"; nor is it "based in the same way [as earlier ideologies] on the causality of dissociated symbols and unconscious motives." This new, technological ideology, Habermas believes, has abandoned any attempt to express a projection of the 'good life.'

In the discussion that follows I will demonstrate that these suppositions about technological consciousness are false. Only because Habermas has accepted the possibility of a radical historicization of consciousness can he believe them to be true. My own discussion begins from quite the opposite understanding. It is impossible for a society to be dominated by technical rationality because the mental structures of humankind cannot be radically historicized; in crucial respects, they are unchanging. Human beings continue to experience the need to invest the world with metaphysical meaning and to experience solidarity with objects outside the self. Certainly, the ability to calculate objectively and impersonally is perhaps the clearest demarcation of modernity. But this remains one institutionalized complex (Parsons, 1951) of motives, actions, and meanings among many others. Individuals can exercise scientifically rational orientations in certain situations, but even in these instances their actions are not scientifically rational as such. Objectivity is a cultural norm, a system of social sanctions and rewards, a motivational impulse of the personality. It remains nested, however, within deeply irrational systems of psychological defense and cultural systems of an enduringly primordial kind.

This is not to deny that technological production has become more central with the advent of postindustrial society. There has been a quickening in the substitution of information for physical energy, which Marx described as a shift in the organic composition of capital, with dramatic consequences. The shift from manual to mental labor has transformed the class structure and the typical strains of capitalist and socialist societies. The increased capacity for storing information has strengthened the control of bureaucracy over the information that it constantly needs. But the sociological approaches to technology, which I have examined in this section, extend much further than such empirical observations. The stronger version of Marxist and critical theory describes a technologically obsessed society whose consciousness is so narrowed that the meaningful concerns of traditional life are no longer possible. The weaker versions of functionalist and postindustrial theory describe technology as a variable that has a merely material status and orientations to technology as cognitively rational and routine. From my point of view, neither of these positions is correct. The ideas that inform even the most modern societies are not cognitive repositories of verified facts; they are symbols that continue to be shaped by deep emotional impulses and molded by meaningful constraints.

TECHNOLOGICAL DISCOURSE AND SALVATION

We must learn to see technology as a discourse, as a sign system that is subject to semiotic constraints even as it is responsive to social and emotional demands. The first step to this alternative conception of modern technology is to reconceptualize its historical emergence in metaphysical terms. Ironically, Weber still provides the best indication of how this can be done.

Weber argued that those who created modern industrial society did so in order to pursue salvation. The Puritan capitalists practiced what Weber (1958) called this-worldly asceticism. Through hard work and self-denial, they produced wealth as proof that God had predestined them to be saved. Weber (1964) demonstrated, indeed, that salvation has been a central concern of humankind for millennia. Whether it be heaven or nirvana, the great religions have promised human beings an escape from toil and suffering and a release from earthly constraints—only if humans conceived of the world in certain terms and strove to act in certain ways. In order to historicize this conception of salvation and to allow comparative explanation of it, Weber developed the typology of this worldly versus other worldly paths to salvation, which he interwove with the distinction between ascetic and mystical. The disciplined, self-denying, and impersonal action on which modernization depended, Weber argued, could be achieved only by acting in a this-worldly, ascetic way. Compared to Buddhist or Hindu holy men, the Puritan saints focused their attention much more completely on this world. Rather than allowing themselves the direct experience of God and striving to become vessels of his spirit, they believed that they would be saved by becoming practical instruments for carrying out his will. This worldly salvation was the cultural precursor for the impersonal rationality and objectivism that, in Weber's view (1958: 181–3), eventually dominated the world.

While Weber's religious theory is of fundamental importance, it has two substantial weaknesses. First, Weber conceived the modern style of salvation in a caricatured way. It has never been as one-sidedly ascetic as he suggests. This worldly activity is permeated by desires to escape from the world, just as the ascetic self-denial of grace is punctuated by episodes of mystical intimacy (Alexander 2000a). In an anomalous strain in his writing about modernity (Alexander, 1986), Weber acknowledged that industrial society is shot through with what he called "flights from the world," in which category he included things such as the surrender by moderns to religious belief or ideological fanaticism and the escape provided by eroticism or aestheticism. Although Weber condemned these flights as morally irresponsible, he was never able to incorporate them into his empirical sociology of modern life. They represented a force with which his historicist and overly ideal-typical theory could not contend.

In truth, modern attempts to pursue salvation in purely ascetic ways have always short-circuited, not only in overtly escapist forms but also in the everyday
world itself. We would never know from Weber's account, for example, that the
Puritans conceived of their relationship to God in terms of the intimacies of
holy matrimony (Morgan, 1958); nor would we be aware that outbursts of mys-
tical "antinomianism" were a constant, recurring danger in Puritan life.
The post-Puritan tradition of evangelical Protestantism, which developed in
Germany, England, and the United States in the late eighteenth and early nine-
teenth centuries, was distinguished by its significant opening to mystical expe-
rience. One of its cultural offshoots, the modern ideology of romantic love
(Lewis, 1983), reflected the continuing demand for immediate, transformative
salvation in the very heart of the industrial age.

This last example points to the second major problem in Weber's religious
theory, its historicism. Weber believed that a concern with salvation could per-
meate and organize worldly experience only so long as scientific understanding
had not undermined the possibility of accepting an extramundane, divine telos
for progress on earth. As I suggested previously, this mistaken effort to rational-
ize contemporary discourse can be corrected by incorporating the more struc-
tural understandings of what Durkheim called his "religious sociology." Durk-
heim believed that human beings continue to divide the world into sacred and
profane and that even modern men and women need to experience mystical cen-
ters directly through ritual encounters with the sacred. In the modern context,
then, Weber's salvation theory can be elaborated and sustained only by turning
to Durkheim. The fit can be made even tighter if we make the alteration in
Durkheim's theory suggested by Callois (1959 [1936]), who argued that along-
side sacred and profane there was a third term, routine. Whereas routine life does
not partake of ritual experience, sacred and profane experiences are both highly
charged. Whereas the sacred provides an image of the good with which social
actors seek community and strive to protect, the profane defines an image of evil
from which human beings must be saved. This conception allows us to be more
ture to Weber's understanding of theology, even when we shift it onto the modern
state. Secular salvation "religions" provide escape not only from earthly suf-
fering in general but also more specifically from evil. Every salvation religion
has conceived not only God and death, in other words, but also the devil.

It is in terms of these reconstructed arenas for symbolic discourse that my ex-
amination of the introduction of technology will proceed.

THE SACRED AND PROFANE INFORMATION MACHINE

Expectations for salvation were inseparable from the technological innovations
of industrial capitalism. Major inventions like the steam engine, railroad, tele-
graph, and telephone (Pool, 1983) were hailed by elites and masses as vehicles
for secular transcendence. Their speed and power, it was widely proclaimed,
would undermine the earthly constraints of time, space, and scarcity. In their
early halcyon days, they became vessels for experiencing ecstatic release, instru-
ments for bringing the glories of heaven down to earth. The technicians and en-
gineers who understood this new technology were elevated to the status of
worldly priests. In this technological discourse, however, the machine has been
not only God but also the devil. In the early nineteenth century, Luddites lashed
out at spinning machines as if they were the idols that the Hebrew fathers had
condemned. William Blake decried "dark Satanic mills." Mary Shelley wrote
Frankenstein, or, the Modern Prometheus, about the terrifying results of Victor
Frankenstein's effort to build the world's most "gigantic" machine. The gothic
genre presented a revolt against the Age of Reason and insisted that dark forces
were still brewing, forces that were often embodied by the engine of technology
itself. It was, ironically, from such forces that the modern age had to be saved.
There is a direct line from that gothic revival to George Lukas's wildly popular
movie Star Wars (Pynchon, 1984). Today's science fiction mixes technology with
medieval gothic themes, pits evil against good, and promises salvation from
space, from time, even from mortality itself.

The computer is the newest and certainly one of the most potent technologi-
cal innovations of the modern age, but its symbolization has been much the
same. The culture structure of technological discourse has been firmly set. In
theoretical terms, the introduction of the computer into Western society resem-
ble the much more tumultuous entrance of Captain Cook into the Sandwich
Islands. It was an event, in Sahlins's (1981: 31) words, "given significance and
effect by the system in place."

While there were certainly routine assessments of the computer from 1944 to
1975—assessments that talked about it in rational, scientific, and "realistic"
tones—they paled in comparison to the transcendental and mythical discourse
that was filled with wish-fulfilling rhetoric of salvation and damnation. In a
Time magazine report on the first encounter between computer and public in
1944, the machine was treated as a sacred and mysterious object. What was
"unveiled" was a "bewildering 50-foot panel of knobs, wires, counters, gears and
switches." The connection to higher, even cosmic, forces immediately suggested
itself. Time described it as having been unveiled "in the presence of high officers
in the Navy" and promised its readers that the new machine would solve prob-
lems "on earth as well as those posed by the celestial universe" (T8/44). This sac-
cred status was elaborated in the years that followed.

To be sacred, an object must be sharply separated from contact with the rou-
tine world—Popular literature continually recounted the distance that separated
the computer from the lay public and the mystery attendant on this. In another
report on the 1944 unveiling, Popular Science, a leading lay technology maga-
azine, described the first computer as an electrical brain whirring "behind its pol-
ished panels" and secluded in "an air-conditioned basement" (PS10/44). Twenty
years later the image had not changed. In 1965, a new and far more powerful
computer was conceptualized in the same way, as an "isolated marvel" working in
"the air-conditioned seclusion of the company's data-programming room." In

The Sacred and Profane Information Machine
unmistakable terms, *Time* elaborated this discourse of the sacred technology: “Arranged row upon row in air-conditioned rooms, waited upon by crisp young white-shirted men who move softly among them like priests serving in a shrine, the computers go about their work quietly and, for the most part, unseen from the public” (T4/65).

Objects are isolated because they are thought to possess mysterious power. The connection between computer and established centers of charismatic power is repeated constantly in the popular literature. Occasionally, an analogy is made between the computer and sacred things on earth. Reporting on the unveiling of a new and more sophisticated computer in 1949, *Newsweek* called it “the real hero” of the occasion and described it, like royalty, as “holding court in the computer lab upstairs” (N11/49). Often, however, more direct references to the computer’s cosmic powers and even to its extrahuman status were made. In an article about the first computer, *Popular Science* reported that “everybody’s notion of the universe and everything in it will be upset by the columns of figures this monster will type out” (PS10/44). Fifteen years later, a famous technical expert asserted in a widely circulated feature magazine that “forces will be set in motion whose ultimate effects for good and evil are incalculable” (RD3/60).

As the machine became more sophisticated, and more awesome, references to godly powers were openly made. The new computers “render unto Caesar by sending out the monthly bills and . . . unto God by counting the ballots of the world’s Catholic bishops” (T4/65). A joke circulated to the effect that a scientist tried to stunt his computer with the question: Is there a God? “The computer was silent for a moment. Then it answered: ‘Now there is’” (N11/66). After describing the computer in superhuman terms—“infallible in memory, incredibly swift in math [and] utterly impartial in judgment”—a mass weekly made the obvious deduction: “This transistorized prophet can help the church adapt to modern spiritual needs” (T3/68). A leader of one national church described the Bible as a “distillation of human experience” and asserted that computers are capable of correlating an even greater range “of experience about how people ought to behave.” The conclusion that was drawn underscored the deeply established connection between the computer and cosmic power: “When we want to consult the deity, we go to the computer because it’s the closest thing to God to come along” (T3/68).

If an object is sacred and sealed off from the profane world, gaining access to its powers becomes a problem in itself. Priests emerge as intermediaries between divinity and laity. As one leading expert suggested, while there were many who appreciated the computer, “only specialists yet realize how these elements will all be combined and [the] far-reaching social, economic, and political implications” (RD5/60). Typically, erroneous predictions about the computer were usually attributed to “nonspecialists” (BW3/65). To possess knowledge of computing, it was emphasized time and again, requires incredible training and inclusion. Difficult new procedures must be developed. To learn how to operate a new computer introduced in 1949, specialists “spent months literally studying day and night” (N8/49). The number of people capable of undergoing such rigorous training was highly restricted. The forging of “links between human society and the robot brain” (N9/49) called for “a new race of scientists.” The “new breed of specialists [which] has grown up to tend the machines,” *Time* wrote sixteen years later, “have formed themselves into a solemn priesthood of the computer, purposely separated from ordinary laymen [and] speak[ing] an esoteric language that some suspect is just their way of mystifying outsiders” (T4/65). The article predicted: “There will be a small, almost separate society of people in rapport with the advanced computer. They will have established a relationship with their machines that cannot be shared with the average man. Those with talent for the work will have to develop it from childhood and will be trained as intensively as the classical ballerina.” Is it surprising that, reporting on computer news ten years later, *Time* (1/74) decided its readers would be interested in learning that among this esoteric group of programmers there had emerged a new and wildly popular computer game called “the game of life”? The identification of the computer with God and of computer operators with sacred intermediaries signifies culture structures that had not changed in forty years.

The contact with the cosmic computer that these technological priests provided would, then, certainly transform earthly life. Like the revolutionary technologies that preceded it, however, the computer embodied within itself both superhuman evil and superhuman good. As Lévi-Strauss (1965) emphasized, it is through naming that the cultural codes defining an object are first constructed. In the years immediately following the introduction of the computer, efforts to name this new thinking machine were intense, and they followed the binary pattern that Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss described.

The result was a similitude of signifiers, an amplified series of sacred and profane associations that created for technological discourse a thick semantic field. One series revealed dreadful proportions and dire implications. The computer was called a “colossal gadget” (T8/44, N8/49), a “figure factory” (PS10/44), a “mountain of machinery” (PS10/44), a “monster” (PS10/44, SEP2/50), a “mathematical dreadnought” (PS10/44), a “portentous contrivance” (PS10/44), a “giant” (N8/49), a “math robot” (N8/49), a “wonderworking robot” (SEP2/50), the “Manniac” (SEP2/50), and the “Frankenstein-monster” (SEP2/50). In announcing a new and bigger computer in 1949, *Time* (9/49) hailed the “great machines that eat their way through oceans of figures like whale grazing on plankton” and described them as roaring like “a hive of mechanical insects.”

In direct opposition to this profane realm, journalists and technicians also named the computer and its parts through analogies to the presumptively innocent and assuredly sacred human being. It was called a “super-brain” (PS10/44) and a “giant brain” (N8/49). Attached to an audio instrument, it was described as “a brain child with a temporary voice” and as “the only mechanical brain with
a soft heart" (N10/49). Its "physiology" (SEP2/50) became a topic of debate. Computers were given an "inner memory" (T9/49), "eyes," a "nervous system" (SEP2/50), a "spinning heart" (T2/51), and a "female temperament" (SEP2/50) in addition to the brain with which they were already endowed. It was announced that they were to have "descendants" (N4/50), and in later years "families" and "generations" (T4/65) emerged. Finally, there were the developmental phrases, "just out of its teens," Time announced (T4/65), the computer was about to enter a "formidable adulthood." It might do so, however, in a neurotic way, for its designers had "made a pampered and all but adored child" out of it.3

The period of compulsive naming quickly abated, but the awesome forces for good and evil that the names symbolized have been locked in deadly combat to this day. Salvation rhetoric overrides this dualism in one direction, apocalyptic rhetoric in another. Both moves can be seen in structural terms as overcoming binary opposition by providing a third term. But more profound emotional and metaphysical issues are also at stake. Computer discourse was eschatological because the computer was seen as involving matters of life and death.

At first, salvation was defined in narrowly mathematical terms. The new computer would "solve in a flash" (T9/49) problems that had "baffled men for years" (PS10/44). By 1950, salvation had already become much more broadly defined. "Come the Revolution!" read the headline to a story about these new predictions (T11/50). A broad and visionary ideal of progress was laid out: "Thinking machines will bring a healthier, happier civilization than any known heretofore" (SEP2/50). People would now be able to "solve their problems the painless electronic way" (N7/54). Airplanes, for example, would be able to reach their destinations "without one bit of help from the pilot" (PS1/55).

By 1960, public discourse about the computer had become truly millennial. "A new age in human relations has opened," a reigning expert announced (RD3/60). Like all eschatological rhetoric, the timing of this promised salvation is imprecise. It has not yet occurred, but it has already begun. It is coming in five years or ten, its effects will be felt soon, the transformation is imminent. Whatever the timing, the end result is certain. "There will be a social effect of unbelievable proportions" (RD3/60). "By surmounting the last great barrier of distance," the computer's effect on the natural world will be just as great (RD2/60). Most human labor will be eliminated, and people will finally be set "free to undertake completely new tasks, most of them directed toward perfecting ourselves, creating beauty, and understanding one another" (Mc5/65).4

The convictions were confirmed in still more sweeping tones in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The new computers had such "awesome power" (RD5/71) that, as God was recorded in the book of Genesis, they would bring "order out of chaos" (BW7/71). That "the computer age is dawning" was certain. One sign of this millennium will be that "the common way of thinking in terms of cause and effect [will be] replaced by a new awareness" (RD5/71). That this was the stuff of which "dreams are made" (USN6/67) cannot be denied. Computers would transform all natural forces. They would cure diseases and guarantee long life. They would allow everyone to know everything at all times. They would allow all students to learn easily and the best to learn perfectly. They would produce a world community and end war. They would overturn stratification and allow equality to reign. They would make government responsible and efficient, business productive and profitable, work creative, and leisure endlessly satisfying.

As for apocalypse, there was also much to say. Machines have always embodied not only the transcendental hopes but also the fear and loathing generate-I by industrial society. Regarding this new technological machine, Time once articulated this deep ambiguity in a truly gothic way. Viewed from the front, computers exhibit a "clean, serene dignity." This is deceptive, however, for "behind there hides a nightmare of pulsing, twitching, flashing complexity" (54/49).

Whereas contact with the sacred side of the computer is the vehicle for salvation, the profane side threatens destruction. It is something from which human beings must be saved. First, the computer creates the fear of degradation. "People are scared" (N8/68) because the computer has the power to "blot or diminish man" (RD3/60). People feel "rage and helpless frustration" (N9/69). The computer degrades because it objectifies; this is the second great fear. It will "lead to mechanical men who replace humans" (T11/50). Students will be "treated as impersonal machines" (RD1/71). Computers are inseparable from "the image of slavery" (USN1/67). It is because they are seen as objectifying human beings that computers present a concrete danger. In 1975, one popular author described his personal computer as a "humming thing poised to rip me apart" (RD11/75). More typically the danger is not mutilation but manipulation. With computers "markets can be scientifically rigged . . . with an efficiency that would make dictators blush" (SEP2/50). Their intelligence can turn them into "instruments for massive subversion" (RD3/60). They could "lead us to that ultimate horror—chains of plastic tape" (N8/66).

Finally, there is the cataclysm, the final judgment on earthly technological folly that has been predicted from 1944 until the present day. Computers are "Frankenstein [monsters] which can . . . wreck the very foundations of our society" (T11/50). They can lead to "disorders [that may] pass beyond control" (RD4/60). There is a "storm brewing" (BW1/68). There are "nightmarish stories" about the "light that failed" (BW7/71). "Incapable of making allowances for error," the "Christian notion of redemption is incomprehensible to the computer" (N8/66). The computer has become the antichrist.

I have taken the computer story to 1975. This was the eve of the so-called personal computer, the very name of which demonstrates how the battle between human and antihuman continued to fuel the discourse that surrounded the computer's birth. In the decades of discussion that followed, utopian and antutopian themes have remained prominent (for example, Turkle, 1984: 165–96). Disappointment and "realism," however, also became more frequently
expressed. Yet, even as computer news passed from the cover of *Time* to advertisements in the sports pages of daily newspapers, eschatological speculations about the Internet revolution and the new e-world have frothed to the bubbling surface of cultural life.

**CONCLUSION**

Let us return to the socioscientific understandings of technology I have recounted here. We can now see that, far from being empirical accounts based on objective observations and interpretations, they represent simply another version of technocratic discourse itself. The apocalyptic strain of that discourse fears degradation, objectification, slavery, and manipulation. Has not critical theory merely translated this evaluation into the empirical language of social science? The same goes for those sociol-theoretical analyses that take a more benign form: they provide social scientific translations of the discourse about salvation.

At stake is more than the accuracy or the distortion of social scientific statements. That the rationalization hypothesis is wrong does not make technology a benign force. The great danger that technology poses to modern life is neither the flattening-out of human consciousness nor its enslavement to economic or political reality. To the contrary, it is because technology is lodged in the fantasies of salvation and apocalypse that its dangers are real. Only by understanding the omnipresent shaping of technological consciousness by discourse can we hope to gain control over technology in its material form. World War II was brought to an end on August 10, 1945, by the surrender of Japan, which followed quickly on American atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The very next day in the *Times* of London an article by Niels Bohr appeared that presented a prescient perspective on how efforts to control the bomb might proceed. Even while he notes the apocalyptic strain in the public's comprehension of this terrible technological achievement, Bohr warns that, above all, a distance from this fantasy is necessary if rational control efforts are to be made. "The grim realities which are being revealed to the world in these days will no doubt, in the minds of many, revive terrifying prospects forecast in fiction. With all admiration for such imagination, it is, however, most essential to appreciate the contrast between these fantasies and the actual situation confronting us" (1985 [1945]: 264).

Karl Marx once famously opined that while intellectuals have traditionally sought to understand the world, our task is to change it. From the hermeneutic, cultural perspective I have been developing in this book, understanding and changing the world simply cannot be separated in this way. If the world is itself based on collective understandings, then changing the world always involves, in some large part, changing these understandings in turn.

Intellectual understanding must itself be reunderstood as well. For Marx and other moderns, the task of intellectuals was one of rational reconstruction. Even the broadest theories of history were seen as factual, either descriptive or explanatory. From the perspective of cultural sociology, however, what intellectuals actually do is something very different from this. The really broad and influential thinkers are prophets and priests. Their ability to be critical, to explain, to historicize, even to describe their own time emerges from a depth of commitment to ethics and feelings that form, and emerge from, simplified binary structures and fiction-like narratives. They involve leaps of faith and faith in leaps. Intellectuals divide the world into the sacred and profane and weave stories about the relationship in between. It is less interesting to examine these tapestries for their factual meaning than to deconstruct their symbolic meaning in a cultural sociological way.

Sometime during the mid-1970s, at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, a major debate erupted around modernization theory that crystallized a decade of social and intellectual change. Two speakers were featured, Alex Inkeles and Immanuel Wallerstein. Inkeles reported that his studies of "modern man" (Inkeles & Smith, 1974) had demonstrated that personality shifts toward autonomy and achievement were crucial and predictable.
results of social modernization, which revolved most centrally around the industrialization of society. The response to Inkeles was appreciative from many of the senior members of the audience, skeptical from the younger. Wallerstein responded to Inkeles in a manner that pleased the younger generation more. "We do not live in a modernizing world but in a capitalist world," he proclaimed (1979: 123), asserting that "what makes this world tick is not the need for achievement but the need for profit." When Wallerstein went on to lay out "an agenda of intellectual work for those who are seeking to understand the world systemic transition from capitalism to socialism in which we are living" (135, italics in original), he literally brought the younger members of the audience to their feet.

Fifteen years later, the lead article in the American Sociological Review was entitled "A Theory of Market Transition: From Redistribution to Markets in State Socialism." The transition referred to in this chapter was rather different from the one Wallerstein had in mind. Written by Victor Nee, once inclined to Maoism and now a rational choice theorist specializing in China's burgeoning market economy, the article suggested that the only hope for organized socialism was capitalism. In fact, Nee portrayed socialism exactly as Marx had depicted capitalism and his predictions for the future formed a mirror image of Marx's own. State socialism, he wrote, was an archaic, outdated mode of production, one whose internal contradictions were leading to capitalism. Employing the class conflict analytic of Marx to the productive system that Marx believed would end such conflict for all time, Nee argued that it is state socialism, not capitalism, that "appropriates surplus directly from the immediate producers and creates and structures social inequality through the processes of its reallocation" (1989: 665). Such expropriation of surplus—exploitation—can be overcome only if workers are given the opportunity to own and sell their own labor power. Only with markets, Nee insisted, could workers develop the power to "withhold their product" and protect their "labor power" (666). This movement from one mode of production to another would shift power to the formerly oppressed class. "The transition from redistribution to markets," he concluded, "involves a transfer of power favoring direct producers" (666).

A NEW "TRANSITION"

In the juxtaposition between these formulations of modernity, socialism, and capitalism there lies a story. They describe not only competing theoretical positions but deep shifts in historical sensibility. We must understand both together, I believe, if either contemporary history or contemporary theory is to be properly understood.

Social scientists and historians have long talked about "the transition." A historical phrase, a social struggle, a moral transformation for better or for worse, the term referred, of course, to the movement from feudalism to capitalism. For Marxists, the transition initiated the unequal and contradictory system that produced its antithesis, socialism and equality. For liberals, the transition represented an equally momentous transformation of traditional society but created a set of historical alternatives—democracy, capitalism, contracts, and civil society—that did not have a moral or social counterfactual like socialism ready to hand. By the late 1980s, for the first time in the history of social science, "the transition" had come to mean something that neither of these earlier treatments could have foreseen. It was the transition from communism to capitalism, a phrase that still seems oxymoronic to our chastened ears even today. In this new transition, the sense of world-historical transformation remains, but the straight line of history seems to be running in reverse.

In this recent period we have witnessed one of the most dramatic spatially and temporally contiguous social transformations in the history of world. The more contemporary meaning of transition may not have entirely eclipsed the earlier one, yet there is no doubt that it has already diminished its significance and will arouse significantly more intellectual interest for a long time to come.

This second great transformation, to redirect Polanyi's (1957) famous phrase, has produced an unexpected, and for many an unwelcome, convergence in both history and social thought. It is impossible even for already committed intellectuals to ignore the fact that we are witnessing the death of a major alternative not only in social thought but in society itself. In the foreseeable future, it is unlikely that either citizens or elites will try to structure their primary allocative systems in nonmarket ways.

For their part, social scientists will be far less likely to think of antimarxist "socialist societies" as counterfactual alternatives with which to explain their own. They will be less likely to explain economic stratification by implicitly comparing it with an egalitarian distribution produced by publicly rather than privately held property, a "plausible world" (Hawthorn, 1991) that inevitably seems to suggest that economic inequality is produced by the existence of private property itself. Social scientists will, perhaps, also be less likely to explain status stratification by postulating the counterfactual tendency to communal esteem in a world that is uncorrupted by individualism of a bourgeois rather than socialist kind. Similarly, it will become much more difficult to speak about the emptiness of formal democracy or to explain its limitations by pointing merely to the existence of a dominant economic class, for these explanations, too, require counterfactuals of a traditionally "socialist" kind. In brief, it will be much less easy to explain contemporary social problems by pointing to the capitalist nature of the societies of which they are a part.

In this essay, I do not propose a return to "convergence" or modernization theories of society as such, as have some reinvigorated proponents of the early tradition (Inkeles, 1991; Lipset, 1990). I will propose, however, that contemporary social theory must be much more sensitive to the apparent reconvexgence of the world's regimes and that, as a result, we must try to incorporate some broad
sense of the universal and shared elements of development into a critical, undogmatic, and reflexive theory of social change. Indeed, in the conclusion of this essay I will demonstrate that a growing range of widely diverse contemporary social theorists, from literary radicals and rational choice theorists to postcommunists, are in fact developing a new language of convergence, and I will address the challenging question, raised so trenchantly by Muller (1992), of whether this emerging conversation can avoid the relatively simplistic and totalizing form that obliterated the complexities of earlier societies and the particularisms of our own.

Despite this new and more sophisticated form, however, what I will later call neomodern theory will remain as much myth as science (Barbour, 1974), as much narrative as explanation (Eintrikin, 1991). Even if one believes, as I do, that such a broader and more sophisticated theory of social development is now historically compelling, it remains the case that every general theory of social change is rooted not only in cognition but also in existence—that it possesses a surplus of meaning, in Ricoeur’s (1977) deeply suggestive phrase. Modernity, after all, has always been a highly relativist term (Bourricaud, 1987; Habermas, 1981; Pocock, 1987). It emerged in the fifth century when newly Christianized Romans wished to distinguish their religiosity from two forms of barbarians, the heathens of antiquity and the unregenerate Jews. In medieval times, modernity was reinvited as a term implying cultivation and learning, which allowed contemporary intellectuals to identify backward with the classical learning of the Greek and Roman heathens themselves. With the Enlightenment, modernity became identified with rationality, science, and forward progress, a semantically arbitrary relationship that seems to have held steady to this day. Who can doubt that, sooner or later, a new historical period will displace this second “age of equipoise” (Burn, 1974) into which we have so inadvertently but fortuitously slipped. New contradictions will emerge and competing sets of world-historical possibilities will arise, and it is unlikely that they will be viewed in terms of the emerging neomodernization frame.

It is precisely this sense of the instability, of the imminent transitoriness of the world, that introduces myth into social theory. Despite the fact that we have no idea what our historical possibilities will be, every theory of social change must theorize not only the past but the present and future as well. We can do so only in normative and expressive ways, in relation not only to what we know but to what we believe, hope, and fear. Every historical period needs a narrative that defines its past in terms of the present and suggests a future that is fundamentally different from and, typically, “even better” than contemporary time. For this reason there is always an eschatology, not merely an epistemology, in theorizing about social change.

I proceed now to examine early modernization theory, its contemporary reconstruction, and the vigorous intellectual alternatives that arose in the period between. I will insist throughout on the relation of these theoretical developments to social and cultural history, for only in this way can we understand social theory not only as science but also as an ideology in the sense made famous by Geertz (1973 [1964]). Unless we recognize the interpenetration of science and ideology in social theory, neither element can be evaluated or clarified in a rational way. With this stricture in mind, I delineate four distinctive theoretical-cum-ideological periods in postwar social thought: modernization theory and romantic liberalism; antimodernization theory and heroic radicalism; postmodern theory and comic detachment; and the emerging phase of neomodernization or reconvergence theory, which seems to combine the narrative forms of each of its predecessors on the postwar scene.

While I will be engaging in genealogy, locating the historical origins of each phase of postwar theory in an archaological way, it is vital to keep in mind that each one of the theoretical residues of the phases that I examine remains vitally alive today. My archeology, in other words, is an investigation not only of the past but of the present. Because the present is history, this genealogy will help us to understand the theoretical sedimentation within which we live.

**MODERNIZATION: CODE, NARRATIVE, AND EXPLANATION**

Drawing from a centuries-long tradition of evolutionary and Enlightenment-inspired theories of social change, “modernization” theory as such was born with the publication of Marion Levy’s book on Chinese family structure (1949) and died sometime in the mid-1960s, during one of those extraordinarily heated rites of spring that marked student uprising, antiwar movements, and newly humanist socialist regimes and that preceded the long hot summers of the race riots and the black consciousness movement in the United States. Modernization theory can and certainly should be evaluated as a scientific theory, in the postpositivist, *wissenschaftliche* sense. As an explanatory effort, the modernization model was characterized by the following ideal-typical traits:

1. Societies were conceived as coherently organized systems whose subsystems were closely interdependent.
2. Historical development was parsed into two types of social systems, the traditional and the modern, statuses that were held to determine the character of their societal subsystems in determinate ways.
3. The modern was defined with reference to the social organization and culture of specifically Western societies, which were typified as individualistic, democratic, capitalist, scientific, secular, and stable and as dividing work from home in gender-specific ways.
4. As a historical process, modernization was held to involve nonrevolutionary, incremental change.
5. The historical evolution to modernity—modernization—was viewed as
likely to succeed, thus assuring that traditional societies would be provided with the resources for what Parsons (1966) called a general process of adaptive "upgrading," including economic takeoff to industrialization, democra-
tization via law, and secularization and science via education.

There were important aspects of truth in these models, which were articulated by thinkers of considerable historical and sociological insight. One truth, for example, lay in the insight that there are functional, not merely idealistic exigencies that push social systems toward democracy, markets, and the universalization of culture, and that shifts toward "modernity" in any subsystem create considerable pressures on the others to respond in a complementary way. This understanding made it possible for the more sophisticated among them to make prescient predictions about the eventual instability of state socialist societies, thus avoiding the rational-is-the-real embarrassments encountered by theorists of a more leftist kind. Thus, Parsons (1971: 127) insisted long before perestroika "that the processes of democratic revolution have not reached an equilibrium in the Soviet Union and that further developments may well run broadly in the direction of Western types of democratic government, with responsibility to an electorate rather than to a self-appointed party." It should perhaps also be emphasized that, whatever their faults, modernization theorists were not provincials. Despite their ideological intent, the most important of them rarely confused functional interdependence with historical inevitability. Parsons's theorizing, for example (1964: 466, 474), stressed that systemic exigencies actually opened up the possibility of historical choice.

Underneath the ideological conflicts between capitalism and communism that have been so prominent, there has been emerging an important element of very broad consensus at the level of values, centering in the complex we often refer to as "modernization." Clearly, definite victory for either side is not the only possible choice. We have another alternative, namely, the eventual integration of both sides—and of uncommitted units as well—in a wider system of order.

Despite these important insights, however, the historical judgment of subsequent social thought has not erred its evaluation of modernization theory as a failed explanatory scheme. Neither non-Western nor precontemporary societies can be conceptualized as internally homogeneous (see Mann, 1986). Their subsystems are more loosely coupled (e.g., Alexander & Colony, 1990; Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and their cultural codes more independent (e.g., Hall, 1985). Nor is there the kind of dichotomized historical development that can justify a single conception of traditional or modern, as Eisenstadt's (e.g., 1964) extensive investigations of "Axial Age" civilizations make clear. Even the concept "Western society," built on spatial and historical contiguity, fails sufficiently to recog-
be characterized as a whole regardless of the actual nature of its divisions and inconsistencies. Not only one’s own time, then, but one’s own society must be characterized by a single linguistic term, and the world that preceded the present must be characterized by another single broad term as well. In light of these considerations, the important ideological, or meaning-making, function that modernization theory served seems fairly clear. For Western but especially American and American-educated intellectuals, modernization theory provided a relas for postwar society by making it “historical.” It did so by providing postwar society with a temporal and spatial identity, an identity that could be formed only in a relation of difference with another, immediately preceding time and place. As Pocock has emphasized, “modernity” must be understood as the “consciousness” rather than the condition of being “modern.” Taking a linguistic model of consciousness, he suggests that such consciousness must be defined as much by difference as identification. The modern is a “signifier” that functions as an “excluder” at the same time. “We call something (perhaps ourselves) modern in order to distance that of which we speak from some antecedent state of affairs. The antecedent is most unlikely to be of neutral effect in defining either what is to be called ‘modern’ or the ‘modernity’ attributed to it” (Pocock, 1987: 48).

If I may give to this approach a late Durkheimian turn—a turn that has been elaborated throughout this book—I would like to suggest that we think of modernity as constructed on a binary code. This code serves the mythological function of dividing the known world into the sacred and profane, thereby providing a clear and compelling picture of how contemporaries must act to maneuver the space in between. In this sense, the discourse of modernity bears a striking resemblance to metaphorical and religious salvation discourse of diverse kinds (Walzer, 1965; Weber, 1964 [1922]). It also resembles the more secular dichotomizing discourses that citizens employ to identify themselves with, and to distance themselves from, the diverse individuals, styles, groups, and structures in contemporary societies (Bourdieu, 1984; Wagner-Pacifici, 1986).

It has been argued, in fact (see chapter 4), that a “discourse of civil society” provides a structured semiotic field for the conflicts of contemporary societies, positing idealized qualities like rationality, individuality, trust, and truth as essential qualities for inclusion in the modern, civil sphere, while identifying qualities such as irrationality, conformity, suspicion, and deceit as traditional traits that demand exclusion and punishment. There is a striking overlap between these ideological constructions and the explanatory categories of modernization theory, for example Parsons’s pattern variables. In this sense, modernization theory may be seen as a generalizing and abstracting effort to transform a historically specific categorial scheme into a scientific theory of development applicable to any culture around the entire world.

Because every ideology is carried by an intellectual cadre (Eisenstadt, 1986; Konrad & Szelenyi, 1979), it is important to ask why the intellectual cadre in a particular time and place articulated and promoted a particular theory. In regard to modernization theory, despite the importance of a small number of influential Europeans like Raymond Aron (e.g., Aron, 1962), we are speaking primarily about American and American-educated intellectuals. Following some work by Eyerman (1992; see Jamison & Eyerman, 1994) on the formation of American intellectuals in the 1950s I would begin by emphasizing the distinctive social characteristics of the postwar period in the United States, particularly the sharpness of the transition to the postwar world. This transition was marked by massive suburbanization and the decline of culturally bounded urban communities, a dramatic reduction in the ethnicity of American life, an extraordinary lessening of labor-capital conflict, and unprecedented long-term prosperity.

These new social circumstances, coming as they did at the end of two decades of massive national and international upheaval, induced in postwar American intellectuals a sense of a fundamental historical break. On the left, intellectuals like C. Wright Mills and David Riesman issued jeremiads against what they feared was the massification of society. In the liberal center, theorists like Parsons suggested how the same transition had created a more egalitarian, more inclusive, and significantly more differentiated society. On the right, there were cries of alarm about the disappearance of the individual in an authoritarian and bureaucratic welfare state (Buckley, 1951; Rand, 1957). On every side of the political spectrum, in other words, American intellectuals were motivated by a sense of dramatic and bifurcating social change. This was the social basis for constructing the traditional/modern binary code, an experience of bifurcation that demanded an interpretation of present anxieties, and future possibilities, in relation to the imagined past.

To fully understand the interrelation between history and theory that produced the new intellectuals, however, we must think about narrativity in addition to symbolic structure. In order to do so, I will draw on the dramaturgical terms of genre theory, which stretches from Aristotle’s poetics to the path-setting literary criticism of Frye (1971 [1957]), which inspired the “negative hermeneutics” of such historically oriented literary critics as White (1987), Jameson (1980), Brooks (1984), and Fussell (1975). In such dramaturgical terms we can characterize the historical period that preceded the era of modernization theory as one in which intellectuals “inflated” the importance of actors and events by emplotting them in a heroic narrative. The 1930s and the war years that followed defined a period of intense social conflict that generated millennial, world-historical hopes for utopian social transformation, either through communist and fascist revolutions or the construction of an unprecedented kind of “welfare state.” Postwar American intellectuals, by contrast, experienced the social world in more “deflationary” terms. With the failure of revolutionary proletarian movements in Europe and the headlong rush to normalization and demobilization in the United States, the heroic “grand narratives” of collective emancipation seemed less compelling. The present
was no longer perceived primarily as a way station to an alternative social order but, rather as more or less the only possible system there ever could be.

Such a deflationary acceptance of "this world" was not necessarily dystopian, fatalistic, or conservative. In Europe and America, for example, there emerged a principled anticommunism that wove together the bare threads of a collective narrative and committed their societies to social democracy. Yet even for such social-democratic and reformist groups the deflation of prewar social narratives had strong effects, effects that were very widely shared. Intellectuals as a group became more "hardheaded" and "realistic." Realism diverges radically from the heroic narrative, inspiring a sense of limitation and restraint rather than idealism and sacrifice. Black-and-white thinking, so important for social mobilization, is replaced by "ambiguity" and "complexity," terms favored by New Critics like Empson (1935) and particularly Trilling (1950), and by "skepticism," a position exemplified in Niebuhr's writings (e.g., Niebuhr, 1952). The conviction that one has been "born again"—this time to the social sacred—which inspires utopian enthusiasm is succeeded by the "thrice-born," chastened soul described by Bell (1952) and by an acute sense that the social God has failed (Grossman, 1950). Indeed, this new realism convinced many that narrative itself—history—had been eclipsed, which produced the representations of this newly "modern" society as the "end of ideology" (Bell, 1962) and the portrayal of the postwar world as "industrial" (Aron, 1962; Lipset & Bendix, 1960) rather than capitalist.

Yet, while realism was a significant mood in the postwar period, it was not the dominant narrative frame through which postwar social science intellectuals charted their times. Romanticism was. Relatively deflated in comparison with heroism, romanticism tells a story that is more positive in its evaluation of the world as it exists today. In the postwar period it allowed intellectuals and their audiences to believe that progress would be more or less continuously achieved, that improvement was likely. This state of grace referred, however, more to individuals than to groups and to incremental rather than revolutionary change. In the new world that emerged from the ashes of war, it had finally become possible to cultivate one's own garden. This cultivation would be an enlightened, modernist work, regulated by the cultural patterns of achievement and neutrality (Parsons & Shils, 1951), culminating in the "active" (Etzioni, 1968) and "achieving" (McClelland, 1953) society.

Romanticism, in other words, allowed America's postwar social science intellectuals, even in a period of relative narrative deflation, to continue to speak the language of progress and universalization. In the United States, what differentiates romantic from heroic narratives is the emphasis on the self and private life. In America's social narratives, heroes are epochal; they lead entire peoples to salvation, as collective representations like the American Revolution and the civil rights movement indicate. Romantic evolution, by contrast, is not collective; it is about Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn (Fiedler, 1955), the yeoman farmer (Smith, 1950), and Horatio Alger. American intellectuals, then, articulated modernization as a process that freed the self and made society's subsystems responsive to its needs. In this sense modernization theory was behavioral and pragmatic; it focused on real individuals rather than on a collective historical subject like nation, ethnic group, or class.

Existentialism was basic to the romantic American ideology of "modernism." American intellectuals, indeed, developed an idiosyncratic, optimistic reading of Sartre. In the milieu saturated with existentialism, "authenticity" became a central criterion for evaluating individual behavior, an emphasis that was central to Trilling's (1955) modernist literary criticism but also permeated social theory that ostensibly did not advocate modernization, for example Goffman's (1956) microsociology, with its equation of freedom with role distance and its conception of back-versus-front stage, and Riesman's (1950) eulogy for the inner-directed man.

These individualistic romantic narratives stressed the challenge of being modern, and they were complemented by an emphasis on irony, the narrative Frye defines as deflationary vis-a-vis romance but not downright negative in its effects. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the modernist aesthetic in Britain and America stressed irony, introspection, ambiguity. The dominant literary theory, so-called New Criticism, while tracing its origins back to Empson's book Seven Types of Ambiguity (1935), came into its own only after the heroic and much more historicist criticism of the 1930s. The key contemporary figure in American literature was Lionel Trilling, who defined the psychological and aesthetic goal of modernity as the expansion of complexity and tolerance for ambiguity. Psychoanalysis was a major critical approach, interpreted as an exercise in introspection and moral control (Rieff, 1959). In visual art, "modern" was equated with abstraction, the revolt against decoration, and minimalism, all of which were interpreted as drawing attention away from the surface and providing pathways into the inner self.

It is evidently difficult, at this remove, for contemporary postmodern and post-postmodern intellectuals to recapture the rich and, indeed, often ennobling aspects of this intellectual and aesthetic modernism, almost as difficult as it is for contemporaries to see the beauty and passion of modernist architecture that Pevsner (1949) so effectively captured in his epoch-defining book Pioneers of Modern Design. The accounts of intellectual—cum-aesthetic modernism proffered by contemporary postmodernists—from Bauman (1989), Seidman (1991), and Lash (1985) to Harvey (1989) and Jameson (1988)—is a fundamental misreading. Their construction of it as dehumanizing abstraction, mechanism, fragmentation, linearity, and domination, I will suggest below, says much more about the ideological exigencies that they and other contemporary intellectuals are experiencing today than it does about modernism itself. In culture, in theory, and in art, modernism represented a sparseness that devalued artifice not only as decoration but as pretension and undercut utopianism as a collective
delusion that was homologous with neurosis of an individual kind (Fromm, 1956). It was precisely such admirable qualities that Bell (1976) designated as early or "classical modernity" in his attack on the 1960s in The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism.

This picture was not, of course, entirely homogeneous one. On the right, engagement in the Cold War provided for some intellectuals a new field for collective heroism, despite the fact that America's most influential modernist thinkers were not as a rule Cold Warriors of the most righteous kind. On the left, both within and outside the United States, there were important islands of social criticism that made self-conscious departures from romanticism of both a social democratic and individualist ironic sort. Intellectuals influenced by the Frankfurt School, like Mills and Riesman, and other critics, like Arendt, refused to legitimize the humanism of this individualist turn, criticizing what they called the New Mass Society as forcing individuals into an amoral, egotistical mode. They inverted modernization theory's binary code, viewing American rationality as instrumental rather than moral and expressive and big science as technocratic rather than inventive. They saw conformity rather than independence; power elites rather than democracy; and deception and disappointment rather than authenticity, responsibility, and romance.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, these social critics did not become highly influential. To do so they would have had to pose a compelling alternative, a new heroic narrative to describe how the sick society could be transformed and a healthy one put in its place. This was impossible to do in the deflationary times. Fromm's Art of Loving (1956) followed his denunciation in The Sane Society (1955); in the fifties, social solutions often were contained in individual acts of private love. No social program issued from Adorno, Frankel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford's Authoritarian Personality (1950). Not only did C. Wright Mills fail to identify any viable social alternatives in his stream of critical studies (see n. 32), but he went out of his way to denounce the leaders of the social movements of the thirties and forties as "the new men of power" (Mills, 1948). After nearly twenty years of violence-producing utopian hopes, collective heroics had lost their sheen. The right-wing populism of Joe McCarthy reinforced the withdrawal from public life. Eventually, however, Americans and western Europeans did catch their breath, with results that must be related, once again, to history and social theory alike.

ANTIMODERNIZATION THEORY: THE HEROIC REVIVAL

Sometime in the 1960s, between the assassinations of President Kennedy and the San Francisco "summer of love" of 1967, modernization theory died. It died because the emerging younger generation of intellectuals could not believe it was true.

Even if we regard social theory as semiotic code rather than pragmatically in-
consciousness from the bottom up. Discourse about exploitation and inequality (e.g., Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Beckhoffer, & Platt, 1969; Mann, 1973) contended with, and eventually displaced, discussions of stratification and mobility. Conflict theories (Coser, 1956; Dahrendorf, 1959; Rex, 1961) replaced functional ones; state-centered political theories (Bendix 1968; Collins, 1976; Evans, Rueschemeyer, & Skocpol, 1985; Skocpol, 1979) replaced value-centered and multidimensional approaches; and conceptions of binding social structures were challenged by microsociologies that emphasized the liquid, unformed, and negotiated character of everyday life.

What pushed modernization theory over the edge, however, were not these scientific alternatives in and of themselves. Indeed, as I have indicated, the revisers of the earlier theory had themselves begun to offer coherent, equally explanatory theories for many of the same phenomena. The decisive fact in modernization theory’s defeat, rather, was the destruction of its ideological, discursive, and mythological core. The challenge that finally could not be met was existential. It emerged from new social movements that were increasingly viewed in terms of collective emancipation—peasant revolutions on a worldwide scale, black and Chicano national movements, indigenous people’s rebellions, youth culture, hippies, rock music, and women’s liberation. Because these movements (e.g., Weiner, 1984), profoundly altered the zeitgeist—the experienced tempo of the times—they captured the ideological imaginations of the rising cadre of intellectuals.

In order to represent this shifting empirical and existential environment, intellectuals developed a new explanatory theory. Equally significant, they inverted the binary code of modernization and “narrated the social” (Sherwood, 1994) in a new way. In terms of code, “modernity” and “modernization” moved from the sacred to the profane side of historical time, with modernity assuming many of the crucial characteristics that had earlier been associated with traditionalism and backwardness. Rather than democracy and individualization, the contemporary modern period was represented as bureaucratic and repressive. Rather than a free market or contractual society, modern America became “capitalist,” no longer rational, interdependent, modern, and liberating but backward, greedy, anarchic, and impoverishing.

This inversion of the sign and symbols associated with modernity polluted the movements associated with its name. The death of liberalism (Louri, 1969) was announced, and its reformist origins in the early twentieth century dismissed as a camouflage for extending corporate control (Kolko, 1967; Weinstein, 1968). Tolerance was associated with fuzzy-mindedness, immorality, and repression (Wolff, Marcuse, & Moore, 1965). The asceticalism of Western religion was critcized for its repressive modernity and Eastern and mystical religious were sacralized instead (Brown, 1966; see Brown, 1959). Modernity was equated with the mechanism of the machine (Rozsak, 1969). For the third world, democracy was defined as a luxury, strong states a necessity. Markets were not luxuries but enemies, for capitalism came to be represented as guaranteeing underdevelopment and backwardness. This inversion of economic ideals carried into the first world as well. Humanistic socialism replaced welfare state capitalism as the ultimate symbol of the good. Capitalist economies were held to produce only great poverty and great wealth (Kolko, 1962), and capitalist societies were viewed as sources of ethnic conflict (Bonacich, 1972), fragmentation, and alienation (Ollman, 1971). Not market society but socialism would provide wealth, equality, and a restored community.

These recordings were accompanied by fundamental shifts in social narratives. Intellectual myths were inflated upward, becoming stories of collective triumph and heroic transformation. The present was reconceived, not as the denouement of a long struggle but as a pathway to a different, much better world. In this heroic myth, actors and groups in the present society were conceived as being “in struggle” to build the future. The individualized, introspective narrative of romantic modernism disappeared, along with ambiguity and irony as preferred social values (Gitlin, 1987: 377–406). Instead, ethical lines were sharply drawn and political imperatives etched in black and white. In literary theory, the new criticism gave way to the new historicism (e.g., Veeser, 1989). In psychology, the moralist Freud was now seen as antirepressive, erotic, and even polymorphously perverse (Brown, 1966). The new Marx was sometimes a Leninist and other times a radical communitarian; he was only rarely portrayed as a social democrat or humanist in the earlier, modernist sense.

The historical vignette with which I opened this essay provides an illustration of this shift in sensibility. In his confrontation with Inkeles, Wallerstein pottenously announced that “the time has come to put away childish things, and look reality in the face” (1979: 133). He was not adopting here a realist frame but rather donning a heroic guise. For it was emancipation and revolution that marked the narrative rhetoric of the day, not, as Weber might have said, the hard, dreary task of facing up to workaday demands. To be realistic, Wallerstein suggested, was to realize that “we are living in the transition” to a “socialist mode of production, our future world government” (136). The existential question he put to his listeners was “How are we relating to it?” He suggested that there were only two alternatives: They could relate to the imminent revolution “as rational militants contributing to it or as clever obstructors of it (whether of the malicious or cynical variety).” The rhetorical construction of these alternatives demonstrates how the inversion of binary coding (the clear line between good and bad, with modernity being polluted) and the creation of a newly heroic narrative (the militantly millenial orientation to future salvation) were combined. Wallerstein made these remarks, it will be recalled, in a scientific presentation, later published as “Modernization: Requiescat in Pace.” He was one of the most influential and original social scientific theorists of the antimodernization theory phase.

The social theories that this new generation of radical intellectuals produced
can and must be considered in scientific terms (see, e.g., Alexander, 1987; van den Berg, 1980). Their cognitive achievements, indeed, became dominant in the 1970s and remained hegemonic in contemporary social science long after the ideological totalities in which they were initially embedded disappeared. Yet to study the decline of a mode of knowledge, I would insist once again, demands broader, extrascientific considerations as well. Theories are created by intellectuals in their search for meaning. In response to continuing social change, generational shifts occur that can make the scientific and ideological efforts of earlier intellectual generations seem not only empirically implausible but psychologically shallow, politically irrelevant, and morally obsolete.

By the end of the 1970s, the energy of the radical social movements of the preceding period had dissipated. Some of their demands became institutionalized; others were blocked by massive backlash movements that generated conservative publics and brought right-wing governments to power. The cultural-cum-political shift was so rapid as to seem, once again, to represent some kind of historical-cum-epistemological break. Materialism replaced idealism among political intellectuals, and surveys reported increasingly conservative views among young people and university students. Marxist ideologues—one thinks of Bernard-Henri Levy (1977) in Paris and David Horowitz (Horowitz & Collier, 1989) in the United States—became anticommunist nouvelles philosophes and, some of them, neoconservatives. Yuppies became yuppies. For many intellectuals who had matured during the radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s, these new developments brought unbearable disappointment. Parallels with the 1950s were evident. The collective and heroic narrative of socialism once again had died, and the end of ideology seemed once again to be at hand.

**POSTMODERNIZATION THEORY: RESIGNATION AND COMIC DETACHMENT**

Postmodernism can be seen as an explanatory social theory that has produced new middle-range models of culture (Foucault, 1977; Huysssen, 1986; Lyotard, 1984), science and epistemology (Rorty, 1979), class (Hall, 1993), social action (Crespi, 1992), gender and family relations (Halpern, 1990; Seidman, 1991b), and economic life (Harvey, 1989; Lash, 1985). In each of these areas, and others, postmodern theories have made original contributions to the understanding of reality. It is not as a theory of the middle range, however, that postmodernism has made its mark. These discussions have become significant only because they are taken to exemplify broad new trends of history, social structure, and moral life. Indeed, it is by intertwining the levels of structure and process, micro and macro, with strong assertions about the past, present, and future of contemporary life that postmodernism has formed a broad and inclusive general theory of society, one that, like the others I have considered here, must be considered in extrascientific terms, not only as an explanatory source.

If we consider postmodernism as myth—not merely as cognitive descriptions but as their coding and narration into a "meaningful" frame—we must deal with it as the successor ideology to radical social theory, animated by the failure of reality to unfold in a manner that was consistent with the expectations generated by that antimonodiermization creed. From this perspective, we can see that while postmodernism seems to be coming to grips with the present and future, its horizon is fixed by the past. It was initially (at least) an ideology of intellectual disappointment, Marxist and post-Marxist intellectuals articulated postmodernism in reaction to the fact that the period of heroic and collective radicalism seemed to be slipping away. They redefined this exalted collective present, which had been held to presage an even more heroic imminent future, as a period that was now passed. They declared that it had been superseded not for reasons of political defeat but because of the structure of history itself. The defeat of utopia had threatened a mythically incoherent possibility, namely that of historical retrogression. It threatened to undermine the meaning structures of intellectual life. With postmodern theory, this imminent defeat could be transformed into an immanent one, a necessity of historical development itself. The heroic "grand narratives" of the Left had merely been made irrelevant by history; they were not actually defeated. Myth could still function. Meaning was preserved.

The most influential early attributions of postmodernism were filled with frank revelations of theoretical perplexity, testimonies to dramatic shifts in reality, and expressions of existential despair. Fredric Jameson (1988: 25), for example, identified a "new and virtually unimaginable quantum leap in technological alienation." Despite his methodological commitments, Jameson resists the impulse to fall back on the neo-Marxist certainties of the earlier age. Asserting that shifts in the productive base of society had created the superstructural confusions of a transitional time, he bemoaned "the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentralized communication network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects" (15).

Referring to the traditional role of art as a vehicle for gaining cultural clarity, Jameson complained that this meaning-making reflex had been blocked: we are "unable to focus our own present, as though we have become incapable of achieving aesthetic representations of our own current experience" (20). Yet the intellectual meaning-making triumph of mature postmodernism is already visible in Jameson's depiction of this new order as privatized, fragmented, and commercial. With these terms, the perplexities and blockages of rationality that Jameson succeeded in articulating can be explained not as personal failure but as historical necessities based on reason itself. What threatened meaninglessness now becomes the very basis for meaning; what has been constructed is a new present and a new past. No wonder that Jameson described (1988: 15) postmodernism as first and foremost a "periodizing concept," suggesting that the term was created so that intellectuals and their audiences could make sense
of these new times: "The new postmodernism expresses the inner truth of that newly emergent social order of late capitalism" (15).

Postmodern theory, then, may be seen, in rather precise terms, as an attempt to readdress the problem of meaning created by the experienced failure of "the sixties." Only in this way can we understand why the very dichotomy between modern and postmodern was announced and why the contents of these new historical categories are described in the ways they are. From the perspective developed here, the answers seem clear enough. Continuity with the earlier period of antimodern radicalism is maintained by the fact that postmodernism, too, takes "the modern" as its explicit foe. In the binary coding of this intellectual ideology, modernity remains on the polluted side, representing "the other" in postmodernism's narrative tales.

Yet in this third phase of postwar social theory, the contents of the modern are completely changed. Radical intellectuals had emphasized the privacy and particularism of modern capitalism, its provinciality, and the fatalism and resignation it produced. The postmodernization alternative they posited was not postmodern but public, heroic, collective, and universal. It is precisely the latter qualities, of course, that postmodernization theory has condemned as the very embodiment of modernity itself. In contrast, it has coded privacy, diminished expectations, subjectivism, individuality, particularity, and localization as the embodiments of the good. As for narrative, the major historical propositions of postmodernism—the decline of the grand narrative and the return to the local (Lyotard, 1984), the rise of the empty symbol, or simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1983), the end of socialism (Gorz, 1982), the emphasis on plurality and difference (Seidman, 1991a, 1992)—are transparent representations of a deflationary narrative frame. They are responses to the decline of "progressive" ideologies and their utopian beliefs.

The resemblances to radical antimodernism, then, are superficial and misleading. In fact, there is a much more significant connection between postmodernism and the period that preceded radicalism, that is, modernization theory itself. Modernization theory, we recall, was itself a deflationary ideology following an earlier heroic period of radical quest. It, too, contained emphases on the private, the personal, and the local.

While these similarities reveal how misleading the intellectual self-representations of intellectual ideologies can be, it is obviously true that the two approaches differ in fundamental ways. These differences emerge from their positions in concrete historical time. The postwar liberalism that inspired modernization theory followed on a radical movement that understood transcendence within a progressivist frame, one that, while aiming to radicalize modernism hardly rejected it. Thus while the romantic and ironic dimensions of postwar liberalism deflated heroic modernism, its movement away from modernism made central aspects of modernism even more accessible.

Postmodernism, by contrast, followed on a radical intellectual generation that had condemned not only liberal modernism but also key tenets of the very notion of modernization as such. The New Left rejected the Old Left in part because it was wedded to the modernization project; they preferred the Frankfurt School (e.g., Jay, 1973), whose roots in German Romanticism coincided more neatly with its own, antimodernist tone. While postmodernism, then, is indeed a deflationary narrative vis-à-vis heroic radicalism, the specificity of its historical position means that it must place both heroic (radical) and romantic (liberal) versions of the modern onto the same negative side. Successor intellectuals tend to invert the binary code of the previously hegemonic theory. For postmodernism, the new code, modernism: postmodernism, implied a larger break with "universalist" Western values than did the traditionalism: modernism of the immediate postwar period or the capitalist modernism: socialist antimodernization dichotomy that succeeded it.

In narrative terms as well, there are much greater deflationary shifts. Although there remains, to be sure, a romantic tenor in some strands of postmodernist thought, and even collectivist arguments for heroic liberation, these "constructive" versions (Rosenau, 1992; Thompson, 1992) focus on the personal and the intimate and tend to be offshoots of social movements of the 1960s, for example gay and lesbian "struggles," the women's "movement," and the ecology activists like the Greens. Insofar as they do engage public policy, such movements articulate their demands much more in the language of difference and particularism (e.g., Seidman, 1991a, 1992) than in the universalist terms of the collective good. The principal and certainly the most distinctive thrust of the postmodern narrative, moreover, is strikingly different. Rejecting not only heroism but romanticism as well, it tends to be more fatalistic, critical, and resigned, in short more cinematically agnostic, than these more political movements of uplift and reform suggest. Rather than upholding the authenticity of the individual, postmodernism announced, via Foucault and Derrida, the death of the subject. In Jameson's (1988: 15) words, "the conception of a unique self and private identity is a thing of the past." Another departure from the earlier, more romantic version of modernism is the singular absence of irony. Rorty's political philosophy is a case in point. Because he espouses irony and complexity (e.g., Rorty, 1983, 1989), he maintains a political if not an epistemological liberalism, and because of these commitments he must distance himself from the postmodernist frame.

Instead of romance and irony, what has emerged full-blown in postmodernism is the comic frame. Frye calls comedy the ultimate equalizer. Because good and evil cannot be parsed, the actors—protagonists and antagonists—are on the same moral level, and the audience, rather than being normatively or emotionally involved, can sit back and be amused. Baudrillard (1983) is the master of satire and ridicule, as the entire Western world becomes Disneyland at large. In the postmodern comedy, indeed, the very notion of actors is eschewed. With tongue in cheek but a new theoretical system in his mind, Foucault announced
the death of the subject, a theme that Jameson canonized with his announce-
ment that “the conception of a unique self and private identity is a thing of the past.” Postmodernism is the play within the play, a historical drama designed to convince its audiences that drama is dead and that history no longer exists. What remains is nostalgia for a symbolized past.

Perhaps I may end this discussion with a snapshot of Daniel Bell, the intellec-
tual whose career nearly embodies each of the scientific-cum-mythical phases of history I have thus far described. Bell came to intellectual self-consciousness as a Trotskyist in the 1930s. For a time after World War II he remained in the heroic anticapitalist mode of figures like C. Wright Mills, whom he welcomed as a colleague at Columbia University. His famous essay on the assembly line and deskilled labor (1963 [1959]) demonstrated continuity with prewar leftist work. By insisting on the concept of alienation, Bell committed himself to “capitalism” rather than “industrialism,” thus championing epochal transformation and resisting the postwar modernization line. Soon, however, Bell made the transition to realism, advocating modernism in a more romantically individualist than radical socialist way. Although The Coming of Post-Industrial Society appeared only in 1973, Bell had introduced the concept as an extension of Aron’s industrialization thesis nearly two decades before. Postindustrial was a periodization that supported progress, modernization, and reason while undermining the possibilities for heroic transcendence and class conflict. Appearing in the midst of antimodernist rebellion, The Coming of Post-Industrial Society was reviewed with perplexity and disdain by many intellectuals on the antimodernist left, although its oblique relationship with theories of postscarcity society were sometimes noted as well.

What is so striking about this phase of Bell’s career, however, is how rapidly the modernist notion of postindustrial society gave way to postmodernism, in content if not explicit form. For Bell, of course, it was not disappointed radicalism that produced this shift but his disappointments with what he came to call late modernism. When Bell turned away from this degenerate modernism in The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism (1976), his story had changed. Postindustrial society, once the epitome of modernism, now produced not reason and progress but emotionalism and irrationalism, categories alarmingly embodied in sixties youth culture. Bell’s solution to this imminent self-destruction of Western society was to advocate the return of the sacred (1977), a solution that exhibited the nostalgia for the past that Jameson would later diagnose as a certain sign of the coming of the postmodern age.

The comparison of Bell’s postindustrial argument with Harvey’s post-Fordism (1989) is revealing in this regard. Harvey takes similar developments in the productive arrangements of high-information capitalism but draws a far different conclusion about their effects on the consciousness of the age. Bell’s anti-Marxism—his (1978) emphasis on the asynchronicity of systems—allows him to posit rebellion in the form of youth culture and to posit cultural salvation in the ideal of “the sacred return” (see Eliade, 1954). Harvey’s continued commitment to orthodox base-superstructure reasoning, by contrast, leads him to postulate fragmentation and privatization as inevitable, and unstoppable, results of the post-Fordist productive mode. Bell’s conservative attack on modernism embraces nostalgia; Harvey’s radical attack on postmodernism posits defeat.

Postmodern theory is still, of course, very much in the making. As I have already mentioned, its middle-range formulations contain significant truths. Evaluating the importance of its general theorizing, by contrast, depends on whether one places poststructuralism under its wing. Certainly theorists of the strong linguistic turn—thinkers like Foucault, Bourdieu, Geertz, and Korty—began to outline their understandings long before postmodernism appeared on the scene. Nevertheless, their emphasis on relativism and constructivism, their principled antagonism to an identification with the subject, and their skepticism regarding the possibility of totalizing change make their contributions more compatible with postmodernism than either modernism or radical antimodernization. Indeed, these theorists wrote in response to the disappointment with modernism (Geertz and Korty vis-à-vis Parsons and Quine) on the one hand and heroic antimodernism (Foucault and Bourdieu vis-à-vis Althusser and Sartre) on the other. Nonetheless, Geertz and Bourdieu can scarcely be called postmodern theorists, and strong culturalists theories cannot be identified with the broad ideological sentiments that the term postmodernism implies.

I would maintain here, as I have earlier in this essay, that scientific considerations are insufficient to account for shifts either toward or away from an intellectual position. If, as I believe to be the case, the departure from postmodernism has already begun, we must look closely, once again, at extrascientific considerations, at recent events and social changes that seem to demand yet another new “world-historical frame.”

NEOMODERNISM: DRAMATIC INFLATION AND UNIVERSAL CATEGORIES

In postmodern theory, intellectuals have represented to themselves and to society at large their response to the defeat of the heroic utopias of radical social movements, a response that while recognizing defeat did not give up the cognitive reference to that utopic world. Every idea in postmodern thought is a reflection on the categories and false aspirations of the traditional collectivist narrative, and for most postmodernists the dystopia of the contemporary world is the semantic result. Yet while the hopes of leftist intellectuals were dashed by the late 1970s, the intellectual imagination of others was rekindled. For when the Left lost, the Right won and won big. In the 1960s and 1970s, the right was a backlash, reactive movement. By 1980 it had become triumphant and began to initiate far-reaching changes in Western societies. A fact that has been conve-
ently overlooked by each of the three intellectual generations I have considered thus far—and most grievously by the postmodernist movement that was historically conterminous with it—is that the victory of the neoliberal Right had, and continues to have, massive political, economic, and ideological repercussions around the globe.

The most striking “success” for the Right was, indeed, the defeat of communism, which was not only a political, military, and economic victory but, as I suggested in the introduction to this essay, also a triumph on the level of the historical imagination itself. Certainly there were objective economic elements in the bankruptcy of the Soviet Union, including growing technological deficiencies, sinking export proceeds, and the impossibility of finding desperately needed capital funds by switching to a strategy of internal growth (Muller, 1992: 139). Yet the final economic breakdown had a political cause, for it was the computer-based military expansion of America and its NATO allies, combined with the right-wing-inspired technology boycott, that brought the Soviet party dictatorship to its economic and political knees. While the lack of access to documents makes any definitive judgment decidedly premature, there seems no doubt that these policies were, in fact, among the principal strategic goals of the Reagan and Thatcher governments and that they were achieved with signal effect.34

This extraordinary, and almost completely unexpected triumph over what once seemed not only a socially but an intellectually plausible alternative world had the same kind of destabilizing, deontologizing effects on many intellectuals as the other massive historical “breaks” I have discussed earlier. It created, as well, the same sense of imminence and the conviction that the “new world” in the making (see Kumar, 1992) demands a new and very different kind of social theory.35

This negative triumph over state socialism was reinforced, moreover, by the dramatic series of “positive successes” during the 1980s of aggressively capitalist market economies. This was most often remarked on (most recently by Kennedy, 1993) in connection with the newly industrialized, extraordinarily dynamic Asian economies that arose in what was once called the third world. It is important not to underestimate the ideological effects of this world-historical fact: high-level, sustainable transformations of backward economies were achieved not by socialist command economies but by zealously capitalist states.

What has often been overlooked, however, is that during this same time frame the capitalist market was also reinvigorated, both symbolically and objectively, in the capitalist West. This transpired not only in Thatcherite Britain and Reaganite America but perhaps even more dramatically in the more “progressive” and state-interventionist regimes like France and, subsequently, in countries like Italy, Spain, and Scandinavia itself. There was not only, in other words, the ideologically portentous bankruptcy of most of the world’s communist economies but also the marked privatization of nationalized capitalist economies in both authoritarian-corporatist and socialist-democratic states. Clinton’s centrist liberalism, British New Labour, and the movement of German social democrats toward the market similarly marked the new vitality of capitalism for egalitarian ideology. In the late 1960s and 1970s, the intellectual successors to modernization theory, neo-Marxists like Baran and Sweezy (1966) and Mandel (1968), announced the imminent stagnation of capitalist economies and an inevitably declining rate of profit.36 History has proved them wrong, with far-reaching ideological results (Chiriță, 1990).

“Righthand” developments on the more specifically political plane have been as far-reaching as those on the economic. As I mentioned earlier, during the late 1960s and 1970s it had become ideologically fashionable, and empirically justifiable, to accept political authoritarianism as the price of economic development. In the last two decades, however, events on the ground seem to have challenged this view, and a radical reversal of conventional wisdom is now underway. It is not only communist tyrannies that have opened up since the mid-1980s but the very Latin American dictatorships that seemed so “objectively necessary” only an intellectual generation before. Even some African dictatorships have recently begun to show signs of vulnerability to this shift in political discourse from authoritarianism to democracy.

These developments have created social conditions—and mass public sentiment—that would seem to belie the postmodern intellectuals’ coding of contemporarity (and future) society as fatalistic, private, particularistic, fragmented, and local. They also would appear to undermine the deflated narrative frame of postmodernism, which has insisted either on the romance of difference or, more fundamentally, on the idea that contemporary life can only be interpreted in a comic way. Indeed, if we look closely at recent intellectual discourse, we can observe a return to many earlier modernist themes.

Because the recent revivals of market and democracy have occurred on a worldwide scale and because they are categorically abstract and generalizing ideas, universalism has once again become a viable source for social theory. Notions of commonality and institutional convergence have reemerged and with them the possibilities for intellectuals to provide meaning in a utopian way.37 It seems, in fact, that we have been witness to the birth of a fourth postwar version of myorthopoeic social thought. “Neo-modernism” (see Tiryakian, 1991) will serve as a rough-and-ready characterization of this phase of postmodernization theory until a term appears that represents the new spirit of the times in a more imaginative way.

In response to economic developments, different groupings of contemporary intellectuals have reinvigorated the emancipatory narrative of the market, in which they inscribe a new past (antimarket society) and a new present/future (market transition, full-blown capitalism) that makes liberation dependent on privatization, contracts, monetary inequality, and competition. On one side a much enlarged and more activist breed of intellectual conservatives has emerged. Although their policy and political concerns have not, as yet, greatly affected the
discourse of general social theory, there are exceptions that indicate the potential is there. James Coleman’s massive *Foundations of Social Theory* (1990), for example, has a self-consciously heroic cast; it aims to make neomarketing, rational choice the basis not only for future theoretical work but for the re-creation of a more responsive, law-abiding, and less degraded social life.

Much more significant is the fact that within liberal intellectual life, among the older generation of disillusioned utopians and the younger intellectual groups as well, a new and positive social theory of markets has reappeared. For many politically engaged intellectuals, too, this has taken the theoretical form of the individualistic, quasi-romantic frame of rational choice. Employed initially to deal with the disappointing failures of working-class consciousness (e.g., Przeworski, 1985; Wright, 1985; see Elster, 1989), it has increasingly served to explain how state communism, and capitalist corporatism, can be transformed into a market-oriented system that is liberating, or at least substantively rational (Moene & Wallerstein, 1992; Nee, 1989; Przeworski, 1991). While other politically engaged intellectuals have appropriated market ideas in less restrictive and more collectivist ways (e.g., Blackburn, 1991b; Friedland & Robertson, 1990; Szelenyi, 1988), their writings, too, betray an enthusiasm for market processes that is markedly different from the attitude of the left-leaning intellectuals of earlier times. Among the intellectual advocates of “market socialism” there has been a similar change. Kornai (1990), for example, has expressed distinctly fewer reservations about free markets in his more recent writings than in the pathbreaking works of the 1970s and 1980s that brought him to fame.

This neomodern revival of market theory is also manifest in the rebirth and redefinition of economic sociology. In terms of research program, Granovetter’s (1974) earlier celebration of the strengths of the market’s “weak ties” has become a dominant paradigm for studying economic networks (e.g., Powell, 1991), one that implicitly rejects postmodern and antimodern pleas for strong ties and local communities. His later argument for the “imbredness” (1985) of economic action has transformed (e.g., Granovetter & Swedberg, 1992) the image of the market into a social and interactional relationship that has little resemblance to the deracinated, capitalist exploiter of the past. Similar transformations can be seen in more generalized discourse. Adam Smith has been undergoing an intellectual rehabilitation (Boltanski, 1999: 35–95; Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991: 60–84; Hall, 1983; Heilbroner, 1986). Schumpeter’s “market realism” has been revived; the individualism of Weber’s marginalist economics has been celebrated (Holton & Turner, 1986); and so has the market acceptance that permeates Parsons’s theoretical work (Holton, 1992; Holton & Turner, 1986).

In the political realm, neomodernism has emerged in an even more powerful way, as a result, no doubt, of the fact that it has been the political revolutions of the last decade that have reintroduced narrative in a truly heroic form (contra Kumar, 1992: 316) and challenged the postmodern deflation in the most direct way. The movements away from dictatorship, motivated in practice by the most variegated of concerns, were articulated mythically as a vast, unfolding “drama of democracy” (Sherwood, 1994), literally as an opening up of the spirit of humanity. The melodrama of social good triumphing, or almost triumphing, over social evil—which Peter Brooks (1984) placed at the roots of the nineteenth century narrative form—populated the symbolic canvas of the late twentieth century West with heroes and conquests of truly world-historical scope. This drama started with the epochal struggle of Lech Walesa and what seemed to be virtually the entire Polish nation (Tiryakian, 1988) against Poland’s coercive party-state. The day-to-day dramaturgy that captured the public imagination ended initially in Solidarity’s inexplicable defeat. Eventually, however, good did triumph over evil, and the dramatic symmetry of the heroic narrative was complete. Mikhail Gorbachev began his long march through the Western dramatic imagination in 1984. His increasingly loyal worldwide audience fiercely followed his epochal struggles in what eventually became the longest-running public drama in the postwar period. This grand narrative produced cathartic reactions in its audience, which the press called “Gorbymania” and Durkheim would have labeled the collective effervescence that only symbols of the sacred inspire. This drama was reprised in what the mass publics, media, and elites of Western countries construed as the equally heroic achievements of Nelson Mandela and Václav Havel, and later Boris Yeltsin, the tank-stopping hero who succeeded Gorbachev in Russia’s postcommunist phase. Similar experiences of exaltation and renewed faith in the moral efficacy of democratic revolution were produced by the social drama that took place in 1989 in Tiananmen Square, with its strong ritualistic overtones (Chan, 1994) and its classically tragic denouement.

It would be astonishing if this reinflation of mass political drama did not manifest itself in equally marked shifts in intellectual theorizing about politics. In fact, in a manner that parallels the rise of the “market,” there has been the powerful reemergence of theorizing about democracy. Liberal ideas about political life, which emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and were displaced by the “social question” of the great industrial transformation, seem like contemporary ideas again. Dismissed as historically anachronistic in the anti- and postmodern decades, they became quite suddenly à la mode.

The reemergence took the form of the revival of the concept of “civil society,” the informal, nonstate, and noneconomic realm of public and personal life that Tocqueville defined as vital to the maintenance of the democratic state. Rising initially from within the intellectual debates that helped spark the social struggles against authoritarianism in eastern Europe (see Cohen & Arato, 1992) and Latin America (Stepan, 1985), the term was “secularized” and given more abstract and more universal meaning by American and European intellectuals connected with these movements, like Cohen and Arato (1992) and Keane (1988a,
1988b). They utilized the concept to begin theorizing in a manner that sharply demarcated their own "left" theorizing from the antimodernization, antiformal democracy writings of an earlier day.

Stimulated by these writers and also by the English translation (1989 [1962]) of Habermas's early book on the bourgeois public sphere, debates about pluralism, fragmentation, differentiation, and participation became the new order of the day. Frankfurt theorists, Marxist social historians, and even some postmodernists became democratic theorists under the sign of the "public sphere" (see, e.g., the essays by Moishe Postone, Mary P. Ryan, and Geoff Eley in Calhoun [1993] and the more recent writings of Held, e.g. 1987). Communitarian and internalist political philosophers, like Walzer (1992a, 1992b), took up the concept to clarify the universalist yet nonabstract dimensions in their theorizing about the good. For conservative social theorists (e.g., Banfield, 1991; Shils, 1991a, 1991b; Wilson, 1991), civil society is a concept that implies civility and harmony. For neofunctionalists (e.g., Mayhew, 1990; Scillli, 1990), it is an idea that denotes the possibility of theorizing conflicts over equality and inclusion in a less anticapitalist way. For old functionalists (e.g., Inkeles, 1991), it is an idea that suggests that formal democracy has been a requisite for modernization all along.

But whatever the particular perspective that has framed this new political idea, its neomodern status is plain to see. Theorizing in this manner suggests that contemporary societies either possess, or must aspire to, not only an economic market but a distinctive political zone, an institutional field of universal if contested domain (Touraine, 1994). It provides a common empirical point of reference, which implies a familiar coding of citizen and enemy and allows history to be narrated, once again, in a teleological manner that gives the drama of democracy full force.

NEOMODERNISM AND SOCIAL EVIL: POLLUTING NATIONALISM

This problem of the demarcation of civil as opposed to uncivil society points to issues that go beyond the narrating and explanatory frameworks of neomodern theory that I have described thus far. Romantic and heroic narratives that describe the triumph, or possible triumph, of markets and democracies have a reassuringly familiar form. When we turn to the binary coding of this emerging historical period, however, certain problems arise. Given the resurgence of universalism, of course, one can be confident that what is involved is a specification of the master code, described earlier as the discourse of civil society. Yet while this almost archetypical symbolization of the requisites and antonyms of democracy establishes general categories, historically specific "social representations" (Moscovici, 1984) must also be developed to articulate the concrete categories of good and evil in a particular time and place. In regard to these secondary elabo-

rations, what strikes one is how difficult it has been to develop a set of binary categories that is semantically and socially compelling, a black-versus-white contrast that can function as a successor code to the postmodern: modern or, for that matter, the socialist: capitalist and modern: traditional symbolic sets that were established by earlier intellectual generations and that by no means have entirely lost their efficacy today.

To be sure, the symbolization of the good does not present a real problem. Democracy and universalism are key terms, and their more substantive embodiments are the free market, individualism, and human rights. The problem comes in establishing the profane side. The abstract qualities that pollution must embody are obvious enough. Because they are produced by the principle of difference, they closely resemble the qualities that were opposed to modernization in the postwar period, qualities that identified the polluting nature of "traditional" life. But despite the logical similarities, earlier ideological formulations cannot simply be taken up again. Even if they effectuate themselves only through differences in second-order representations, the distances between present-day society and the immediate postwar period are enormous.

Faced with the rapid onrush of "markets" and "democracy" and the rapid collapse of their opposites, it has proven difficult to formulate equally universal and far-reaching representations of the profane. The question is this: Is there an oppositional movement or geopolitical force that is a convincingly and fundamentally dangerous—that is a "world-historical"—threat to the "good"? The once powerful enemies of universalism seemed to be historical relics, out of sight and out of mind, laid low by a historical drama that seems unlikely soon to be reversed. It was for this semantic reason that, in the interim period after "1989," many intellectuals, and certainly broad sections of Western publics, experienced a strange combination of optimism and self-satisfaction without an energetic commitment to any particular moral repair.

In comparison with the modernization theory of the postwar years, neomodern theory involves fundamental shifts in both symbolic time and symbolic space. In neomodern theory, the profane can neither be represented by an evolutionarily preceding period of traditionalism nor identified with the world outside of North America and Europe. In contrast with the postwar modernization wave, the current one is global and international rather than regional and imperial, a difference articulated in social science by the contrast between early theories of dependency (Frank, 1966) and more contemporary theories of globalization (Robertson, 1992). The social and economic reasons for this change center on the rise of Japan, which this time around has gained power not as one of Spencer's military societies—a category that could be labeled backward in an evolutionary sense—but as a civilized commercial society.

Thus, for the first time in five hundred years (see Kennedy, 1987; Huntington 1996), it is becoming impossible for the West to dominate Asia, either economically or culturally. When this objective factor is combined with the perva-
The traditional discourse of Arab nationalism, to say nothing of the quite decrepit state system, is inexact, unresponsive, anomalous, even comic. ... Today's Arab media are a disgrace. It is difficult to speak the plain truth in the Arab world. ... Rarely does one find rational analysis—reliable statistics, concrete and undoctored descriptions of the Arab world today with its crushing mediocrity in science and many cultural fields. Allegory, complicated symbolism and innuendo substitute for common sense.

When Said concludes that there appears to be a "remorseless Arab propensity to violence and extremism," he suggests the end of occidentalism. If anything, this trend has deepened with the post-September 11 "war" on terrorism, in which intellectuals from East and West have made elaborate efforts—contra Huntington (1996)—to represent the action as a defense of universalism and to separate it from the orientalist bias of modernist thought.

Because the contemporary recoding of the antithesis of universalism can be geographically represented neither as non-Western nor as temporarily located in an earlier time, the social sacred of neomodernism cannot, paradoxically, be represented as "modernization." In the ideological discourse of contemporary intellectuals, it would seem almost as difficult to employ this term as it is to identify the good with "socialism." Not modernization but democratization, not the modern but the market—these are the terms that the new social movements of the neomodern period employ. These difficulties in representation help to explain the new saliency of supranational, international organizations (Thomas & Lauderda, 1988), a salience that points, in turn, to elements of what the long-term representation of a viable ideological antimony might be. For many critically placed European and American intellectuals (e.g., Held, 1995), the United Nations and European Community have taken on new legitimacy and reference, providing institutional manifestations of the new universalism that transcend earlier great divides.

The logic of these telling institutional and cultural shifts is that "nationalism"—not traditionalism, communism, or the "East"—is coming to represent the principal challenge to the newly universalized discourse of the good. Nationalism is the name intellectuals and publics are now increasingly giving to the negative antinomies of civil society. The categories of the "irrational," "conspiratorial," and "repressive" are taken to be synonymous with forceful expressions of nationality and equated with primordiality and uncivilized social forms. That civil societies have always themselves taken a national form is being conveniently neglected, along with the continuing nationalism of many democratic movements themselves. It is true, of course, that in the geopolitical world that has so suddenly been re-formed, it is the social movements and armed rebellions for national self-determination that trigger military conflicts that can engender large-scale wars (Snyder, 2000).

Is it any wonder, then, that nationalism came to be portrayed as the successor...
of communism, not only in the semantic but in the organizational sense? This equation is made by high intellectuals, not only in the popular press. "Far from extinguishing nationalism," Liah Greenfeld (1992) wrote in the New Republic, "communism perpetuated and reinforced the old nationalist values. And the intelligentsia committed to these values is now turning on the democratic regime it inadvertently helped to create." It does not seem surprising that some of the most promising younger generation of social scientists have shifted from concerns with modernization, critical theory, and citizenship to issues of identity and nationalism. In addition to Greenfeld, one might note the new work of Rogers Brubaker, whose studies of central European and Russian nationalism (e.g., Brubaker, 1994) make similar links between Soviet communism and contemporary nationalism and whose current pessimistic interests in nationalism seems to have displaced an earlier preoccupation with citizenship and democracy (see Calhoun, 1993).

In winter 1994, Theory and Society, a bellwether of intellectual currents in Western social theory, devoted a special issue to nationalism. In their introduction to the symposium, Comaroff and Stern make particularly vivid the link between nationalism-as-pollution and nationalism-as-object-of-social-science.

Nowhere have the signs of the quickening of contemporary history, of our misunderstanding and misprediction of the present, been more clearly expressed than in the . . . assertive renaissance of nationalism . . . World events over the past few years have thrown a particularly sharp light on the darker, more dangerous sides of nationalism and claims to sovereign identity. And, in so doing, they have revealed how tenuous is our grasp of the phenomenon. Not only have these events confounded the unsuspecting world of scholarship. They have also shown a long heritage of social theory and prognostication to be flatly wrong. (Comaroff & Stern, 1994: 35)

While these theorists do not, of course, deconstruct their empirical argument by explicitly relating it to the rise of a new phase of myth and science, it is noteworthy that they do insist on linking the new understanding of nationalism to the rejection of Marxism, modernization theory, and postmodern thought (35–7). In their own contribution to this special revival issue, Greenfeld and Chilot insist on the fundamental antithesis between democracy and nationalism in the strongest terms. After discussing Russia, Germany, Romania, Syria, Iraq, and the Cambodian Khmer Rouge, they write:

The new social representation of nationalism and pollution, based on the symbolic analogy with communism, has also permeated the popular press. Serbia's expansionist military adventures provided a crucial field of collective representation. See, for example, the categorial relationships established in this editorial from the New York Times:

Communism can pass easily into nationalism. The two creeds have much in common. Each offers a simple key to tangled problems. One exalts class, the other ethnic kinship. Each blames real grievances on imagined enemies. As a Russian informant shrewdly remarked to David Shipler in The New Yorker:

"They are both ideologies that liberate people from personal responsibility. They are united around some sacred [read profane] goal." In varying degrees and with different results, old Bolsheviks have become new nationalists in Serbia and many former Soviet republics.

The Times editorial writer further codes the historical actors by analyzing the 1990s breakup of Czechoslovakia to the kind of virulent nationalism that followed on the First World War.

And now the same phenomenon has surfaced in Czechoslovakia . . . . There is a . . . moral danger, described long ago by Thomas Masaryk, the founding president of Czechoslovakia, whose own nationalism was joined inseparably to belief in democracy. "Chauvinism is nowhere justified," he wrote in 1927, "least of all in our country. . . . To a positive nationalism, one that seeks to raise a nation by intensive work, none can demur. Chauvinism, racial or national intolerance, not love of one's own people, is the foe of nations and of humanity." Masaryk's words are a good standard for judging tolerance on both sides. (June 16, 1992: reprinted in the International Herald Tribune)

The analogy between nationalism and communism, and their pollution as threats to the new internationalism, is even made by government officials of formerly communist states. For example, in late September 1992, Andrei Kozyrev, Russia's foreign minister, appealed to the United Nations to consider setting up international trusteeships to oversee the move to independence by former Soviet non-Slavic republics. Only a UN connection, he argued, could prevent the newly independent states from discriminating against national minorities. The symbolic crux of his argument is the analogy between two categories of pollution. "Previously, victims of totalitarian regimes and ideologies needed protection," Kozyrev told the UN General Assembly. "Today, ever more often one needs to counter aggressive nationalism that emerges as a new global threat."

Since the murder and social havoc wreaked by Al Qaeda in New York City on September 11, 2001, this already strenuous effort to symbolize the darkness that threatens neo-modern hopes has become even more intense. "Terror" has
become the ultimate, highly generalized negative quality. It is not only associated with anticivil murder but with religious fundamentalism, which in the wake of the tragedy has displaced nationalism as representing the essence of antimodernity. Terror was a term that postwar modern employed to represent the fascist and communist others against which it promised relief. Fundamentalism, however, is new. Religiousity was not associated with totalitarianism. But is it fundamentalism per se or only Islamic versions that are employed to mark the current alternative to civil society? Is terrorism such a broad negative that militant movements against antidemocratic, even murderous regimes will be polluted in turn? Will opposing “terrorism” and “fundamentalism” make the neo-modern vulnerable to the conservatism and chauvinism of modernization theory in its earlier form? (Alexander, forthcoming).

MODERNIZATION REDUX? THE HUBRIS OF LINEARITY

In 1982, when Anthony Giddens confidently asserted that “modernization theory is based upon false premises” (144), he was merely reiterating the common social scientific sense of the day, or at least his generation’s version of it. When he added that the theory had “served . . . as an ideological defense of the dominance of Western capitalism over the rest of the world,” he reproduced the common understanding of why this false theory had once been believed. Today both these sentiments seem anachronistic. Modernization theory (e.g., Parsons, 1964) stipulated that the great civilizations of the world would converge toward the institutional and cultural configurations of Western society. Certainly we are witnessing something very much like this process today, and the enthusiasm it has generated cannot be explained simply by citing Western or capitalist domination.

The sweeping ideological and objective transformations described in the preceding section have begun to have their theoretical effect. The gauntlet that the various strands of neomodernism have thrown at the feet of postmodern theory are plain to see. Shifting historical conditions have created fertile ground for such post-postmodern theorizing, and intellectuals have responded to these conditions by revising their earlier theories in far-reaching ways. Certainly, it would be premature to call neomodernism a “successor theory” to postmodernism. It has only recently become crystallized as an intellectual alternative, much less emerged as the victor in this ideological-cum-theoretical fight. It is unclear, further, whether the movement is nourished by a new generation of intellectuals or by fragments of currently competing generations who have found in neomodernism a unifying vehicle to dispute the postmodern hegemony over the contemporary field. Despite these qualifications, however, it must be acknowledged that a new and very different current of social theorizing has emerged on the scene.

With this success, however, there comes the grave danger of theoretical amne-
sia about the problems of the past, problems that I have alluded to in my brief discussion of September 11. Retrospective verifications of modernization theory have begun in earnest. One of the most acute reappraisals was written by Muller (1992), who offered fulsome praise for the once-disgraced perspective even while suggesting that any current version must be fundamentally revised (see Muller, 1994). “With an apparently more acute sense of reality,” Muller (1992: 111) writes, “the sociological theory of modernity had recorded the long-term developments within the Eastern European area, currently taking place in a more condensed form, long before they were empirically verifiable.” Muller adds, for good measure, that “the grand theory constantly accused of lacking contact with reality seemingly proves to possess predictive capacity—the classical sociological modernization theory of Talcott Parsons’ (111, italics in original). Another sign of this reappraisal can be found in the return to modernization theory made by distinguished theorists who were once neo-Marxist critics of capitalist society. Bryan Turner (1986), for example, now defends Western citizenship against radical egalitarianism and lauds (Holton & Turner, 1986) Parsons for his “anti-nostalgic” acceptance of the basic structures of modern life. While Giddens’s (1990, 1991, 1992) position is more ambiguous, his later work reveals an unacknowledged yet decisive departure from the conspicuously antimodernization stance that marked his earlier ideas. A portentous tone of crisis frames this new work, which Giddens conspicuously anchors in the abrupt emergence of social developments that in his view could not have been foreseen.

In the social sciences today, as in the social world itself, we face a new agenda. We live, as everyone knows, at a time of endings . . . Fin de siècle has become widely identified with feelings of disorientation and malaise . . . We are in a period of evident transition—and the “we” here refers not only to the West but to the world as a whole. (Giddens, 1994: 56; see Beck, 1994: 1, Lash, 1994: 110)

The new and historically unprecedented world that Giddens discovers—the world he came eventually to characterize as “beyond left and right”—however, turns out to be nothing other than modernity itself. Even among former communist apparatchiks themselves, there is growing evidence (i.e., Borko, cited in Muller, 1992: 112) that similar “retrodictions” about the convergence of capitalist and communist societies are well underway, tendencies that have caused a growing number of “revisits” to Schumpeter as well.

The theoretical danger here is that this enthusiastic and long overdue reappraisal of some of the central thrusts of postwar social science might actually lead to the revival of convergence and modernization theories in their earlier forms. In his reflections on the recent transitions in eastern Europe, Habermas (1990: 4) employed such evolutionary phrases as “rewinding the reel” and “rectifying revolution.” Inkeles’s (1991) tractatus to American policy agencies is re-
plete with such convergence homilies as that a political “party should not seek to advance its objectives by extrapoli
tical means.” Sprinkled with advice about “the importance of locating . . . the distinctive point where additional re-
sources can provide greatest leverage” (69), his article displays the kind of over-
confidence in controlled social change that marked the hubris of postwar mod-
erization thought. When Lipset (1990) claims the lesson of the second great tran-
sition as the failure of the “middle way” between capitalism and socialism, he is no doubt correct in an important sense, but the formulation runs the dan-
ger of reinforcing the tendentious, either/or dichotomies of earlier thinking in a
manner that could justify not only narrow self-congratulation but unjustified optimism about imminent social change. Jeffrey Sachs and other simplistic ex-
positors of the “big bang” approach to transition seemed to be advocating a rerun of Rostow’s earlier “takeoff” theory. Like that earlier species of moderniza-
tion idea, this new monetarist modernism throws off constraints of social solidarity and citizenship, let alone any sense of historical specificity, utterly to the winds (see Leijonhufvud [1993] and the perceptive comments by Muller, 1994:
17–27).

Giddens’s enthusiastic return to the theory of modernity provides the most elaborate case in point. Despite the qualifying adjectives he employs to differenti-
ate his new approach from the theories he once rejected—he speaks at different
points of “high,” “late,” and “reflexive” modernity—his model rests on the same
simpistic set of binary oppositions as did earlier modernization theory in its most
banal forms. Giddens (1994a: 63–5, 79, 84, 104–5) insists on a clear-cut and
decisive polarity between traditional and modern life. “Traditional order,” he claims, rests on “formulaic notions of truth,” which confute “moral and emo-
tional” elements, and on “ritual practices,” organized by “guardians” with unchallengable power. These beliefs and practices, he declares, create a “status”-
based, “inside/outsider” society. By contrast, in the period of “reflexive modern-
ity” everything is different. Ritual is displaced by “real” and “pragmatic” action,
formulaic ideas by “propositional” ones, guardians by “skeptical” experts, and
status by “competence.”

From this familiar conceptual binarism there follows the equally familiar empir-
ical conclusion; tradition, Giddens discovers, has been completely “evac-
uated” from the contemporary phase of social life. To provide some distance from
earlier postwar theory, Giddens suggests that these earlier versions were naive;
they had not realized that their own period, which they took to be thoroughly
modern, actually remained firmly rooted in the past—“for most of its history,
modernity has rebuilt tradition as it has dissolved” (1994a: 56; see Beck, 1994:
2). What Giddens has really done, however, is to historicize the present by in-
voking the alternatives of modernization theory in an even more arbitrary way.
Indeed, his renewal of the tradition/modern divide is much more reductive than
the complex and nuanced, if ultimately contradictory, arguments that emerged
from within classical modernization theory in its terminal phase, arguments

about which Giddens seems completely unaware. Nor does Giddens appear to
have learned anything from the debates that so successfully persuaded postmod-
erization intellectuals to abandon the historically arbitrary, Western-centered,
and theoretically tendentious approach to tradition he now takes up. Only by
ignoring the implications of the linguistic turn, for example, can he conceive
modernity in such an individualistic and pragmatic way (see Lash’s [1994] simi-
lar criticism). Finally, Giddens’s version of neomodernism is impoverished in
an ideological and moral sense. The problem is not only that he fails to pro-
vide a compelling alternative vision of social life—a failure rooted in the forced-
choice nature of the binary categories themselves—but also that his arguments
give credence to the “end of ideology” argument in a new way. In the face of the
changes wrought by reflexive modernization, Giddens suggests (1994b), the very
difference between reformism and conservatism has become passé. Contempo-
rary empirical developments demonstrate not only that politics must go be-
yond the traditional alternatives of capitalism and socialism but beyond the very
notions of “left” and “right.” Such is the intellectual amnesia that the new his-
torical disjunction has produced and on which its continued misunderstanding
depends.

While many of the recent social scientific formulations of market and democ-

cracy avoid such egregious distortions, the universalism of their categories, the
heroism of their zeitgeists, and the dichotomous structures of their codes make
the underlying problems difficult to avoid. Theories of market transition some-
times suggest a linearity and rationality that historical experience belies. Civil
society theory too often seems unable to theorize empirically the demonic, anti-
civil forces of cultural life (see Sz tom pka, 1991).

If there is to be a new and more successful effort at constructing a social
theory about the fundamentally shared structures of contemporary societies (see
Sz tom pka, 1993: 136–41), it will have to avoid these tendencies, which resur-
rect modernization ideas in their simplistic form. Institutional structures like
democracy, law, and market are institutional requisites if certain social compet-
encies are to be achieved and certain resources to be acquired. They are not,
however, either historical inevitabilities or linear outcomes; nor are they social
panaceas for the problems of noneconomic subsystems or groups (see, e.g.,
Rueschemeyer, 1993). Social and cultural differentiation may be an ideal-typical
pattern that can be analytically reconstructed over time; however, whether or
not any particular differentiation occurs—market, state, law, or science—
depends on the normative aspirations (e.g., Sz tom pka, 1991), strategic position,
history, and powers of particular social groups.

No matter how socially progressive in itself, moreover, differentiation dis-
places as much as it resolves and can create social upheaval on an enormous scale.
Social systems may well be pluralistic and the causes of change multidimen-
sional; at any given time and in any given place, however, a particular subsystem
and the group that directs it—economic, political, scientific, or religious—may
successfully dominate and submerge the others in its name. Globalization is, indeed, a dialect of indigenization and cosmopolitanism, but cultural and political asymmetries remain between more and less developed regions, even if they are not inherent contradictions of some imperialistic fact. While the analytic concept of civil society must by all means be recovered from the heroic age of democratic revolutions, it should be deidealized so that the effects of “anticivil society”—the countervailing processes of decivilization, polarization, and violence—can be seen also as typically “modern” results. Finally, these new theories must be pushed to maintain a decentered, self-conscious reflexivity about their ideological dimensions even while they continue in their efforts to create a new explanatory scientific theory. For only if they become aware of themselves as moral constructions—as codes and as narratives—will they be able to avoid the totalizing conceit that gave early modernizing theory its bad name. In this sense, “neo-” must incorporate the linguistic turn associated with “post-” modern theory, even while it challenges its ideological and more broadly theoretical thrust.

In one of his last and most profound theoretical meditations, François Bourricaud (1987: 19–21) suggested that “one way of defining modernity is the way in which we define solidarity.” The notion of modernity can be defended, Bourricaud believed, if rather than “identify[ing] solidarity with equivalence” we understand that the “general spirit” is both “universal and particular.” Within a group, a generalizing spirit “is universal, since it regulates the intercourse among members of the group.” Yet if one thinks of the relations between nations, this spirit “is also particular, since it helps distinguish one group from all others.” In this way, it might be said that “the “general spirit of a nation” assures the solidarity of individuals, without necessarily abolishing all their differences, and even establishing the full legitimacy of some of them. What of the concept of universalism? Perhaps, Bourricaud suggested, “modern societies are characterized less by what they have in common or by their structure with regard to well-defined universal exigencies, than by the fact of their involvement in the issue of universalization” as such.

Perhaps it is wise to acknowledge that it is a renewed sense of involvement in the project of universalism rather than some lipid sense of its concrete forms that marks the character of the new age in which we live. Beneath this new layer of the social topsoil, moreover, lie the tangled roots and richly marbled subsoil of earlier intellectual generations, whose ideologies and theories have not ceased to be alive. The struggles between these interlocutors can be intimidating and confusing, not only because of the intrinsic difficulty of their message but because each presents itself not as form but as essence, not as the only language in which the world makes sense but as the only real sense of the world. Each of these worlds does make sense, but only in a historically bounded way. A new social world is coming into being. We must try to make sense of it. For the task of intellectuals is not only to explain the world; they must interpret it as well.