Cultural Theorizing

Another Embarassing Confession

Like the concept of social structure, the conceptualization of culture in sociology is rather vague, despite a great deal of attention by sociologists to the properties and dynamics of culture. There has always been the recognition that culture is attached to social structures, and vice versa, with the result that sociologists often speak in terms of sociocultural formations or sociocultural systems and structures. This merging of structure and culture rarely clarifies but, instead, further conflates a precise definition of culture. And so, sociology's big idea—culture—is much like the notion of social structure. Its conceptualization is somewhat metaphorical, often rather imprecise, and yet highly evocative. There is no consensus in definitions of culture beyond the general idea that humans create symbol systems, built from our linguistic capacities, which are used to regulate conduct. And even this definition would be challenged by some.

Since the 1980s and accelerating with each decade, the amount of cultural theorizing has dramatically increased. Mid-twentieth-century functional theory had emphasized the importance of culture but not in a context-specific or robust manner; rather, functionalism viewed culture as a *mechanism* by which actions are controlled and regulated,[1] whereas much of the modern revival of culture has viewed culture in a much more robust and inclusive manner. When conflict theory finally pushed functionalism from center stage, it also tended to bring forth a more Marxian view of culture as a "superstructure" generated by economic substructures. Culture became the sidekick, much like Tonto for the Lone Ranger, to social structure, with the result that its autonomy and force independent of social structures were not emphasized and, in some cases, not even recognized. Yet, such had not always been the case.

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[1]For example, Talcott Parsons saw it as an action system that provided the necessary information of regulating social systems and the status-role and normative structure of social systems that, in turn, regulated the psychological action system and even the organismic system (see Chapter 2). Or, in Niklas Luhmann's work, ideology is seen as mechanisms, which is critical to the integration of institutional domains; see his *The Differentiation of Society*, trans. S. Holmes and C. Larmore (New York: Columbia University Presss, 1982).

Early Sociological Conceptions of Culture

Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim

From its beginnings in France, sociological theorizing has always emphasized the power of culture. For Auguste Comte[2] and Emile Durkheim,[3] as well as the French philosophers of the eighteen century, society was seen as held together by commitments of individuals to a common cultural core. The exact nature of this core was always a bit vague in French philosophy and sociology, but in today's vocabulary, it denotes systems of cultural symbols that carry meanings shared by members of a population and that have the power to regulate the actions of individuals and corporate units. Culture was built from language and carried a populations' history, traditions, and lore, while also codifying these into values, beliefs and ideologies, norms, and laws that direct actions and interactions among social units. The late Durkheim increasingly emphasized that differentiated societies require a common cultural core and that this core is invoked by individuals when they engage in rituals directed at totems symbolizing key elements of this core. Through emotion-arousing rituals, culture was not only recognized but also *moralized* as emotions were attached to key elements of culture, giving culture an imperative character and causing guilt and shame for all those who would violate this imperative power of moral codes. Emotions thus gave "teeth" to culture because emotions can be negative and, hence, painful when persons fail to abide by cultural directives in situations.

Karl Marx and Max Weber

German sociologists like Karl Marx and Max Weber also emphasized culture, but in somewhat different ways. For Marx,[4] as noted above, culture is part of the *superstructure* of a society. This superstructure is controlled by those owning the means of production and is codified into ideologies supported by the state—another part of the social superstructure. Once codified, the ideologies of cultural superstructures legitimate the interests of powerful owners of capital and the means of production. Culture was thus an obfuscating force because it blinds workers and the oppressed from recognizing their true interests in changing the system of production and power in a society. Yet, Marx also recognized that counter-ideologies by subordinates in the system of inequality were critical to arousing emotions and motivating subordinates to incur the risk of conflict with superordinates. As part of a revolutionary force,

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[2]Auguste Comte, *The Course of Positive Philosophy*, translated and condensed by Harriet Martineau as *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte* (London: Bell and Sons, 1898). See also Comte's *System of Positive Polity* (Burt Franklin, 1875, originally published in 1851).

[3]Emile Durkheim's notion of the collective conscience gave priority to culture as an integrative force in the *Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1933, originally published in 1892), and later, he gave even more emphasis to culture in his analysis of rituals as the link between culture and the individuals' commitment to culture in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1947, originally published in 1912). Comte and Spencer were only continuing the tradition set a century earlier by the French philosophes, who all emphasized the importance of culture as an integrative force, as well as a force for change.

[4]Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International, 1946, originally published in 1846).

then, culture can gain some autonomy in Marx's eyes because it pushes actors to seek alternative forms of social structure. As they do so, subordinates codify a counter-ideology that gives direction to their pursuit of conflict with superordinates.

Marx Weber[5] did not go so far as to see culture as "merely" a superstructure; indeed, he felt that culture could be seen as an autonomous force driving social structural arrangements. His famous typology on the Protestant ethic and worldly asceticism[6] emphasizes that structural change can occur when particular structural conditions are in place—e.g., markets, labor markets, money, urban centers, stable polity, etc. Once in place, new beliefs and ideologies can emerge to push a society over to an entirely new pattern of social organization. Thus, in his eye, the industrial revolution and capitalism were chance events that only emerged with alternations in religious beliefs and with the development of a more secular ideology of worldly asceticism (see footnote 6) that codified the moral imperatives of Protestantism into an ideology that could drive actors to form new kinds of economic relations. He also, like Marx, recognized that *legitimated social orders* (what today we might call institutional domains) and stratification systems were legitimated by ideologies and that if these were ever to change, mobilization of actors with new counter-ideologies and charismatic leaders would be necessary.

George Herbert Mead

At the more micro level of social organization, George Herbert Mead's[7] notion of the *generalized other* is very similar to Durkheim's ideas about the *collective conscience* (a term central to early Durkheim but later abandoned). Individuals not only role take with real persons; they also assume the perspective of generalized others attached to all social structures. The generalized other is, for Mead, a "community of attitudes" or set of beliefs that is shared by persons and that drives their conduct and self-evaluations as they role take in a situation. Too much is probably packed into the notion of generalized other (collective values, beliefs, norms, perspectives, attitudes, sentiments, etc.), but Mead provided a mechanism—role-taking with the generalized other—by which individuals invoke culture to regulate their conduct and to evaluative themselves. Mead did not, however, develop Durkheim's ideas about ritual as another key mechanisms by which culture exerts it power. For, as individuals make ritual appeals to totems symbolizing the power of the supernatural that is, in reality, the collective order of a society and its culture, individuals come under the power of culture and, moreover, legitimate its sanctity. Still, both the late Durkheim and Mead were seeking the more micro basis of social organization, and this search led them to try and understand how culture becomes internalized and part of persons' worldviews and perceptions of proper forms of conduct.

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[5]Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons (New York: Scribners, 1948, original published in two parts between 1904 and 1905. See also Stephen Kallberg's translation for Roxbury Press, 2002).

[6]Worldly asceticism emphasizes hard work, diligence, frugality, savings and accumulation of capital, and rationality—all in the name of God.

[7]George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934).

Alfred Schutz

In Germany and later, after his immigration to the United States, the more phenomenological sociologist Alfred Schutz[8] also began to explore how individuals store knowledge, including knowledge and emotional tags for cultural directives, and how they make this knowledge available in concrete situations. Schutz's famous phrase, partially borrowed from the philosopher Edmund Husserl, "stocks of knowledge at hand," indicates that culture is highly robust, and it postulates vast stores of knowledgeability that can be drawn upon to facilitate interaction among individuals. These stores are accumulated during a lifetime, and they are often implicit and not easy to articulate, but they are available when needed; thus, culture is more than just norms, beliefs, ideologies, and values, but stores and stocks of information relevant to persons in concrete situations. Other phenomenological thinkers in Europe, in varying ways, also emphasized this more robust and seemingly amorphous body of culture sitting in the human brain, which can be drawn upon rapidly and be assembled to give guidance in varying types of situations. This more robust view of culture also became part of the modern revival of cultural sociology.

The Mid-Century Legacy of Claude Levi-Strauss

Another legacy from early sociology is what is sometimes termed *structuralism*, which is a mix of Durkheim's ideas and those of early twentieth-century structural linguistics. The details of this mixing are less critical than what was left on the table long after structuralism faded from its mid-twentieth-century prominence. Claude Levi-Straus was perhaps the critical figure here because he initially followed Durkheim's and Marcel Mauss'[9] lead of seeing cultural logics as reflecting the structural, including ecological, arrangements of societies. That is, basic categories of thought about such matters as time, space, and causation are a reflection of how societies are organized. Later, Levi-Strauss was to "turn Durkheim on his head" to argue that the structure of culture arises from programming lodged in the neuro-anatomy of the human brain.[10] There are *deep structures* of generative rules, logics, assumptions, conceptions of time/space/others, and other properties of culture that undergird all cultural phenomena, but for the later Levi-Strauss, they are hardwired in the brain.

Even if one does not want to go as far as Levi-Strauss in seeing elements of culture as manifestations of bioprogrammers in the neurology of the brain, the notion that culture as used by people in their daily lives is but a *surface structure* driven by deeper structures of culture—that is, underlying rules and logics—that are more fundamental to understanding culture than simple empirical examination of surface structures. For example, a cultural myth, value premises, ideologies, norms, stories of traditions, and virtually all surface culture are to be understood much better when the *deeper structures* systematically generating these cultural phenomena are isolated and examined as the root source of culture.

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[8]Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1967, originally published in 1932).

[9]Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, *Primitive Classification* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1963, originally published in 1903).

[10]Claude Levi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (New York: Schocken, 1979); *A World Without Wane* (London: Hutchinson, 1961); *Structural Anthropology* (Paris: Plon, 1964).

Along with this line of argument from structuralism came rather metaphorical uses of ideas from the emerging field on computer sciences, although these ideas had also appeared in Durkheim's later work. Culture, for example, was seen as structured by binary oppositions, such as good/bad, tall/short, present/past, and in fact, the diversity of culture and its capacity for restructuring itself inheres in this binary structure because one cultural or moral code about what is right also implies what is "not right," or codes pushing people to think in the present or future also imply what it means to think about the past. These metaphors still exist in structuralism and many other approaches in sociology[11]—for example, Giddens'[12] structuration theory summarized in the previous chapter or in functional theories like that developed by Niklas Luhmann,[13] who argued that each cultural code makes "negative copies of itself," which is another way of expressing the notion of binary oppositions.

To capture variations in the application of these ideas in contemporary cultural sociology,[14] I have selected several theorists for review: Robert Wuthnow, Pierre Bourdieu, Jeffrey Alexander, Gary Alan Fine, and my own theoretical excursions into cultural theorizing. Wuthnow extends the Durkheimian tradition in interesting ways; Bourdieu dramatically improves Marx's analysis of class structures from a cultural perspective; Alexander and colleagues are the most prominent advocates for "the strong program" in cultural sociology where the autonomy of culture as a force is emphasized; Fine develops a theory of idioculture that emphasizes the importance of group processes; and I seek to rehabilitate older ideas from functionalism on culture in more acceptable guise.

Cultural Analysis Today

Robert Wuthnow's Theory of Cultural Meanings

Robert Wuthnow's theory of culture[15] is one of the more creative approaches to structuralism, primarily because it blends structuralist concerns about relations among symbolic codes

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[11]For some general works reviewing structuralism, see Anthony Giddens, "Structuralism, Post-structuralism and the Production of Culture," in *Social Theory Today*, eds. A. Giddens and J. H. Turner (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000); S. Clarke, *The Foundations of Structuralism* (Sussex, UK: Harvester, 1981); J. Sturrock, ed., *Structuralism and Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); W. G. Runciman, *"What Is Structuralism?" in Sociology in Its Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Ino Rossi, *From the Sociology of Symbols to the Sociology of Signs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) and Ino Rossi, ed., *Structural Sociology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Jacques Ehrmann, *Structuralism* (New York: Doubleday, 1970); Philip Pettit, *The Concept of Structuralism: A Critical Analysis* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977); Charles C. Lemert, "The Uses of French Structuralism in Sociology," and Michelle Lamont and Robert Wuthnow, "Recent Cultural Sociology in Europe and the United States," in *Frontiers of Social Theory*, G. Ritzer, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

[12]Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

[13]Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society* (see note 1).

[14]For some reviews, see Robert Wuthnow and Marsha Witten, "New Directions in the Study of Culture," *Annual Review of Sociology* 14 (1988): pp. 149–167. See also Robert Wuthnow, James Davidson Hunter, Albert Bergesen, and Edith Kurzweil, *Cultural Analysis: The World of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault, and Jurgen Habermas* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

[15]For examples of Robert Wuthnow's work on religion, see his *The Consciousness Reformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) and *Experimentation in American Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

with other theoretical traditions.[16] Among these other traditions are elements of dramaturgy, institutional analysis, and subjective approaches drawn from phenomenology.

Cultural Structure, Ritual, and Institutional Context

In Wuthnow's view, it is best to move away from an overemphasis on attitudes, beliefs, and meanings held by individuals in the analysis of culture. These are difficult to measure, and so instead, it is best to focus on observable communications of interacting individuals to understanding culture. Once emphasis shifts away from cultural meaning per se to the structure of culture in social contexts and in socially produced texts, other theoretical approaches become useful.

Dramaturgy (Chapter 7) is one essential supplement because of its emphasis on ritual as a mechanism for expressing and dramatizing symbols—an emphasis that clearly owes its root to Durkheimian theory. In a sense, individual interpersonal rituals as well as collective rituals express deeply held meanings, but at the same time, they affirm particular cultural structures. In so doing, ritual performs such diverse functions as reinforcing collective values, dramatizing certain relations, denoting key positions, embellishing certain messages, and highlighting particular activities.

Another important theoretical supplement is institutional analysis. Culture does not exist as an abstract structure in its own right. Nor is it simply dramatic and ritualized performances; it is also embedded in organized social structures. Culture is produced by actors and organizations that require resources—material, organizational, and political—if they are to develop systems of cultural codes, ritualize them, and transmit them to others. Once the institutional basis of cultural activity is recognized, then the significance of inequalities in resources, the use of power, and the outbreak of conflict become essential parts of cultural analysis.

The Moral Order

Wuthnow labels this view of culture as the study of *the moral order*. The moral order revolves around (1) the construction of systems of cultural codes, (2) the emission of rituals, and (3) the mobilization of resources to produce and sustain these cultural codes and rituals. Let me examine each of these in turn.

The Structure of Cultural Codes

A cultural code is a set of symbolic elements that define "the nature of commitment to a particular course of behavior." Contrary to views of cultural codes as having a tight logic, as Levi-Strauss had argued, Wuthnow only sees sets of cultural elements that have an "identifiable structure," which can be used "to make sense of" situations and areas that can generate problems in establishing the nature of moral obligations. Wuthnow sees three such distinctions as crucial to structuring a moral order from cultural codes: (1) moral objects versus real programs, (2) core self versus enacted social roles, and (3) inevitable constraints versus intentional options. Below, I review each of these.

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[16]Robert Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987). For a review of this work, see Jonathan H. Turner, "Cultural Analysis and Social Theory," *American Journal of Sociology* 94 (July 1988): pp. 637–644.

1. *Moral Objects and Programs*. The structure of a moral order distinguishes between (a) the *objects of commitment* and (b) the activities or *real programs* in which the committed are engaged. The objects of commitment can vary—a person, a set of beliefs and values, a text, and so on. Real program can be almost any kind of activity. The critical points that the objects of moral commitment and the behavior emitted to demonstrate this commitment are "connected" and, yet, "different." For example, one's object of commitment might be "making a better life for one's children," which is to be realized through "hard work" and other activities or real programs. For the structure of a moral order to be effective, it must implicitly distinguish and, at the same time, connect such objects and real programs.

2. *Real Self and Roles*. The structure of moral codes must also, in Wuthnow's view, distinguish between (a) the person's "real self" or "true self" and (b) the various "roles" that this person plays. Moral structures always link self-worth and behavior but, at the same time, allow them to be distinguished so that there is a "real me" who is morally worthy and who can be separated from the roles that can potentially compromise this sense of self-worth. For example, when someone reveals "role distance," an assertion is being made that a role is beneath one's dignity or self-worth.

3. *The Inevitable and Intentional*. Moral codes must also distinguish between (a) those forces that are out of people's control and (b) those that are within the realm of their will. That is, the inevitable must be distinguished from the intentional. In this way, cultural codes posit a moral evaluation of those behaviors that can be controlled through intent and will power, while forgiving or suspending evaluation for what is out of a person's control. Without this distinction, it would be impossible to know what kinds of behaviors of individuals are to be subject to moral evaluations.

Thus, the structure of a moral order revolves around three basic types of codes that denote and distinguish commitments with respect to (1) moral objects/real programs, (2) self/roles, and (3) inevitable constraint/intentional options. These three basic types of codes indicate what is desirable by separating and, yet at the same time, also linking objects, behavior, self, roles, constraints, and intentions. Without this denotation of, and a distinction along, these three axes, a moral order and the institutional system in which it is lodged will reveal crises and will begin to break down. If objects and programs are not denoted, distinguished, and yet linked, then cynicism becomes rampant; if self and roles are confused, then loss of self-worth spreads; and if constraints and control are blurred, then apathy or frustration increases.

The Nature of Ritual

A moral ritual dramatizes collective values and demonstrates individuals' moral responsibility for such values through the enactment of emotion-arousing rituals. In so doing, rituals operate to maintain the moral order—that is, the system of symbolic codes ordering moral objects/real programs, self/roles, and constraints/options. Such rituals can be embedded in normal interaction as well as in more elaborate collective ceremonies, and they can be privately or publicly performed. But the key point is that ritual is a basic mechanism for sustaining the moral order—as idea clearly borrowed from Durkheim and extended in Goffman's dramaturgy (see Chapter 7).

Ritual is also used to cope with uncertainty in the social relations regulated by the codes of the moral order. Whether through increased options, uses of authority, ambiguity in expectations,

lack of clarity in values, "equivocality" in key symbols, or unpredictability in key social relations, uncertainty will often be invoked to deal with these varying bases of uncertainty. Uncertainty is thus one of the sources of escalated ritual activity. However, such uses of ritual are usually tied to efforts at mobilizing resources in institutional contexts to create a new moral order.

Institutional Context and Resources

For a moral order to exist, it must be produced and reproduced, and for new moral codes to emerge—seen by Wuthnow as *ideologies*—these new ideologies also must be actively produced by actors using resources. Thus systems of symbolic codes depend on material and organizational resources. If a moral order is to persist, and if a new ideology is to become a part of the moral order, it must have a stable supply of resources for actors to use in sustaining the moral order, or in propagating a new ideology. That is, actors must have the material goods necessary to sustain themselves and the organizations in which they participate; they must have organizational bases that depend not only on material goods, such as money, but also on organizational "know-how," communication networks, and leadership; and at times, they must also have power. Thus, the moral order is anchored in institutional structures revolving around material goods, money, leadership, communication networks, and organizational capacities.

Ideology

Wuthnow defines ideologies as symbols that express and/or dramatize some aspect of the moral order. The basic idea appears to be that an ideology is a subset of symbolic codes emphasizing a *particular aspect* of the more inclusive moral order. The moral order is altered through the development and subsequent institutionalization of new ideologies, and ideologies are the driving force of change—much as Marx emphasized.

The production, use in mobilizing individuals, and eventual institutionalization of ideologies are all dependent upon (1) the mobilization of other types of resources (leaders, communication networks, organizations, and material goods) and (2) the development and use of rituals highlighting the morality of an ideology. New ideologies must often compete with one another for attention, with the consequence that ideologies with superior resource bases are more likely to survive this competition and become a part of the moral order. There is, then, an ecological dimension to ideologies as competing in resource niches composed of potential adherents to the ideology.

The Dynamics of the Moral Order

Wuthnow employs an ecological framework for the analysis of dynamics (see Chapter 4). If a moral order (1) does not specify the ordering of moral objects/real programs, self/roles, and inevitable constraints/intentional controls, (2) cannot specify the appropriate communicative and ritual practices for its affirmation and dramatization, and as a result of these conditions, (3) cannot reduce the risks associated with various activities, then there will be some ambiguity in most situations. The consequence of this ambiguity is that individuals will not have sufficient guidance, and their actions will be somewhat unpredictable. Under conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity, new ideologies become likely to emerge as a way of reducing these conditions. New ideological production will increase with (1) high degrees of heterogeneity in the types of social units—classes,

groups, organizations, and so forth—in a society; (2) high levels of diversity in resources and their distribution; (3) high rates of change (realignment of power, redistribution of resources, establishment of new structures, creation of new types of social relations); (4) inflexibility in cultural codes (created by tight connections among a few codes); and (5) reduced capacity of political authority to repress new cultural codes, rituals, and mobilization of resources.

In an ecological perspective, these processes increase "ideological variation" that, in turn, increases the level of "competition" among ideologies. Some ideologies are "more fit" to survive this competition and, as a consequence, are "selected." Such "fitness" and "selection" depends on an ideology's capacity to accomplish several goals: (1) define social relations in ways reducing uncertainty (over moral objects, programs, self, roles, constraints, options, risks, ambiguities, and unpredictability); (2) reveal a flexible structure consisting of many elements weakly connected; (3) secure a resource base (particularly money, adherents, organizations, leadership, and communication channels); (4) specify ritual and communicative practices; (5) establish autonomous goals; and (6) achieve legitimacy in the eyes of political authority and in terms of existing values and procedural rules.

The more that these six conditions can be met, the more likely is an ideology to survive in competition with other ideologies and the more likely it is to become institutionalized as part of the moral order. In particular, the institutionalization of an ideology depends on the establishment of rituals and modes of communication affirming the new moral codes within organizational arrangements that allows for *ritual dramatization* of new codes reducing uncertainty, that secures a stable resource base, and that eventually receives acceptance by political authority.

Different types of ideological movements will emerge, Wuthnow appears to argue, under varying configurations of conditions that produce variation, competition, selection, and institutionalization.

Pierre Bourdieu's Constructivist Structuralism[17]

Pierre Bourdieu has characterized his work as "constructivist structuralism" or "structuralist constructivism."[18] Structures constrain action, but this constraint is not absolute. People use their capacities for thought, reflection, and action to *construct* social and cultural phenomena. They do so within the parameters of existing structures, but these structures are repositories of materials and resources that can be used for a wide variety of social and cultural constructions. Acknowledging his structuralist roots, Bourdieu analogizes to the relation of grammar and language in order to make this point: The grammar of a language only loosely constrains the production of actual speech; it can be seen as defining the possibilities for new kinds of speech acts.[19] So it is with social and cultural structures: They exist independently of agents and guide

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[17]This section is coauthored with Stephan Fuchs.

[18]Indeed, Bourdieu has been enormously prolific, having authored some twenty-five books and hundreds of articles in a variety of fields, including anthropology, education, cultural history, linguistics, philosophy, and sociology. His empirical work covers a wide spectrum of topics—art, academics, unemployment, peasants, classes, religion, sports, kinship, politics, law, and intellectuals. See Loic J. D. Wacquant, "Towards a Reflexive Sociology: A Workshop with Pierre Bourdieu," *Sociological Theory* 7 (1, Spring 1989): pp. 26–63. This article also contains a selected bibliography on Bourdieu's own works as well as secondary analyses and comments on Bourdieu.

[19]Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," *Sociological Theory* 7 (1, Spring, 1989): p. 14.

their conduct, and at the same time, they also create options, possibilities, and paths for creative actions and for the construction of new and unique cultural and social phenomena.

Bourdieu's Cultural Conflict Theory

Bourdieu has explored many topics, but the conceptual core of his sociology is a vision of social classes and the cultural forms associated with these classes.[20] In essence, Bourdieu combines a Marxian theory of objective class position in relation to the means of production with a Weberian analysis of status groups (lifestyles, tastes, prestige) and politics (organized efforts to have one's class culture dominate). The key to this reconciliation of Karl Marx's and Max Weber's views of stratification is the expanded conceptualization of *capital* as more than economic and material resources, coupled with elements of French structuralism.[21]

Classes and Capital

To understand Bourdieu's view of classes, it is first necessary to recognize a distinction among four types of capital:[22] (1) *economic capital*, or productive property (money and material objects that can be used to produce goods and services); (2) *social capital*, or positions and relations in groupings and social networks; (3) *cultural capital*, or informal interpersonal skills, habits, manners, linguistic styles, educational credentials, tastes, and lifestyles, and (4) *symbolic capital*, or the use of symbols to legitimate the possession of varying levels and configurations of the other three types of capital.

These forms of capital can be converted into one another, but only to a certain extent. The degree of convertibility of capital on various "markets" is itself at stake in social struggles. The overproduction of academic qualifications, for example, can decrease the convertibility of educational into economic capital ("credential inflation"). As a result, owners of credentials must struggle to get their cultural capital converted into economic gains, such as high-paying jobs. Likewise, the extent to which economic capital can be converted into social capital is at stake in struggles over control of the political apparatus, and the efforts of those with economic capital to "buy" cultural capital can often be limited by their perceived lack of "taste" (a type of cultural capital).

The distribution of these four types of capital determines the objective class structure of a social system. The overall class structure reflects the total amount of capital possessed by various groupings. Hence the dominant class will possess the most economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital; the middle class will possess less of these forms of capital; and the lower classes will have the least amount of these capital resources.

The class structure is not, however, a simple lineal hierarchy. Within each class are *factions* that can be distinguished by (1) the composition or configuration of their capital and (2) the

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[20]Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

[21]Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).

[22]Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research in the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986). Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). See also Michele Lamont and Annette P. Larreau, "Cultural Capital: Allusions, Gaps, and Glissandos in Recent Theoretical Developments," *Sociological Theory* 6 (2, Fall 1988): pp. 153–168.

social origin and amount of time that individuals in families have possessed a particular profile or configuration of capital resources.

Table 9.1 represents schematically Bourdieu's portrayal of the factions in three classes. The top faction within a given class controls the greatest proportion of economic or productive capital typical of a class; the bottom faction possesses the greatest amount of cultural and symbolic capital for a class; and the middle faction possesses an intermediate amount of economic, cultural, and symbolic capital. The top faction is the dominant faction within a given class, and the bottom faction is the dominated faction for that class, with the middle faction being both superordinate over the dominated faction and subordinate to the top faction. As factions engage in struggles to control resources and legitimate themselves, they mobilize social capital to form groupings and networks of relations, but their capacity to form such networks is limited by their other forms of capital. Thus, the overall distribution of social capital (groups and organizational memberships, network ties, social relations, and so forth) for classes and their factions will correspond to the overall distribution of other forms of capital. However, the particular forms of groupings, networks, and social ties will reflect the particular configuration of economic, cultural, and symbolic capital typically possessed by a particular faction within a given class.

Bourdieu borrows Marx's distinction between a class "for itself" (organized to pursue its interests) and one "in itself" (unorganized but having common interests and objective location in a class and class faction), and then he argues that classes are not real groups but only "potentialities." As noted earlier, the objective distribution of resources for Bourdieu relates to actual groups as grammar relates to speech: It defines the possibilities for actors but requires actual people and concrete settings to become real. And, it is the transformation of class and class-faction interests into actual groupings that marks the dynamics of a society.

Such transformation involves the use of productive material, cultural, and symbolic capital to mobilize social capital (groups and networks); even more important, class conflict tends to revolve around the mobilization of symbols into ideologies that legitimate a particular composition of resources. Much conflict in human societies, therefore, revolves around efforts to manipulate symbols to make a particular pattern of social, cultural, and productive resources seem the most appropriate. For example, when intellectuals and artists decry the "crass commercialism," "acquisitiveness," and "greed" of big business, this activity involves the mobilization of symbols into an ideology that seeks to demean forms of capital held by elites and, thereby, to mitigate their domination by the owners of the means of production.

But class relations involve more than a simple pecking order. There are also homologies among similarly located factions within different classes. For example, the rich capitalists of the dominant class and the small business owners of the middle class are equivalent in their control of productive resources and their dominant position relative to other factions in their respective classes. Similarly, intellectuals, artists, and other cultural elites in the dominant class are equivalent to schoolteachers in the middle class because of their reliance on cultural capital and because of their subordinate position in relation to those who control the material resources of their respective classes.

These homologies in class factions across different classes make class conflict complex, because those in similar objective positions in different classes—say, intellectuals and schoolteachers—will mobilize symbolic resources into somewhat similar ideologies—in this example, emphasizing learning, knowledge for its own sake, and life of the mind and, at the same time, decrying crass materialism. Such ideologies legitimate their own class position and attack those

Table 9.1   Representation of Classes and Class Factions in Industrial Societies*

Dominant Class: Richest in all forms of capital
Dominant faction: Richest in economic capital, which can be used to buy other types of capital. This faction is composed primarily of those who own the means of production—that is, the classical bourgeoisie.
Intermediate faction: Some economic capital, coupled with moderate levels of social, cultural, and symbolic capital. This faction is composed of high-professionals.
Dominated faction: Little economic capital but high levels of cultural and symbolic capital. This faction is composed of intellectuals, artists, writers, and others who possess cultural resources valued in a society.
Middle Class: Moderate levels of all forms of capital
Dominant faction: Highest in this class in economic capital but having considerably less economic capital than the dominant faction of the dominant class. This faction is composed of petite bourgeoisie (small business owners).
Intermediate faction: Some economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital but considerably less than the intermediate faction of the dominant class. This faction is composed of skilled clerical workers.
Dominated faction: Little or no economic capital and comparatively high social, cultural, and symbolic capital. This class is composed of educational workers, such as schoolteachers, and other low-income and routinized professions that are involved in cultural production.
Lower Class: Low levels of all forms of capital
Dominant faction: Comparatively high economic capital for this general class. It is composed of skilled manual workers.
Intermediate faction: Lower amounts of economic and other types of capital. It is composed of semi-skilled workers without credentials.
Dominated faction: Very low amounts of economic capital. There is some symbolic capital in uneducated ideologues and intellectuals for the poor and working person.

*I have had to make inferences from Bourdieu's somewhat rambling text, but the table captures the imagery of Bourdieu's analysis. He probably would not like this layered (like a cake) imagery in the table, but the critical point is that individuals and families in factions of different classes often have more in common that individuals and families at different factions within a class. This makes stratification a much more complex phenomenon that is typically portrayed by sociologists.

who dominate them (by emphasizing the importance of those cultural resources that they have more of). At the same time, their homologous positions are separated by the different amounts of cultural capital owned: The intellectuals despise the strained efforts of schoolteachers to appear more sophisticated than they are, whereas the schoolteachers resent the decadent and irresponsible relativism of snobbish intellectuals. Thus, ideological conflict is complicated by the simultaneous convergence of factions within different classes and by the divergence of these factions by virtue of their position in different social classes.

Moreover, an additional complication stems from people sharing similar types and amounts of resources but having very different origins and social trajectories. Those who have recently moved to a class faction—say, the dominant productive elite or intermediate faction of the middle class—will have somewhat different styles and tastes than those who have been born into these classes, and these differences in social origin and mobility can create yet another source of ideological conflict. For example, the "old rich" will often comment on the "lack of class" and on the "ostentatiousness" of the "new rich," or the "solid middle class" will be somewhat snobbish toward the "the poor boy who made good" but who "still has a lot to learn" or who "still is a bit crude."

All those points of convergence and divergence within and between classes and class factions make the dynamics of stratification very complex. Although there is always an "objective class location," as determined by the amount and composition of capital and by the social origins of the holders of this capital, the development of organizations and ideologies is not a simple process. Bourdieu often ventures into a more structuralist mode when trying to sort out how various classes, class factions, and splits of individuals with different social origins within class factions generate categories of thought, systems of speech, signs of distinction, forms of mythology, modes of appreciation, tastes, and lifestyle.

The general argument is that objective location—(1) class, (2) faction within class, and (3) social origin—creates interests and structural constraints that, in turn, allow different social constructions.[23] Such constructions might involve the use of "formal rules" (implicitly known by individuals with varying interests) to construct cultural codes that classify and organize "things," "signs," and "people" in the world. This kind of analysis by Bourdieu has not produced a fine-grained structuralist model of how individuals construct particular cultural codes, but it has provided an interesting analysis of "class cultures." Such "class cultures" are always the dependent variable for Bourdieu, with objective class location being the independent variable and with rather poorly conceptualized structuralist processes of generative rules and cultural codes being the "intervening variables." Yet, the detailed description of these class cultures is perhaps Bourdieu's most unique contribution to sociology and is captured by his concept of *habitus*.

Class Cultures and Habitus

Those within a given class share certain modes of classification, appreciation, judgment, perception, and behavior. Bourdieu conceptualizes this mediating process between class and individual perceptions, choices, and behavior as *habitus*. In a sense, *habitus* is the "collective unconscious" of those in similar positions because it provides cognitive and emotional guidelines that enable individuals to represent the world in common ways and to classify, choose, evaluate, and act in a particular manner.

Habitus creates syndromes of taste, speech, dress, manner, and other responses. For example, a preference for particular foods will tend to correspond to tastes in art, ways of dressing, styles of speech, manners of eating, and other cultural actions among those sharing a common class location. There is, then, a correlation between the class hierarchy and the cultural objects, preferences, and behaviors of those located at particular ranks in the hierarchy. For instance, Bourdieu devotes considerable attention to "taste," which is seen as one of the most visible manifestations of the habitus.

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[23]Bourdieu, *Distinction* and *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (cited in note 22).

Bourdieu views "taste" in a holistic and anthropological sense to include appreciation of art, ways of dressing, and preferences for foods.[24] Although taste appears as an innocent, natural, and personal phenomenon, it co-varies with objective class location: The upper class is to the working class what an art museum is to television; the old upper class is to the new upper class what polite and distant elegance is to noisy and conspicuous consumption; and the dominant is to the dominated faction of the upper class what opera is to avant-garde theater. Because tastes are organized in a cultural hierarchy that mirrors the social hierarchy of objective class location, conflicts between tastes are class conflicts.

Bourdieu roughly distinguishes between two types of tastes, which correspond to high versus low overall capital, or high versus low objective class position. The "taste of liberty and luxury" is the taste of the upper class; as such, it is removed from direct economic necessity and material need. The taste of liberty is the philosophy of art for its own sake. Following Immanuel Kant, Bourdieu calls this aesthetic the "pure gaze." The pure gaze looks at the sheer form of art and places this form above function and content. The upper-class taste of luxury is not concerned with art illustrating or representing some external reality; art is removed from life, just as upper-class life is removed from harsh material necessity. Consequently, the taste of luxury purifies and sublimates the ordinary and profane into the aesthetic and beautiful. The pure gaze confers aesthetic meaning to ordinary and profane objects because the taste of liberty is at leisure to relieve objects from their pragmatic functions. Thus, as the distance form basic material necessities increases, the pure gaze or the taste of luxury transforms the ordinary into the aesthetic, the material into the symbolic, the functional into the formal. And, because the taste of liberty is that of the dominant class, it is also the dominant and most legitimate taste in society.

In contrast, the working class cultivates a "popular" aesthetic. Their taste is the taste of necessity, for working-class life is constrained by harsh economic imperatives. The popular taste wants art to represent reality and despises formal and self-sufficient art as decadent and degenerate. The popular taste favors the simple and honest rather than the complex and sophisticated. It is downgraded by the "legitimate" taste of luxury as naive and complacent, and these conflicts over tastes are class conflicts over cultural and symbolic capital.

Preferences for certain works and styles of art, however, are only part of "tastes" as ordered by habitus. Aesthetic choices are correlated with choices made in other cultural fields. The taste of liberty and luxury, for example, corresponds to the polite, distant, and disciplined style of upper-class conversation. Just as art is expected to be removed from life, so are the bodies of interlocutors expected to be removed from one another and so is the spirit expected to be removed from matter. Distance from economic necessity in the upper-class lifestyle not only corresponds to an aesthetic of pure form, but it also entails that all natural and physical desires are to be sublimated and dematerialized. Hence, upper-class eating is highly regulated and disciplined, and foods that are less filling are preferred over fatty dishes. Similarly, items of clothing are chosen for fashion and aesthetic harmony, rather than for functional appropriateness. "Distance from necessity" is the motif underlying the upper-class lifestyle as a whole, not just aesthetic tastes as one area of practice.

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[24]Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" (cited in note 22). For another cultural approach to analyzing classes, see Michelle Lamont, *Money, Morals and Manners: The Culture of the French and American Upper-Middle Class* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992); "Symbolic Boundaries and Status," in *Cultural Sociology*, ed. Lyn Spillman (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 98–119; *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press and New York: Russell Sage Foundation. Paperback 2002).

Conversely, because they are immersed in physical reality and economic necessity, working-class people interact in more physical ways, touching one another's bodies, laughing heartily, and valuing straightforward outspokenness more than distant and "false" politeness. Similarly, the working-class taste favors foods that are more filling and less "refined" but more physically gratifying. The popular taste chooses clothes and furniture that are functional, and this is so not only because of sheer economic constraints but also because of a true and profound dislike of that which is "formal" and "fancy."

In sum, then, Bourdieu has provided a conceptual model of class conflict that combines elements of Marxian, Weberian, and Durkheimian sociology. The structuralist aspects of Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus as the mediating process between class position and individual behavior have been underemphasized in this review, but clearly Bourdieu places Durkheim "back on his feet" by emphasizing that class position determines habitus. However, the useful elements of structuralism—systems of symbols as generative structures of codes—are retained and incorporated into a theory of class conflict as revolving around the mobilization of symbols into ideologies legitimating a class position and the associated lifestyle and habitus.

Jeffrey C. Alexander's Approach to Cultural Pragmatics

To many cultural sociologists,[25] much analysis of culture is part of a "weak program" where culture is seen as something that emerges out of structural arrangements and that can only be theorized in reference to social structures. A *strong program*, in contrast, makes culture the main topic rather than, in Marx's works, a "superstructure" to material social-structural conditions. This strong program is to involve "thick descriptions" of symbolic meanings and the mechanisms by which such meanings are constructed. Culture is seen as texts with themes, plotlines, moral evaluations, traditions, frameworks, and other properties that make culture an autonomous realm, separated from social structure.

Much of the work in such a strong program would be empirical, examining specific types of cultural formations and analyzing them in detail. And, only after such a strong program has existed for a time should the relationship between culture and social structure be examined through such processes as rituals and interactions.

Jeffrey Alexander and his colleagues at Yale and other key centers of cultural theorizing have been part of the movement pushing for a strong program. Even though not all cultural sociologists go this far, most cultural sociologists have been influenced by the call for the analysis of culture per se and by the need to engage in rich and thick empirical descriptions of cultural processes. Of course, description does not always lead to theorizing about why the culture described exists and operates the way it does. Thus, even a strong program must eventually begin to explain cultural dynamics more than simply describe empirical manifestations of these

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[25]See, for example, Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernard Giessen, and Neil J. Smelser, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (University of California Press, 2004); Jeffrey Alexander, Bernard Giessen, and Jason Mast, *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Philip Smith and A. T. Riley, *Cultural Theory*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell); Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Civil Sphere (*Oxford University Press, 2006); Jeffrey Alexander, *The Meaning of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005; Jeffrey Alexander, Ronald Jacobs, and Philip Smith, *The Oxford Handbook of Cultural Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

dynamics. Alexander's work on "cultural pragmatics" is a good illustration of moving beyond description to explain at least a limited range of cultural processes.[26]

In pursuing the goal to develop theories about culture, Alexander blends a heavy dose of Emile Durkheim's analysis of ritual and emotion in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* with Erving Goffman's dramaturgy (see Chapter 7). This mix makes sense because one of the most conspicuous strands of cultural theorizing revolves around rituals and performances that arouse emotions, which bring background "collective representations," "implicit scripts," and "themes" to the foreground of interaction with audiences of others.

History of Ritualized Performances

Alexander draws from Durkheim's distinction between *mechanical* and *organic* solidarity (employed in *The Division of Labor in Society*, but subsequently abandoned) to present a condensed history of ritualized performances. In simple, homogenous societies (mechanical), all of the elements of performances are seamless so that culture is always in the foreground, making individuals experience rituals as personal, immediate, and iconographic. The cultural script, texts, collective representations, stage, props, actors, audience, means for symbolic production, and social powers of individuals are, as he puts it, *fused* together, allowing interaction to seem not only seamless but *authentic* as individuals engage in ritual performances to immediate audiences.

With the differentiation of societies, however, there comes (1) a separation of foreground texts and background symbolic representations, (2) an estrangement of the symbolic means of production from the mass of social actors, and (3) a disconnect between elites who carry out symbolic actions and their mass audiences. The result is that successful performances are no longer automatic but something that takes skill and effort to *re-fuse* the elements of background representations with *texts* that are used in the foreground, on a stage, in ritual performances in front of audiences. Rituals become the means by which the disparate elements of culture are *re*-assembled through effort and performances.

At times in primary groups, re-fusion is not so necessary even in complex societies; interaction rituals proceed smoothly and seamlessly as background comes to foreground in an emotionally gratifying way. Still, the dramatic increase in the number and scale of social spaces and the vast public sphere in modern, complex societies inevitably cause separation among the elements of performances. As a consequence, it is always problematic as to how to re-fuse them through ritual performances among people. The cultural world is fragmented and detached from many performances, giving the modern world problems of cultural integration and meaning in social situations—very old themes that go back to the founding of sociology.

Alexander has, with a different vocabulary, rephrased the basic problem that Durkheim emphasized in his earlier work in *The Division of Labor in Society*. How can performances be made in ways that re-fuse what inevitably gets decomposed with structural and cultural differentiation in a society? For Alexander, a successful performance that re-fuses background to foreground "stands or falls" upon individuals and collective actions to achieve what he terms (1) *cultural extension* of the background representations and its interpretation in a text to the

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[26]Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performances Between Ritual and Strategy," *Sociological Theory* 22 (2004): pp. 512–574.

audience and (2) *psychological* (and emotional) *identification* of the audience with performances and its interpretation of the background representations as text. Only in this way can the fragmentation of complex societies be overcome in performances. Alexander's theory is thus about the steps and strategies of actors in successfully re-fusing culture during their performances. I will come back to these shortly, but let me now backtrack to outline some of the basic assumptions that Alexander makes in developing his theory of cultural pragmatics.

Assumptions About Actors and Performances

Alexander assumes that actors are motivated by moral concerns and that they seek to bring both background representations and scripts of culture to the forefront of action and interaction with audiences. In realizing this fundamental goal, Alexander lists emphasizes several key properties of re-fusing:

1. Actors convert background representation of culture and scripts into *texts* that decode and interpret these background elements of culture.

2. To bring off a successful performance, actors must also achieve *cathexis*, or some kind of emotional attachment to the text as it has been decoded.

3. With interpretations of background representations and scripts that are emotionally valenced, individuals and potentially collective actors are in a better position to engage in cultural extension of the text to the audience; if successful, the audience will psychologically identify with the performance and the underlying text, script, and background representations.

4. In making a performance to an audience, actors always assess the means of symbolic reproduction, or the stage and props that are available for a performance.

5. The dramatic presentation of text thus involves physical and verbal gestures on a stage where props are used to enhance the performance.

6. Performances like all actions are constrained by power, which can delimit, limit, or facilitate access to text as well as the availability of stages, staging props, actors who can engage in performances, and audiences that these actors can reach in interpreting and decoding background cultural elements into a text.

As is evident, the dramatic metaphor is central to cultural pragmatics, which perhaps makes it a part of dramaturgy. Moreover, much like dramaturgy summarized in Chapter 7, there is an emphasis on *strategic* elements in just how to go about (a) reaching or achieving *cultural extension* to an audience and (b) getting the members of the audience to *identify* with the performance and the cultural text.

Challenges and Strategies Employed in Performances

Re-fusing always poses challenges that, in turn, lead actors to adopt various strategies for achieving cultural extension and audience identification with a performance and its underlying

text. First, in order to give a successful performance, an effective *script* must be created that compresses background cultural meanings and intensifies these meanings in ways that facilitate an effective performance. Alexander lists several techniques for doing so: (a) *cognitive simplification* of background representations so that audiences do not need to deal with too much complexity, (b) *time-space compression* that collapses elements in time and space so that the elements are highlighted and less dependent upon contextual interpretations, (c) *moral agonism* whereby representations are stated as dichotomies such as good vs. evil, conflicts against enemies, and challenges that must overcome obstacles, and (d) *twistings and turnings* in the plot line that keeps audiences engaged.

Second, re-fusing involves a script, action, and performances as actors "walk and talk" in space. This process is more engaging when writers of scripts leave room for dramatic inventions and interpretations and when directors of staged actions allow for some dramatic license on the part of performers. When scripts, direction, and staging are too tightly orchestrated, performances come off as stiff, artificial and less engaging than when actors are seen as authentically brining to an audience emotionally charged background elements of culture.

Third, re-fusing always involves the use of social power. This power must be mobilized on at least three fronts: (a) the appropriation of relevant symbolic means of production, such as the right venues and stages where a performance can be most effective and reach the right audience; (b) the appropriation of the means of symbolic distribution in which the background representations can be secured and then through performances distributed to audiences; and (c) the appropriation of some control over the subsequent debate, discourse, and criticism of a performance.

Fourth, actors are always in a double re-fusing situation. They have to connect with the (a) text and, then, (b) the audience. The best way to bring off this "double re-fusion" is through giving a performance that seems natural and as part of the ongoing flow of the situation, whereas disjointed performances will only exacerbate the process of re-fusing. This problem is aggravated in complex societies as individuals play different roles in highly diverse social context; under these conditions, it is often difficult to give a performance in all stages that is natural rather than somewhat disjointed. The result is that re-fusing will fail, or partially fail, thereby reducing the extension of culture and audience identification.

And fifth, there is the challenge of re-fusing audience with the performance text because, in complex societies, audiences are frequently diverse, larger, and separated in time and space from actors, as is especially the case with performances that are given through various media. This reality of the stages and audiences in complex societies places enormous demands on actors, directors, and scriptwriters to pull off an effective performance. Some of the strategies listed above—cognitive simplification, time-space compression, moral agonism, and twists and turns are one set of means for overcoming the problems of appealing the larger, more diverse, and separated audiences. These strategies simplify, de-contextualize to a degree, moralize, and make engaging the text and performance in ways that extend the culture to the audience and emotionally pull them in to the point of identifying with the performance and text.

Why Pragmatics?

I have stated Alexander's argument abstractly, as he does, but without examples. The point of the theory, I believe, is to emphasize that fusing of background cultural elements with

performances is a generic and universal process that has been made more difficult and challenging in complex, highly differentiated societies. Yet, if the background culture of a society cannot be fused with actors' performances, the problems of integration in complex societies become that much greater. In simple, homogeneous societies of the past, performances were naturally fused, but with complexity, active re-fusing through dramatic performances must occur. This re-fusing, I believe Alexander intends to argue, can occur at many different levels and among different types of actors. The process is perhaps easiest at the level of encounters of face-to-face interaction, but if those interacting are strangers to each other and from different backgrounds, then the interaction will often be awkward and stilted because the script, direction, staging, use of props, and acting in front of the audience are disjointed or unclear. At the other extreme are dramatic performances by (political, economic, religious) actors to large audiences given through mass media, and here the same problems exist. The actors confront a large, diverse, and spatially disconnected audience where the script, performance, text, and staging must somehow pull in diverse audiences who are asked to emotionally identify with the performance and text being brought forward. Relatively few actors can pull this off in natural settings, although good actors in movies and on theatrical stage are often able to pull audiences into their performances, but these successful performances only highlight the difficulty of doing so in real life situations. In between encounters of individuals and media presentations are performances at all the intervening levels of society—groups, organizations, civic meeting, lectures, rallies, protest events, revolutions, and other stages[27]—where actors confront audiences of varying sizes and backgrounds and where they must give a performance that extends culture and pulls the audience into the performance and text so that they identify emotionally with both. Again, only relatively few actors can bring these kinds of performances off and achieve full re-fusion. And yet, the viability of complex societies depends upon some degree of success in such performances.

Thus, ritual performances that connect audience with texts that decode background cultural representations are s key dynamic, in Alexander's view, in all social situations. Yet, many situations in complex societies are fragmented because they have been subject to de-fusion as a simple consequence of the scale and differentiation of society. In these de-fused situations, the importance of performance rituals becomes ever-more evident because performances are not automatic, nor do they seamlessly unfold. Whether it be one person in an encounter writing the script, decoding background representations in a text, appropriating stages and props, and giving the performance or a large team of actors coordinating the writing, directing, staging, marketing, and securing actors and audiences, the dynamics are the same; moreover, they are critical to the integration of societies.

Only with a strong program in cultural sociology, Alexander seems to argue, would this need to bring cultural representations from background to the front stage be seen as critical. Without a prior understanding of the dynamics of culture per se, the ritual performances needed to make cultural assumptions salient, relevant, and engrossing to audiences would not be appreciated and, hence, theorized.

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[27]For example, the titles of the following books by Alexander reveal that more macro-level effects of performance dynamics: *Performative Revolution in Egypt: An Essay on Cultural Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); *The Performance of Politics: Obama's Victory and The Democratic Struggle for Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); and *Peformance of Power* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011).

Gary Alan Fine's Theory of Idioculture

For many years, Gary Alan Fine has been the strongest advocate for conceptualizing groups as the critical meso-level structure that mediates between interactions among persons, on the one side, and more macro-level structures such as institutional domains, on the other. Groups give "tensile strength" to interaction by providing spaces for interactions to build up a shared culture that incorporates cultural elements from more macro structures but, even more importantly, generates culture that not only orders relations among micro-level interactions in groups but, potentially, can spread across networks to other groups and up lines of structural embeddedness to macrostructure formations. In his *Tiny Publics: A Theory of Group Action and Culture*,[28] Fine brings together ideas developed in many essays, and while the theory is not tightly integrated, it is highly evocative and adds considerably to the revival of cultural theorizing in sociology.

What Is Idioculture?

For Fine, the defining characteristic of groups is the development of a shared culture, or *idioculture* that consists of "a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and that serves as a basis for further interaction."[29] A group and its culture make strips of interaction more coherent and, in so doing, groups reveal a number of important characteristics:

1. *Social Control.* Groups socialize individuals into communal standards, and in so doing, they provide an important mechanism of social control, while also engaging in monitoring and sanctioning of conformity to communal standards, thereby adding an additional form of social control. And, if groups develop differences in power and authority among status locations, they add a third set of social control mechanisms.

2. *Contestation.* Groups provide an arena in which these cultural standards are developed and, if necessary, changed. Groups build up commitments to ideologies and frames for change; in fact, they are the locus of micro mobilizations for change that, if extended across groups and up to organizations, can turn into more meso- and macro-level mobilizations for change. Change, then, comes from the power of a group's idioculture to develop commitments to cultural ideologies that can become a starting point for mass mobilizations for change.

3. *Representations.* Groups provide spaces for the development, appropriation, and interpretation of meaning and objects that carry meanings. It is within groups that culture is created, and people use their cultural resources to create symbolic meanings and ideologies that represent the collective. These systems of symbols can trickle down from more macrostructures and their cultures, or be generated from interactions, but in both cases, these cultural elements become representations of both individuals and the group. And, they can often become symbols operating like totems to represent the culture of the group toward which ritualized performances affirm commitments to the group and its representations are made.

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[28]Gary Alan Fine, *Tiny Publics: A Theory of Group Action and Culture* (New York: Russell Sage, 2012).

[29]Ibid., p. 8.

4. *Allocation*. Groups are spaces where people negotiate positions in a status order, often a hierarchical order, and in so doing, the culture of the group will include evaluations of, and expectations for, status within the group and, more generally, in the society as a whole.

Thus, as these processes of social control, contestation, representation, and allocation play themselves out in groups, the culture that is created gives groups the solidity to order interactions and, moreover, to provide a vessel to which the culture from other groups or from more macro-level formations can filter into and change the culture of the group. It is thus at the group level that culture takes hold of people, building commitments that have consequences not only for group members but also other types and levels of social structure and culture in a society.

The Dynamics of Idioculture

As soon as people interact, they begin to build up an idioculture by asking about background knowledge, by making collective references, by talking and reciprocally questioning each other during sociable interactions, and by suggesting rules, opinions, and information. As they do so, they begin to create an important property of a group: a history, or what Randall Collins has termed *particularistic cultural capital*. Culture is thus acted out, talked about, and made on the ground as individuals interact, and the more the group provides a structural locus and arena for interaction, the more clear will the idioculture become.

It is these dynamics that are at the core of culture, and for this reason, groups are important to theorizing about culture because this is where people "do" culture and assemble meanings. Groups are also the nexus for the mediation between cultural elements from more macro-structures and the interaction of individuals in a specific context. Idioculture is thus built up through a series of key dynamics, including the following:

1. *Known Knowledge*. In groups, people present and assess their known knowledge. Culture cannot emerge and evolve without this critical space where the respective knowledge of interactants can be presented.

2. *Use of Cultural Elements*. Once presented, individuals must assess and often negotiate over the use of this cultural knowledge. What elements of culture can be used by group members?

3. *Functionality*. People must assess the degree to which cultural elements help a group meet its goals and facilitate the survival and viability of the group. Functionality is a kind of selection process where members assess and negotiate which elements of a culture will facilitate its viability in the environment.

4. *Appropriateness*. Individuals also assess the extent to which culture is appropriate for the structure and existing patterns in the group. Do cultural elements challenge the existing set of arrangements, or are these elements compatible with existing status order and culture?

5. *Triggering Events*. While there are inertial tendencies in groups with an idioculture, events can trigger assessment of new elements of culture; and so, events can set into motion processes 2, 3, and 4 above as individuals in the group reassess what is usable, what is functional, and what is appropriate for the group.

Embedding and Constraints

Groups exist in an environment of other social structures and their cultures, and unlike many theorists, Fine recognizes that there is a *macro-level* foundation to mesostructures and microstructures and their cultures, while also recognizing that macrostructural and macro-cultural formations are built on the solidity of group structures that cement together interactions so that they have the strength to serve as the building blocks of larger-scale sociocultural systems. Thus, the embedding of groups in larger structures operates as a constraint as well as a conduit from larger structures and their cultures to groups and their idiocultures. This "exteriority" is both an obdurate feature of the environment of groups, but it is also a constructed set of perceptions by members of groups who assess the most salient constraints.

These constraints operate as (1) *physical* limitations that constrain movement and actions of group members, (2) *temporal* constraints of when various types of actions can occur, (3) *spatial* constraints on where actions can occur, (4) *institutional* constraints imposed by networks of groups lodged in organizations that make up most institutional domains, and (5) *traditional* burdens where the past "weighs heavily on the present" as a set of cultural traditions as well as structural constraints from institutional embeddedness listed under (4) above, and (6) limitations imposed by organizational primacy, where organizations become reified as objects that impose themselves on group processes because of their embeddedness in institutional domains that invoke the power of all other constraints, but especially (4) and (5) above.

Culture in Action and Performance

Norms are expectations for behaviors, but because they almost always carry an element of evaluation, they are also how individuals evaluate each other. Fine borrows from Erving Goffman the ideas of frame and framing that impose shared values, recognizable motivations, and normative expectations for behaviors. This framing moralizes norms and makes them object of special meanings. Fine emphasizes that individuals do not so much "obey" norms as *perform* them; norms are seen in the ways in which individuals orchestrate their behaviors in a dramatic performance in a situation. Not only do individuals perform norms, they also talk about them in "tellings" as they indicate what norms are and what happens when they are violated. Indeed, norms are often talked about and transformed into stories, which contain the moral message of why norms are important and cannot be violated. Thus, norms are a part of cultural narrations.

Norms are negotiated as individuals seek to determine what expectations are to be relevant in a group. These negotiations are constrained by the structural situation or scene in which interaction occurs and in which the group is embedded. Negotiations also have temporal limits, which must actively be extended in time or, if necessary, revised and reconstituted if conditions on the ground change or changes in the larger social structure require a change in norms.

Ideologies are a linked set of beliefs about the social and political order that are shared by members of a community; these beliefs have a high level of moral and evaluative content, indicating how individuals *should* think about and act in situations. Like norms, people act out ideologies in performances, thereby affirming or, if desired, changing the moral order defined by values, ideologies, and norms. Ideologies are thus behavioral, but they are also "images" of a moral order. Ideologies gain power and effectiveness when (1) the particular scene or situational context can be dramatically linked to widely held moral concerns of individuals, (2) the

images connected to beliefs specify what is good, proper, and just, while providing guidelines for making decisions and taking actions, and (3) the situation in which an ideology is invoked is highly relevant to participants in a group.

Like norms, ideologies are not just "held"; they are both personal to individuals and shared with others in a group. As such, they become a characteristic of actors, their enacted relationships with other actors, and resources for presentations of individual actors or the group as a whole. Groups provide the space these enactment processes revolve around:

1. *Identification*. Ideologies served to promote an identification for self, as well as the group or community in which the ideology is enacted. As part of the conception that persons and groups have of themselves, ideology becomes capable of exerting great power.

2. *Rituals*. Ideologies represent one way that groups overcome "free-rider problems" where persons enjoy the benefits produced by group interaction without incurring the necessary costs. This power to limit free-riding relies on ritual performances of actors, reaffirming the moral tenets of an ideology publically and, thereby, making the necessary contribution to sustaining the culture and structure of the group.

3. *Resource Mobilization*. Ideologies are almost always linked to resource and efforts to secure resources necessary to sustain or change the group and, potentially, other groups and even institutional domains. By mobilizing rituals to affirm a moral order, groups can recruit new members and even material resources needed to achieve group goals.

Ideologies exert much of their power by arousing emotions. Ideologies are felt by individuals, and these emotions arouse individuals to engage in the rituals and other enactment processes necessary to sustain or even change ideologies. Decisions by individuals are also constrained by the emotional commitments that persons feel toward an ideology, and these decisions, in turn, determine behavioral enactments in the group. And as individuals engage in ritual performances reaffirming the moral tenets of the ideology, these performances arouse the emotions that attach people to the moral order of a group and to more remote social structures linked to the group.

The Diffusion of Culture

Groups are typically connected to each other via networks among individuals in different groups, or networks among the groups themselves. Institutional domains also knit groups together, often via organizations that ultimately are built from groups. As culture moves out along networks to include more groups, subcultures in a society are generated. And since culture can serve as a mechanism for securing resources, the culture of a group as it moves out from its origins and spreads to other groups can also generate not only subcultures but sub-societies composed of linked groups. Fine outlines a number of mechanisms by which idiocultures diffuse out from local groups to other groups and potentially to more macro-level structures and their culture.

One mechanism extending a group's culture is *multiple group memberships*. Individuals in complex societies are always members of different groups. As they occupy status locations and play roles in diverse groups, they also potentially bring the culture of one group to another.

Moreover, as individuals develop identities around their position in groups, the connection between identity and culture means that this identity will often be carried to other groups and played out, thus bringing the culture of one group through the back door to another group. A second mechanism resides in systems of *weak ties among diverse individuals* and groups. Weak ties also weaken boundaries among those linked by weak ties, with the result that culture can travel along these weak-tie relations and not have much resistance from the boundaries of groups (Conversely, if solidarity is sustained by strong ties among group members, these ties will resist diffusion of new cultural elements.) Third, even when the connection among groups is through marginal actors or stronger *actors in a brokerage situation* (standing between two groups and managing flow of resources), these actors fill in large holes in the network among groups and thus provide conduits by which culture travels across the space between groups. Media in a weak-tie society also allow for the diffusion of culture from one group to another. A fourth mechanism inheres in some *roles that, by their very nature, transcend group boundaries*. Roles such as lecturer, sales person, and all broker roles bring one group culture into another just by the process of playing the role out in diverse settings. A fifth mechanism is the *modes of connection* among groups. Some are hierarchical, as when one group has power over another, whereas another would be more horizontal where groups exchange resources. In both cases, the culture of one group moves into that of another. A sixth mechanism is *embedding* whereby groups are lodged inside communities or organizations and thus exposed to the culture of the more inclusive structure, while the larger structure will also have to reconcile its culture with the culture of its constituent groups. These and other mechanisms, Fine argues, allow groups and their cultures to begin as "a tiny spore from a mighty mushroom grows."[30]

Groups and Civil Society

Fine argues that groups or "tiny publics" carrying a culture are the seedbed of civil society. Groups provide the communal spaces that mitigate individualism and free-riding, while being the locale where "civil society is enacted."[31] As Fine argues, "groups define the terms of civic engagement, provide the essential resources, and link the movements to larger political and cultural domains."[32] Moreover, successful groups that influence civil society often become templates for the formation of similar groups, which also extend the reach and influence of groups. Small groups, then, are the key structures in understanding the dynamics of civic engagement by virtue of

1. *The Framing Function.* Groups provide "interpretative tools" to unpack and frame problems and issues of the larger social context in terms of local meanings in the group. These framing activities in groups can facilitate alignment of group members, as well as members of diverse groups; they can amplify the emerging ideologies about the goals of mobilizations to change some aspect of civil society; and these mobilizations further frame local context within the institutional domains that may require change.

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[30]Ibid., p. 156.

[31]Ibid., p. 127.

[32]Ibid, p. 128.

2. *The Mobilization Function.* As noted earlier, groups and their ideologies operate to pull resources—new members, material and organizational resources, and cultural resources—into the group. These tiny publics, then, are the "gravitational centers of civic life" by drawing individuals into civic engagement and participation not just by the ideologies that they develop but also by the resources that they can pull into the group to support its goals. Politics is, in many ways, always "local," and local networks among families, friends, and associates are the stage for engagement, the ties that pull people into groups, and the magnate for resource mobilization.

3. *The Creating Citizens Function.* The emotions, cognitive sets, and cultural meanings that are generated in groups will radiate outwards to larger social venues and increase group members' civic identity. In so doing, groups not only increase these members' sense of group identity, but they nurture an identity tied to larger groups and civic structures in the society. In so doing, groups increase commitments at micro-interpersonal level, the meso level of the group and the organizations and communities in which the group is embedded, and the macro level of the society as a whole and/or its key institutional domains.

Groups thus provide the tensile strength for not only society but also for social movements that change the culture and structure of society. Groups provide the face-to-face interaction and ritual activities that charge up emotions and increase solidarity, and these become a *private good* that is highly rewarding to group members. These private goods, such as positive emotions and solidarity, increase commitments to groups and thus give groups power over individuals, while at the same time monitoring their members activities and, if necessary, sanctioning them. Groups also provide reputation resources, membership, and status locations, which also are rewarding to individuals. As a consequence, groups limit free-riding while increasing commitments to groups and their ideology. In so doing, groups become the building block of a social movement as its culture is extended out by the mechanisms of diffusion listed earlier.

The Centrality of Groups to Cultural Analysis

In sum, Fine makes a strong case for what Alexander might see as a "weak culture program" because idiocultures are still very much attached to social structure. Fine would argue, I think, that culture exerts influence because it is groups that are the necessary structure to develop idiocultures and commitments to these cultures; it is through the mechanisms linking groups that culture can diffuse outward, thereby opening up opportunities for ideological mobilizations for change that, again, ultimately start with groups.

Jonathan Turner's Explicitly "Weak" Cultural Program

Analytical Theorizing and Weak Programs of Cultural Analysis

Much cultural analysis before the revival of the "strong" program in cultural sociology was decidedly weak in two senses: First, there was less effort to separate structure and culture; instead, there was a clear emphasis on their connectedness, without a preference for declaring structure or culture as more primary. And second, the goal was not so much

to tease out the empirically unique and robust nature of symbol systems but, rather, to emphasize the *generic* elements that always exist when culture emerges in *any* structural contexts emerge. Talcott Parsons' analysis of culture within his functional action theory (see Chapter 2) represented one type of weak program, while the emphasis on ideology and belief systems in analytical conflict theory was another example of a weak program (see Chapter 3). Just whether the strong program proposed by Alexander and his colleagues is needed as a corrective to previous under-emphasis on culture as a force in its own right can be debated, but even Gary Alan Fine's theoretical approach, which draws from very detailed and insightful qualitative research projects on a variety of groups is closer to the weak than strong program. In fact, as Alexander's theory demonstrates, once emphasis is on the explanatory theory rather than the empirical and historical details of culture, the theories all converge and seem to become part of a weaker program, as I will note when summing up cultural theory in the conclusions.

For the present, I will introduce my views of cultural dynamics as they can be theorized. I will draw from the outline of basic structural formations as different levels of social organization in Figure 8.9 on page 162 to illustrate an alternative form of cultural analysis. Social structure unfolds at three levels: the micro level of face-to-face interaction; the meso level of corporate units (groups, organizations, communities) and categoric units (social categories carrying evaluations and expectations); and the macro level of institutional domains, stratification systems, societies, and inter-societal systems (see Figure 8.9 on page 162 for an outline and page 160 for definitions of each of these universal structures). I have tended to call this distribution of basic structural forms at three levels of reality *sociocultural formations* because this is just what they are: They are social structures of a basic type with a culture that, I believe, can be conceptualized in more generic terms than a strong program would allow. That is, whatever the exact content of culture in these generic and universal types of social structures at the three fundamental levels (micro, meso, and macro), there are also generic types of cultural systems necessary for their operation.

A Weak Model of Culture and Levels of Social Organization

By comparing Figure 9.1 with Figure 8.9 on page 162, it is evident that I have attached cultural systems to the generic social structures of macro, meso, and micro levels of social reality. The arrows are intended to emphasize certain causal connections within and between levels, and it is in these connections that many of the dynamics of culture from an analytical standpoint occur. By emphasizing these aspects of culture, I am asserting that they are *the most important dimensions* of culture in understanding how sociocultural formations operate and interact with each other. I am, in many ways, going back to earlier analytical theories and suggesting what is needed for an explanation of cultural processes is simplification rather than an endless search for robust and situational meanings of culture in their unique historical context. The outline in Figure 9.1 is not the explanation but, rather, the guide to developing models and proposition describing cultural dynamics. In this short review, I cannot outline these dynamics in detail, but they can be found in other works.[33]

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[33]Jonathan H. Turner, *Theoretical Principles of Sociology*, volumes 1, 2, and 3 (New York: Springer 2010–2012).

Figure 9.1 Levels of Culture
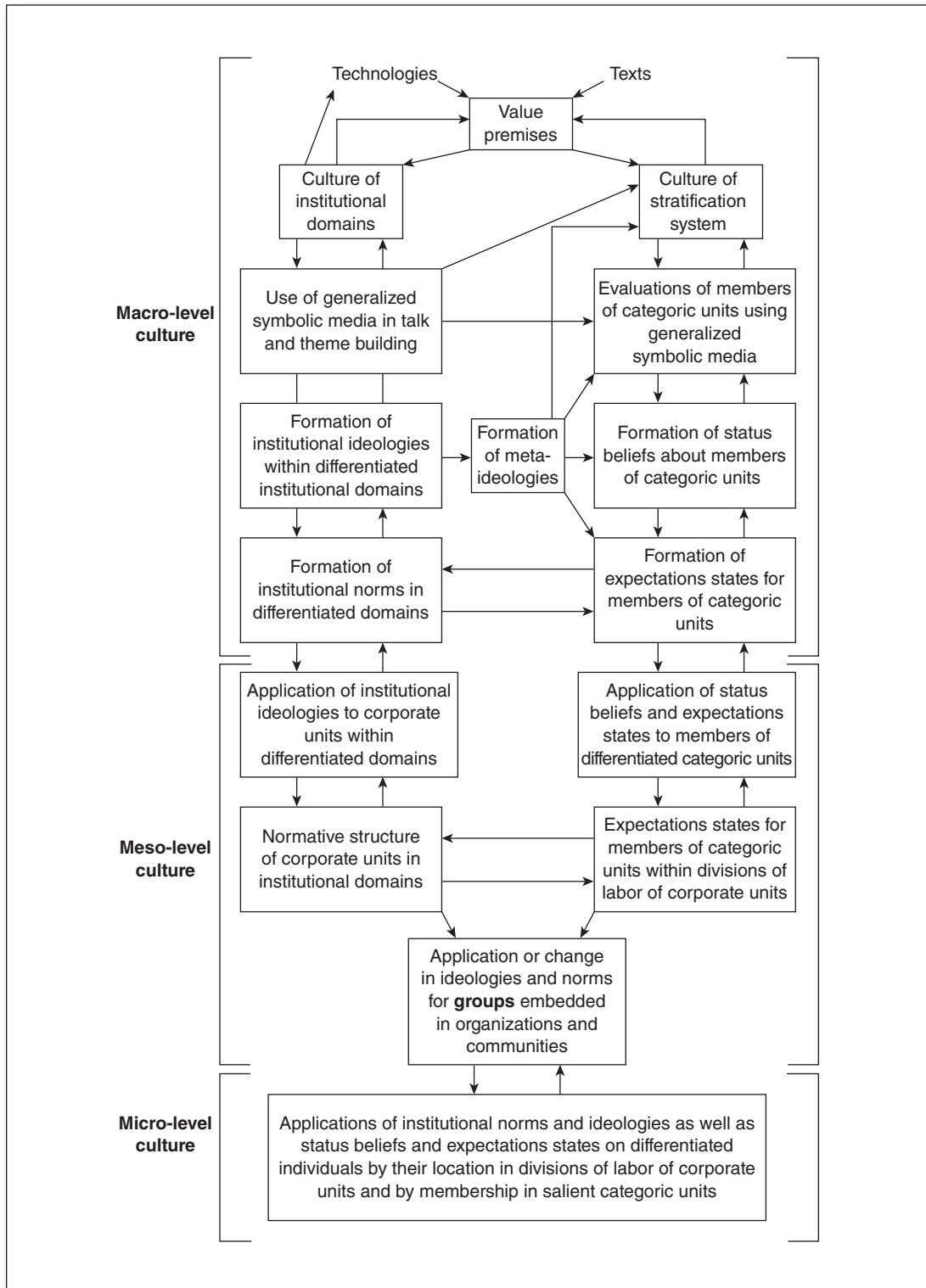
The Figure 9.1 is set up to emphasize the embedding of micro in meso-sociocultural, and the meso in macro-sociocultural formations. For culture, this means that value premises of a society, as influenced by the level of technology and the accumulated texts (history, traditions, philosophy, lore, etc.) of a society are the most general systems of symbols relevant for understanding many basic social processes. *Value premises* are emphasized because these are highly abstract cultural codes denoting of right/wrong and appropriate/inappropriate that constrain all other elements of culture that affect behavior and social organization. Values can vary considerably by their number, their consistency with each other, the level of consensus over key tenets among members of diverse subpopulations, and of course, their actual content, but as a general rule, the greater the consensus over values, the greater will be their influence on ideologies and norms as these develop at the meso and micro levels of social organization.

Ideologies are a prominent force in all cultural sociologies, but my take on them is more in tune with a reconstructed functionalism than is typically the case. *Ideologies* are evaluative beliefs that draw from the basic tenets of value premises to state what is right and correct within an institutional domain, such as economy, kinship, religion, education, law, polity, science, medicine, etc. Ideologies are built up from *generalized symbolic media* that begin as a means for ordering communication among actors as institutional domains are first being built up. These generalized media are used in discourse among actors and eventually evolve into general moral themes and, over time, become codified into a distinctive ideology for an institutional domain. Thus, values are made relevant to actors by virtue of their influence on the formation of ideologies as these are built up from generalized symbolic media. Table 9.3 lists in a very rough way the generalized media for a number of basic institutions. Generalized media have some very special characteristics: First, they are the terms and media of discourse, but they always carry elements of evaluation because they are drawn from more general value premises. Second, as emphasized above, they are the building blocks of ideologies that form within institutional domains. And third, they are also the valued resource unequally distributed by the corporate units that make up each institutional domain. For example, *money* is a generalized medium, but it is also the valued resource unequally distributed by corporate units in the economy and in modern societies in many other institutional domains. *Power* is the medium or terms of discourse for constructing political ideologies, and at the same time, it is the valued resource unequally distributed. Thus, stratification systems unequally distribute *money*, *power*, *learning*, *health*, *love/loyalty*, *piety/sacredness*, and other media, and these become the resources unequally distributed in the stratification system. Because generalized symbolic media carry moral connotations, at the very least, and moral imperatives at the most, they always have effects on how individuals, and especially members of what I term *categoric units*, are evaluated. Thus, members of different social classes as well as other social categories, such as ethnicity, gender, age, religious affiliation, etc. are all evaluated by the moral tenets that are implicit in generalized symbolic media, as is denoted by the arrow from generalized symbolic media to evaluations of members of categoric units.

As these media are used in forging *corporate units* of an institutional domain, they are codified into an ideology that adds an additional layer of moral coding. These ideologies constrain the formation of institutional norms at the macro level, as well as the culture of corporate units at the meso level, as is indicated by the downward arrows on the left side of Figure 9.1. The arrow going from institutional ideologies to formation of *status beliefs* about members of categoric units emphasizes that, once codified, ideologies provide the evaluative

Table 9.2 Generalized Symbolic Media of Institutional Domains

Kinship	**Love/loyalty**, or the use of intense positive affective states to forge and mark commitments to others and groups of others
Economy	**Money**, or the denotation of exchange value for objects, actions, and services by the metrics inhering in money
Polity	**Power,** or the capacity to control the actions of other actors
Law	**Influence,** or the capacity to adjudicate social relations and render judgments about justice, fairness, and appropriateness of actions
Religion	**Sacredness/Piety**, or the commitment to beliefs about forces and entities inhabiting a non-observable supernatural realm and the propensity to explain events and conditions by references to these sacred forces and beings
Education	**Learning,** or the commitment to acquiring and passing on knowledge
Science	**Knowledge,** or the invocation of standards for gaining verified knowledge about all dimensions of the social, biotic, and physico-chemical universes
Medicine	**Health,** or the concern about and commitment to sustaining the normal functioning of the human body
Sport	**Competitiveness,** or the definition of games that produce winners and losers by virtue of the respective efforts of players
Arts	**Aesthetics,** or the commitment to make and evaluate objects and performances by standards of beauty and pleasure that they give observers

Note: These and other generalized symbolic media are employed in discourse among actors, in articulating themes, and in developing ideologies about what should and ought to transpire in an institutional domain. They tend to circulate within a domain, but all of the symbolic media can circulate in other domains, although some media are more likely to do so than others.

yardstick for forming beliefs about the worth and merit of members of diverse categoric units. Much of this influence of ideologies on status beliefs is, however, mediated by what I term *meta-ideologies*, which are combinations of the ideologies from the dominant institutions in a society. Thus, for example, if the ideologies of economy, education, science, and democratic polity dominate, their basic tenets will be combined and reconciled to create a meta-ideology that then becomes the moral standard by which individuals are evaluated and judged, especially members of categoric units (see arrow from ideology to meta-ideology to formation of status beliefs). In contrast, if the dominant institutions are religion, kinship, and non-democratic polity, then a very different meta-ideology will be formed and become the moral standard by which people are judged in terms of their relative worth.

Moving down Figure 9.1 to the meso level of social reality, ideologies of a domain will influence the normative structure of corporate units (groups, organizations, and communities). If a corporate unit such as a community is embedded in multiple domains, a

meta-ideology will be formed to give community norms a moral character. Status beliefs as part of the culture of the stratification system will incorporate tenets of ideologies and meta-ideologies, and these become specified as expectation states for how members of different categoric units are likely to behave and, indeed, *should* behave. There is considerable empirical and theoretical literature supporting the power of these expectation states, and they all draw from status beliefs that, in turn, are pulled from ideologies and meta-ideologies.[34] These expectation states represent implicit norms about how people in valued and devalued categories are to behave, and these expectations tend to be enforced at the level of the encounter. Similarly, the norms in the division of labor of corporate units also are applied to encounters. Following Fine, I argue that group corporate units are particularly important in this process because they provide the space and structure for housing ideologies, norms, and expectation states that can then be applied to interacting individuals. Moreover, it is at the level of groups that variously categorized individuals meet other cultural elements; if there is resentment about expectation states for categoric unit members or about norms in organizations or communities, the resentment is expressed here as a challenge to expectations states and norms. And, as much of the social movement literature documents, it is at the level of the group that counter-ideologies ferment and then begin to spread up the ladder of embedding among the cultural elements portrayed in Figure 9.1 and/or out to other groups via the "mechanisms" outlined in Fine's theory. Thus, the arrows all indicate connection among cultural elements, which gives them great power, but at the same time, if resentments over inequalities and inequities of stratification associated with ideologies, status beliefs, and expectations states increase, these very same networks and patterns of embedding become a highway for the rapid movement of change-oriented ideologies.

There is not sufficient space to trace out all of these dynamics, but what a more analytical approach communicates is this: There are relatively few levels of culture in play for most actions, interactions, and social structures; these elements of culture are always moralized, to a degree, and they lead to differential evaluation of persons by their membership in various social categories. And as these legitimating ideologies for stratification and for corporate-unit organization generate resentment of people at the level of the encounter and group, they can set into motion powerful cultural forces for social change of the structure and culture of corporate units and the culture and structure of status beliefs and categoric units, and change at this meso level will, eventually, affect institutional domains and the society-wide stratification system, and hence the whole society and perhaps even inter-societal relations of societies with each other. All of the processes and dynamics denoted by the boxes and arrows connecting them can, therefore, be specified in greater detail with models and theoretical principles.[35]

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[34]For a summary of this literature, see Jonathan H. Turner and David Wagner, "Status Theorizing," in Jonathan H. Turner, *Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012).

[35]See, for example, Turner, *Theoretical Principles of Sociology* (see note 33); Jonathan H. Turner, *Face-to-Face: Toward a Sociological Theory of Interpersonal Processes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

Conclusion

With the conflict critique on functional theories in the 1960s and 1970s, especially the approach of Talcott Parsons who *did* emphasize cultural processes, sociological attention shifted to the material bases of society as they generated conflicts of interests that, under various conditions, led to varying types of conflict. Culture was not irrelevant in this conceptual shift, but it was relegated to the analysis of beliefs and ideologies as they arouse parties to conflict or legitimated oppressive social structures. Just as conflict theory reacted to functionalism, I suspect that the new cultural sociology emerged as a reaction to the simplification of cultural analysis when it was seen as the sidekick of conflict dynamics, ultimately generated by the material conditions of societies.

There were intellectual traditions, such as phenomenology and hermeneutics, that remained viable during this period, but they did not explore culture in all of its manifestations; these were specialized theories that were often more cognitive than cultural. It is obvious, but surprisingly underappreciated, that everything humans do when they act and organize is cultural. Ideas are expressed with language, not just words but the language of emotions; ideas take hold when they are used by interacting persons and collective actors to build up social structures, reproduce such structures, or tear them down, only to rebuild them in another form. But, culture is more—new cultural theories appear to argue—because it is a domain of reality where symbols are organized and stored, and then brought into use in dramatic performances. They are not simple superstructures to material social structures, but an autonomous set of dynamics that need to be theorized and, eventually, connected to the structural properties of social reality. The notion of *performances* seems to be one wedge for recognizing the autonomous dynamics of culture per se and the necessity of bringing culture to stages and props in social settings that are part of social structures. It is the capacity to extend cultural representations to audiences and to get audiences to emotionally identify with these representations through scripts, direction, texts, staging, and acting that culture that exerts their power over actions of persons and corporate units as they build up, reproduce, dismantle, and build up anew social structures.

In somewhat different ways, Wuthnow, Bourdieu, Alexander, Fine, and Turner have sought to highlight the properties of culture and how culture is used in social settings. Each explicitly, or more implicitly in the case of Bourdieu, sees ritual and performances as critical in generating the emotions necessary to give culture its power to influence how people behave and how social structures are created, reproduced, or changed. Yet, when theorized by these scholars and others, the conceptualization of culture becomes a bit vague—*moral order*, *habitus*, *cultural and symbolic capital*, *background representations*, *texts*, *scripts, idioculture*, and the like. These are not precise conceptualizations. They are evocative, to be sure, but they are not denotative in any precise sense. From empirical descriptions of these in real empirical contexts, perhaps it will be possible to isolate the properties and dynamics of each of these evocative terms, which I think would represent a much stronger program in cultural sociology. For the present, let me summarize by listing some of the key assumptions and topics that are a part of the new cultural theorizing:

1. Culture is all the systems of symbols carrying meanings that have been produced by individual and collective actors in a population.

2. Culture is composed of texts, lore, traditions, technologies, and stocks of knowledge that can be stored in the minds of persons, in social structures of corporate units, in the definitions of categoric units, and in cultural warehouses (libraries, computer files, etc.) available in a society, but the most important dimensions of culture are those that are consistently used by actors in micro-, meso-, and macro-level social structures.

3. Virtually any aspect of culture has an effect on the substance of symbol systems used by actors at the micro, meso, and macro levels of social reality, but for virtually all situations, certain elements of culture are most critical to understanding the dynamics of the moral order generated by culture.

   A. At the macro level, the moral order consists of society-wide and highly abstract *value premises* that moralize all situations and provide the premises for action at all levels of social reality.

   B. At the meso level of social reality, value premises are drawn into evaluative beliefs within institutional domains and within the stratification systems.

      1. Evaluative beliefs within institutional domains can be viewed as *ideologies*, which specify in moral terms proper conduct and action for all actors in a given domain. Such ideologies are built from *generalized symbolic media* that are used in discourse and exchanges of resources among actors within and between institutional domains.

         a. These ideologies, and the symbolic media from which they are built, are used to legitimate institutional domains.

         b. The generalized symbolic media from which ideologies are built also denote the valued resources that are unequally distributed by corporate units operating within institutional domains and, hence, also become mechanism by which stratification systems are legitimated.

         c. The culture of corporate units—their normative systems and general culture—are constrained by the ideologies of the institutional domain in which they are embedded as well as by the ideologies that circulate into a given domain from other domains. Norms governing actions and interactions within corporate units carry the moral overtones of institutional ideologies.

         d. The beliefs evaluating the moral worth of members of diverse social classes in the stratification and other categoric units associated with the system of inequality are constrained by the combination of ideologies from institutional domains used to legitimate inequalities. *Status beliefs* about the worth of members of categoric units carry the moral overtones of the ideologies legitimating inequality, while generating the expectation states for members of categoric units during their action and interactions.

   C. At the micro level, individuals are guided by the norms of the corporate units in which episodes of interaction are embedded and by the expectations states of categoric units that are derived from status beliefs and ideologies legitimating inequality.

4. Culture is created, sustained, and changed by ritualized acts and performances that arouse emotions and generate commitments to, or alienation from, symbol systems.

5. The more positive are the emotions aroused in ritual acts, the greater will be commitments to the moral tenets of a system of symbols, and the more likely will interactions lead to

   A. A fusing of person, action, interaction, social structure, and background elements of culture so as to produce high levels of solidarity among individuals involved in ritual acts and performances

   B. Self-identification with the moral order and, thus, enhanced commitments to this order since self-definitions depend upon the viability of this order

   C. Marking of group boundaries with symbols having a totemic quality and, thereby, reinforcing the common culture of those acting within these boundaries marked by totemic symbols

   D. Development of idiocultures at the group level that frame for group members social issues and problems from the broader society

6. Systems of symbols can be viewed as valued resources or a form of capital that are distributed unequally and, hence, become part of the stratification system. As such, classes and factions within classes in the stratification system will differ by the nature of the cultural capital that they possess and by the symbols available to legitimate or to challenge the existing system of inequality.

7. Culture is always used to legitimate existing systems but also to challenge existing ideologies and the social structural formations that these ideologies legitimate.

8. Those social formations and the actors in them that can use culture, especially ideologies but other cultural systems as well, to secure resources are more likely to be able to sustain themselves and, indeed, spread their culture to other social formations, whereas those formations that cannot successfully use culture to secure resources, will not have their culture diffuse outward and may, in fact, see their culture disappear or be absorbed by a more resource-rich social formation and its culture.

9. The outcome of the dynamics described in (7), (8), and (9) above will revolve around the relative success of actors in groups possessing a given culture in

   A. Recruiting new members committed to a particular culture and its ideology

   B. Acquiring material resources to sustain the formation

   C. Developing forms of organizational structure that can absorb new members and engage in recruiting and extending their culture outward

   D. Using networks among groups to extend one group's idioculture outward within and between organizations, communities, and categoric units, which becomes more likely in multiple group affiliations of group members, the existence of brokerage roles, roles that transcend group boundaries, weak ties within and between groups, and prominence of mass media

   E. Using a group's culture to legitimate its viability vis-à-vis the culture and ideology of other structural formations

   F. Focusing their idioculture on civic issues of public importance that are salient to all members of a population