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# Neofunctionalism Today: Reconstructing a Theoretical Tradition



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In 1979, Alexander acknowledged that "despite Parsons' enduring impression on the sociological tradition, it is too early to determine the ultimate fate of his theoretical legacy." There seemed a real possibility that "the Parsonian synthesis will break down completely." It was also possible, however, that in time a "more loosely-defined, less sectarian version of functionalist theory" might appear (Alexander 1979a, 355). In this essay we will try to demonstrate that it is the latter, not the former, of these possibilities that actually has come to pass.

When the initial volumes of *Theoretical Logic in Sociology* began to appear in 1982 (Alexander 1982a, 1982b, 1983a, 1983b), they were not greeted with unanimous approval. Incredulity, dismay, even indignation were prominently displayed. Marxist, humanist, constructivist, and positivist theorists, and even one older Parsonian, wrote negative reviews, warning the profession away from what they considered a retrograde development. The one thing about which these critics agreed was that the Parsonian foundation of *Theoretical Logic* represented a holdover from the past, rather than a new development in contemporary sociological thought.

These initial responses emerged from self-understandings of theoretical orientations that had been formed in a struggle against structural-functional thought. Positivism, conflict theory, Marxism, exchange theory, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology—all had once been obstreperous challengers to the Parsonian edifice. By 1980, it might be said, with only some exaggeration, that they were triumphant, not challengers but the dominant theories in a new, if internally divided, establishment. Surely, if sociological progress was to have any meaning at all, the Parsonian approach could not be revived. The very *raisons*

*d'etre* of these positions demanded that such an alternative not be raised.

In the January 1988 issue of *Contemporary Sociology*, Marco Orru describes the works he has under review as sharing an "enthusiastic reappraisal of Parsonian sociology." He develops a perspective within which to view them by pointing precisely to the doubt their existence casts on linear conceptions of social scientific development.

As social scientists, we wish for theories about the social world to build on each other in some linear fashion but more often than not we observe, instead, a cyclical pattern by which different schools of thought replace each other in commanding our attention over time. Leading figures in the various theoretical traditions follow this same pattern. (Orru 1988, 115)

Only after suggesting the validity of a more cyclical pattern can Orru conclude by suggesting that "the revival of Parsonian thought is one of the distinguishing features of 1980s sociology."

If Orru is right about the conspicuous importance of the Parsonian revival, and we think he is, there has been a sea change in sociology in the last half dozen years. In retrospect, at least, it seems clear that *Theoretical Logic* was not the final aftershock in response to the anti-Parsonian quake. As we will suggest later in this essay, it was not, in fact, an effort to revive earlier, orthodox Parsonian theory at all. It was, rather, a challenge to central tenets of the Parsonian orientation, an effort to revise it in a radical, post-Parsonian way. As such, it might better be seen as a preshock, a premonition of things to come. It has become evident in retrospect that *Theoretical Logic* was not anomalous. The previous year, indeed, Habermas had pointedly demanded the relegitimation of Parsonian theory in a not dissimilar way, as had Richard Munch in a powerful double set of articles in the *American Journal of Sociology*.<sup>1</sup>

When Alexander (1985a) subsequently introduced the term "neofunctionalism," it was in order to emphasize the double element of continuity and internal critique. This emphasis is revealed in his analogy to neo-Marxism. Current sociology à la Parsonian is to the earlier orthodoxy as neo-Marxism is to its orthodox earlier variant. Neo-Marxism has tried to overcome the mechanistic rigidities of Marx by incorporating the most important advances of twentieth-century social thought. The relation of neofunctionalism to the traditions that challenged early Parsonian theory, it was suggested, is much the same.

This public assertion of the continuing vitality of the Parsonian tradition drew, once again, a decidedly mixed response. In *Footnotes*, an elder statesman (Page 1985) wrote an open letter to warn his colleagues about the dangers of revivifying functionalism. A younger the-

orist, Charles Camic (1986), in his review of *Neofunctionalism*, reassured his readers that the revivalists had learned nothing from the criticisms of Parsons and that in their theorizing one could find nothing new. Another contemporary, George Ritzer (1985), reinforced this skepticism, while offering that he was willing to wait and see.

Today, while fundamental doubts about the validity and desirability of neofunctionalism have not disappeared, the disciplinary community is gradually coming to terms with the fact that something new has appeared on the sociological scene. Orru's observation attests to this recognition. So does Giddens and Turner's (1987, 3) reference to the recent "considerable revival" of Parsonian thought in their introduction to *Social Theory Today*. Contemporary textbooks in sociological theory (e.g., Ritzer 1988; Collins 1988a) are being revised to reflect this shift in the theoretical map.<sup>2</sup>

In the course of the twentieth century, critics and sympathizers of neo-Marxism have often asked, "What is Marxist about it?" In so doing, they have indicated the extent of the critical departure from the original form. In Jonathan Turner and Alexandra Maryanski's (1988) "What is Functionalist about Neofunctionalism?" the same doubt is raised about recent neofunctionalist work. There is no doubting that in certain respects Turner and Maryanski have grounds for complaint. Neofunctionalism differs from orthodox Parsonian thought in decisive and often radical ways. Even while it disputes the discipline's evaluation of earlier functionalism, it does not itself accept some of the central tendencies of that earlier thought. Even while it sustains fundamental links with Parsons' earlier work, therefore, it does not conceive of itself as an attempt to resuscitate an older orthodoxy. Whether its originality is undermined by its continuing roots in Parsonian thought is, of course, a matter of debate. The claim can be made, however, that neofunctionalism is the only new theoretical movement to have emerged in Western sociology in the 1980s.<sup>3</sup>

One of our ambitions in this paper is to indicate the substance of this new theoretical movement in sociology—its general discursive structure, its interpretations of the classics, the scope of its research programs, and its relation to other theoretical discourse and research programs in the field. This will involve a critical look at the wide variety of work that is currently underway. We would like to begin, however, by exploring some of the reasons why this unexpected revival has come about. In this regard, to point to the intrinsic interest of current neofunctionalist works is besides the point. Their very appearance has been a response to underlying developments in sociology. Neofunctionalism, we will argue, is only one indication of a deep groundshift in the entire sociological field. To understand its relevance

on the contemporary scene one must understand the new and different theoretical situation that is emerging today.

## THE EMERGING THIRD PHASE OF POSTWAR SOCIOLOGY

Since World War II, Western sociology has passed through two periods, and it is entering a third. In the first phase, which lasted into the 1960s, structural-functionalism, in its Parsonian and Mertonian form, could be said to be the dominant force. Whatever its ideological weaknesses, its anti-empirical stance, its naive confidence in equilibrium—and we will talk about all these below—that functionalism was committed to the syntheses of what Parsons called the “warring schools” of sociological thought seems impossible to deny. This orientation toward theoretical integration and synthesis was one casualty of the rebellion against functionalism that began in the 1960s and continued triumphantly into the early 1980s.

Two major battle lines were drawn. On the one side, microsociology set contingent action against social structure in the name of creativity and individual freedom. On the other side, conflict sociology argued that social change could be explained only by emphasizing material rather than ideal forces. These propositions denied the central tenets of Parsons’ work. Thus, as Goffman, Homans, and Garfinkel gained increasing authority, interest in socialization and personality structure correspondingly declined. As Rex, Lockwood, and Dahrendorf became central figures, with Collins, Giddens, Wright, and Skocpol following in their stead, macrosociological interest in culture and symbolic legitimacy dramatically declined.

Yet even as these brilliant challengers became the new establishment, even as the “multiparadigmatic” character of sociology passed from daring prophecy (e.g., Friedrichs 1970) to conventional wisdom (e.g., Ritzer 1975), the vital and creative phase of these theoretical movements was coming to an end. Stimulated by the premature theoretical closure of the micro and macro traditions, a new phase is beginning. It is marked by an effort to relink theorizing about action and order, conflict and stability, structure and culture. Such efforts have been made from within each of the newly dominant theoretical traditions, from both sides of the great micro/macro divide. They are also the most clearly distinguishing characteristics of the new directions in general theory. The old lines of confrontation are being discredited. There is a movement back to synthesis once again. We believe that it is this development that marks the third phase of postwar sociology.

In symbolic interaction, a whole spate of work has challenged the emphasis on individualistic contingency that, under Blumer's leadership, marked this tradition's earlier development. Goffman's writing (1974) on frame analysis and Becker's (1982) on the social organization of art can be seen as marked departures from earlier, much more negotiation-oriented work. Stryker (1980) has called for a reintegration of interactionism with systems theory, Lewis and Smith (1980) have argued that Mead was a collectivist, and Fine (1984, 1988) has moved forcefully into the area of cultural and organizational studies.

In the exchange tradition, leading theorists (e.g., Coleman 1986a, 1986b, 1987; Wippler and Lindenberg 1987) increasingly reject the notion that the individual/structure relation can be seen as a causal relation between discrete empirical events. Because there is empirical simultaneity, the linkage between micro and macro must be seen as an analytical one sustained by larger systemic processes. This analytical linkage is achieved by the application of what are called "transformation rules," such as voting procedures, to individual actions. In the work of theorists like Goode, Blau, and Coleman, structural explanations—about the rules of constitutions (e.g., Coleman 1987), the dynamics of organizations and intergroup relations (Blau 1977), and the system of prestige allocation (Goode 1978)—have begun to replace utility arguments.

Within ethnomethodology, one can point to similar developments in the work of Cicourel, who has recently pushed for a linkage with macrosociological work (Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel 1981). Recent work by Molotch (Molotch and Boden 1985) and Schegloff (1987) demonstrates how discursive practices are structured by organizational context and the distribution of power, even while their analytical autonomy is maintained. Heritage and Greatbatch's (1986) research on political conventions makes a similar effort to establish micro-macro links.

When one examines the structural or conflict position, one finds similar efforts to overcome the splits of the second phase. Moore (1978) has turned from objective to subjective injustice, Skocpol and Finegold (1982) have raised the possibility that religion may be an independent cause of social policy and political change. Sewell (1980, 1985), once a devoted Tilly student, and Darnton (1982), once a leading *Annaliste*, are now developing cultural approaches to social change and history. Calhoun (1982) and Prager (1986) have published polemically antistructural works of historical sociology. Meyer and Scott (1983) link organizations to cultural structures rather than technical ones. This cultural turn in macrosociology is responsible, we believe, for the emergence of a new disciplinary specialty, cultural sociology, which has just become the newest American Sociological Association section. It is instructive

that theorists who associate themselves with this specialty argue that culture cannot be understood in terms of what we have called the dichotomies of the second phase. Wuthnow (1988) argues that culture need not be understood individualistically or even subjectively, Swidler (1986) for culture's opening to contingency, Archer (1988) for its sensitivity to change, Eisenstadt (1986) for its link to material force and institutional life.

Within general theory there is an equally strong movement away from the one-sided polemics of earlier theoretical work. Where Giddens' earlier work (1971) was part of conflict and neo-Marxist theorizing, in the last decade he (1984) has sought to interweave contingency, material structure, and normative rules. Collins' (1975) earlier work was paradigmatic of conflict sociology; in recent years, by contrast, he has embraced microsociology (1981), the later Durkheimian emphasis on rituals (1987, 1988b), and even the framing concept of multidimensionality (1988a). Habermas, too, began his career with a typical Frankfurt school emphasis on the destructively capitalist features of modern life; more recently, he (1984) has theorized about the normative and micro processes that underline and often oppose the macrostructure of capitalist societies, making these cultural forces "equal but separate" subsystems.<sup>4</sup>

We earlier pointed to premature theoretical closure as the intellectual reason for the denouement of phase two. One-sided theories are effective polemical means; they are decidedly less successful when they must function as sources of theoretical cohesion, if not disciplinary integration, in their own right. Social and institutional factors, however, are also involved. One certain factor is the changing political climate in the United States and Europe. Revolutionary social movements have faded away; because of developments like Solidarity and revelations about the Chinese Cultural Revolution, in the eyes of many critical intellectuals Marxism itself has been morally delegitimated.

The ideological thrust that fueled post-Parsonian discourse in its micro and macro form and that justified Marxist structuralism on the Continent is largely spent. There is a new realism, even pessimism, about the possibilities for social change, which has manifest itself in two very different ways. On the one hand, there is the resignation, even fatalism of so much postmodern thought, with its nostalgic return to localism (Lyotard 1984) and its abandonment of the possibility of a more rational social life (Foucault 1984). On the other hand, there is the search for less apocalyptic ways of institutionalizing rationality, approaches which concentrate on the difficulties of preserving political democracy rather than on the unlikely, and perhaps undesirable, possibility of some socialist transformation (Lefort 1986; Alexander 1988a).

## PARSONS' NEW RELEVANCE IN THE CONTEMPORARY PHASE

Is it any wonder that neofunctionalism has flourished in this changing social and disciplinary environment? Parsons' original work contained within it a wide and contradictory range of theoretical ideas. There are central areas in his corpus, however, that complement this third phase. Developing in a period of reaction against the limits of the second phase, neofunctionalists have interpreted the "natural concerns" of Parsons' thought in just this way. They have argued that it provides critical theoretical resources for addressing the concerns of this new period in postwar sociological work.

More than anything else, perhaps, neofunctionalism has presented itself as a prototypically synthetic form of theorizing. After all, it was Parsons' original and flawed effort at theoretical integration—and what were seen as its attendant weaknesses—that provoked micro and macro theorists to launch the one-sided theories that themselves have recently come under increasing doubt. It is not surprising, therefore, that as contemporary theorists have returned to the project of synthesis, they have often returned to some core element in Parsons' earlier thought. It is striking that this return is manifest in the work of theorists who have never had any previous association with Parsonian thought. The motive is theoretical logic, not personal desire.

No more clear example of this theoretical pressure can be found than Habermas' *Legitimation Crisis* (1975). Departing from the safe harbor of critical theory, Habermas wanted to incorporate into his model of economic contradictions factors like personality strain, the universalist potential of value commitments, and the latently anticapitalist pressures that emanate from the formal equality of political and legal institutions. What he ends up employing, de facto if not de jure, is Parsons' AGIL model and also his division between culture, personality, and social system. Similar examples can be found in a wide range of recent theoretical work. When Schluchter (1979, 1981) wants to present a newly integrated view of Weber's civilizational work, he makes use of the evolutionary and developmental language of Parsons' differentiation theory. When Collins (1988b) pushes to expand his "conflict-Durkheimian" theory of social rituals into the realm of democratic politics, he is forced to acknowledge the importance Parsons' multidimensional theory of political support. In Holton's (1986) effort to transcend both market and Marxist approaches to political economy, he turns with relief to the rich conceptual legacy of Parsons and Smel-

ser's model of the economy-society relation. To reaffirm the delicate but distinctive pluralism of Western social systems, Turner (1986a, 1986b, 1987) extends the concepts of inclusion, citizenship, and value generalization from Parsons' theory of social change. In our own efforts (Alexander and Giesen 1987; Alexander 1987a; Colomy and Rhoades 1988) to construct a model of the micro-macro link—efforts that challenge orthodox functionalism in fundamental ways—we have found that Parsons' analytic model provides the only viable foundation for a new synthesis.

This new relevance of Parsonian thought can also be seen in the renewed theorizing about culture and society. It is not accidental, in this regard, that it has been the former students and coworkers of Parsons who have assumed a central role in the revival of macro-cultural studies. Geertz (1973) initiated this "cultural revolution" with his essays in the 1960s, which stood firmly upon Parsons' insistence on the analytical autonomy of the cultural realm. Bellah's (1970, 1973) argument for the relationship between symbolic realism and democratic social integration can also be traced back to key themes in Parsons' normative work. When Eisenstadt criticizes contemporary structuralist approaches to historical and contemporary sociology for their "ontological" rather than analytical approach to culture and society relations (1986), he is drawing from Parsons' theory of the institutionalization of values. Archer's (1985, 1988) ambitious metatheory of culture begins from the Parsonian distinction between culture, action, and social system. Robertson's (1987) work on global culture issues in critical respects (Robertson 1982; cf. Robertson 1988) from Parsons' concepts of value generalization and societal community. In Alexander's (1982b, 211–296; 1984, 1988b) own effort to construct a model of cultural structures and processes, he, too, begins with the analytic differentiation of symbolic patterns from the exigencies of social and personality systems.

We have indicated here the convergence between the interests that mark the current, third phase of sociological thought and some of the earlier concerns of Parsonian work. We have demonstrated this coincidence in terms of the desire for theoretical synthesis and the new attempt to theorize culture. The third element of this third phase—the clearly changing ideological environment of sociology—will be taken up below, in the context of a more systematic discussion of neofunctionalist work. Up until this point, we have noted the convergence between developments in neofunctionalism and more general movements in the theoretical field, but we have not looked at specific arguments or tried to construct the details of a new disciplinary map.



Before taking up these tasks, we need a framework within which to consider issues of disciplinary conflict and change.

## SOCIAL SCIENCE AS DISCOURSE AND RESEARCH PROGRAM<sup>5</sup>

To understand correctly the issues involved in the emergence and decline of theoretical orientations, we must see that social science is neither the fact-bound nor middle-level enterprise that empiricists describe. Social science is organized by traditions, and traditions, whatever their aspirations for rationality, are founded by charismatic figures. At the beginnings of a discipline, powerful intellectual figures are regarded as classical founders (Alexander 1987b); at later points, they are accorded quasi-classical status and treated as founders of powerful schools. Social reality, then, is never confronted in and of itself. Because perception is mediated by the discursive commitments of traditions, social scientific formulations are channeled within relatively standardized, paradigmatic forms. The matrix social scientists inhabit need not be drawn from a single tradition or be wholly of a piece, but inhabit it they must, aware of it or not.

While traditionalism implies habitual behavior, it need not imply stasis or lack of change. In social science, this openness to change is intensified by the universalism of institutionalized standards that mandate impersonal rationality and push against the particularism of a traditional first response. Social science traditions define themselves by staking out theoretical cores that are highly resistant to change. The substantial areas surrounding these nuclei, however, are subject to continuous variation. In ideal-typical terms, changes in the peripheral areas of traditions can be conceived as proceeding along two lines, "elaboration" and "revision." While both lines of development present themselves as loyally carrying out traditional commitments, they differ in the creativeness with which they pursue this task. Because elaborative sociological work proceeds from the assumption that the original tradition is internally consistent and relatively complete, it aims primarily at refinement and expansion of scope. In revisionist work, by contrast, there is a greater sense of the vulnerabilities of the established tradition; in the guise of loyal specification, an often implicit effort is made to address these strains and offer formulations that can resolve them (see, e.g., Alexander 1979a; Colomy 1986).

Elaboration and revision are lines of specification that recur periodi-

cally in a tradition's history, not only in the period of routinization that immediately follows the charismatic founding but in the wake of the powerful reformulations that must emerge if a tradition is to remain intact.<sup>6</sup> It is this latter possibility that points to a third ideal-typical form of theoretical change. Insofar as cores themselves undergo substantial shifts—without abandoning their association with the overarching tradition—there occurs the theoretical activity we will call “reconstruction.” Reconstruction differs from elaboration and revision in that differences with the founder of the tradition are clearly acknowledged and openings to other traditions are explicitly made. Reconstruction can revive a theoretical tradition, even while it creates the opportunity for the kind of development out of which new traditions are born.<sup>7</sup> Finally, of course, traditions can be destroyed. This does not happen because core and peripheral commitments are falsified, but because they have become delegitimated in the eyes of the scientific community. Even in this situation, however, traditions do not so much disappear as become latent; the possibility always remains that they may be picked up once again.<sup>8</sup>

According to this model, then, social science does not grow simply because of the compulsion to understand empirical reality; nor can its growth be measured merely in relation to the expansion of empirical knowledge or conceptual scope. The primary motor of social scientific growth is conflict and competition between traditions. The primary reference points for measuring scientific growth are established by the relations between traditions and by signposts internal to a given tradition itself. Instead of speaking about theoretical or empirical progress *per se*, one must speak of relative explanatory and theoretical success *vis-à-vis* one's own tradition or competing ones.<sup>9</sup>

Elaboration, revision, and reconstruction are concepts that describe the closeness of fit between subsequent theoretical work and original tradition. They do not describe the degree of real advance. Elaboration, for example, may be thin or thick, to redeploy Geertz's ethnographic standards. Traditions may be enriched and elevated by these processes of theoretical change; they may also be impoverished and simplified, robbed of their sophistication and denuded of some of their most powerful intellectual sustenance.<sup>10</sup> If social science change can be progressive, therefore, it can be reactionary as well. It is rare, moreover, for these modes of theoretical development to proceed in either an entirely progressive or reactionary way.

A disciplinary community's switch from one theoretical position to another is determined neither by the theoretical effectiveness and sophistication of the respective positions nor by their objective empirical scope. It is usually motivated, rather, by broad shifts in what might be

called the disciplinary community's "scientific sensibility."<sup>11</sup> Shifts in disciplinary sensibility put different questions on the floor. They place a premium on the development of different modes of discourse. Indeed, it is often only after new discursive commitments are made to an approach that increased theoretical sophistication and empirical scope emerge. It is in this sense that one can speak less of social scientific "development" than of social scientific "movements." Disciplines should not be understood as being organized primarily by specialties defined by their empirical objects of investigation, into Mertonian middle-range subfields like deviance, stratification, or political sociology. The deep structure of a discipline consists of the networks and literatures that are produced by the contact between empirical objects, ongoing traditions, and new disciplinary movements.

By this route we can return to the topic of neofunctionalism. In the phase of routinization that followed the emergence of Parsons' founding work, functionalism was presented as a consistent and increasingly completed theory, and elaboration and revision were the order of the day. In the second phase of postwar sociology, shifts in the disciplinary sensibility delegitimated these efforts and functionalism as a vital tradition came near to extinction. In the emerging third phase, scientific sensibility has shifted once again. In an altered theoretical and historical climate, new questions are being asked. These questions represent opportunities for dramatic disciplinary shift. In response, the functionalist tradition has entered a phase of reconstruction. Neofunctionalism is the result.

To fully elaborate the changes that have occurred within the functionalist tradition would be a complex and detailed task, for one would have to examine developments at every level of the scientific continuum. The discussion can be simplified by examining the process in terms of two basic genres, generalized discourse and research programs. By generalized discourse, we refer to discussions that argue about presuppositions, about ontology and epistemology, about the ideological and metaphysical implications of sociological argument, and about its broad historical grounding. Within the context of research programs, by contrast, such generalized issues are assumed to be relatively unproblematic. What becomes problematic, what propels this mode of scientific activity, is the need to provide interpretations or explanations of specific empirical structures and processes.

The discourse/research program distinction must not be confused with the distinctions introduced above. It is not isomorphic, for example, with core and peripheral concerns. The specific commitments that are pursued by research programs may be considered vital to the core of a tradition. Generalized discourse, for its part, is often directed

to peripheral elements. Thus, in twentieth-century Marxism, in contrast to that of the nineteenth century, presuppositions about materialism and idealism have been considered part of the core; shifts toward idealism are not conceived of as threatening the "Marxist" character of theorizing. As for our model of scientific development, the processes we have identified as elaboration, revision, and reconstruction can occur through both discourse and research programs alike. In practice, it is usually discourse about more general issues that announces and introduces a reconstructive phase, for it is generalized issues that provide a framework within which more specific explanatory concerns can be conceived.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, in our consideration of neofunctionalism, we will focus primarily on the new kind of generalized discourse that has challenged the core. Following that discussion, we will present a brief overview of the research programs that have followed in its wake.

## THE GENERALIZED DISCOURSE OF NEOFUNCTIONALISM

Generalized discourse occurs in both interpretive and expository modes. Via interpretation, theorists treat the work of the founder and other major figures in the tradition as difficult and problematic texts. Interpretive challenges are also mounted against the primary and secondary texts of other classical traditions and against the secondary literature that has developed within the home tradition as well. In the expository mode, by contrast, discourse is conducted on its own terms, general principles are set out and comparative frameworks established. While these modes of generalized discourse can be carried out by different theorists or at different points in the same discussion by a single person, they are connected to one another in an intimate way. No matter how apparently scholastic an interpretive discussion, the broader context of disciplinary struggle ensures that texts will never be considered simply for their own sake. Arguments about the meaning and validity of various texts represent one alternative, and sometimes the most effective one (Alexander 1987b) for engaging in substantive theoretical debate.

Generalized discourse makes arguments within the framework of, and in reference to, presuppositions, models, metamethodological commitments, and *Weltanschauung*, or world views. While it is possible to argue that Parsons took definite positions on each of these elements, we would argue, as neofunctionalists, that on each of these levels Parsons' orientation was ambiguous (Alexander 1983b). In terms of the

problem of action, Parsons committed himself to a synthesis of material and idealist presuppositions; yet he consistently deviated from this professed aim in an idealist way. In terms of order, he aimed at linking individual actions and social structures, but from within his collectivist position he never theorized contingent effort. In terms of Parsons' theoretical model, functional and systems terminology are employed to describe a society of interrelated yet relatively independent parts. None of these are conceptualized as dominant, and equilibrium is considered an analytic reference point for evaluating social systems, not an empirical description of them. When Parsons converted this model into a cybernetic system, however, he tilted toward one set of social system parts, the normative, raising it to a vertical position over another set, the material. He had great difficulty, moreover, in maintaining the analytic status of his model, often conflating the conceptualized ideal of equilibrium with the condition of an empirical society. Finally, there are extremely significant ambiguities in Parsons' ideology or *Weltanschauung*. Over the course of his long career, his ideological outlook shifted from critical to quiescent liberalism. What was a hopeful pessimism in the 1930s and 1940s became full-throated optimism in the 1950s and 1960s as a dedicated social scientist who aimed at constructing general covering laws, Parsons denied the connection of facts and values. Yet his growing confidence in modern, and particularly American, society made his work significantly less sensitive to the darker sides of modernity, to a wide range of depressing but undeniable facts about contemporary life.

What is perhaps most distinctive about the initial phases in the elaboration and revision of a sociological tradition is that they typically do not occur in a discursive mode. If we examine the three or four decades of Parsons' students' works, most of it, whether elaborative or revisionist, takes place within the school's research program. One need only think here of Bellah's *Tokugawa Religion* and *Beyond Belief*, Smelser's *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution and Theory of Collective Behavior*, and Eisenstadt's *The Political Systems of Empires*. In each of these works there is a powerful challenge to an element in the tradition's ambiguous core (Alexander 1979a, 1983b), but it is expressed in the mode of an implicit revision of explanatory apparatus, not in the framework of general discourse.<sup>13</sup>

When generalized discourse does emerge in this initial period, it is almost entirely affirmative, its aim being to explain the intricacies of a difficult text to students or outsiders. Good illustrations of such occasional discursive references are the Devereaux (1961) and Williams (1961) contributions to the Max Black volume on Parsons, various sections in Harry Johnson's (1960) once popular introductory textbook,

and the initial chapters to the seminal books by Parsons' students we have listed above. Only in the waning days of functionalism's initial period, when Parsons came under increasing attack, did consistent exercises in generalized discourse appear. Victor Lidz's (1970, 1972) rejoinders to Albert Syzmanski's (1970a, 1970b, 1972) attacks on the value-laden character of Parsonian theory are a case in point. For the first time, Lidz raised the metamethodological underpinnings of Parsons' work in an explicit way. His rejoinders were brilliant elaborations and generalized defenses of Parsons' value-neutral stance, strictly from within the confines of the technical theory. The editors' introductions to the various sections of the two-volume Free Press festschrift for Parsons can be read in much the same way, as the last attempts by the last generation of "real Parsonians" to develop a general discourse that could affirm, elaborate, and revise the founder's work (Loubser et al. 1976).

Neofunctionalism can be distinguished from functionalism by its effort to reconstruct the core of the Parsonian tradition. Elaborative and revisionist efforts remain; indeed, the emergence of reconstructive efforts have relegitimated these more moderate, internalist lines of development. It is reconstruction, however, that has established the framework for a "neo" functionalism in the contemporary phase. Among those loosely associated with this movement, there is virtually no effort to return to the research program or discourse of the earlier period. A surprisingly large portion of earlier peripheral criticism has been accepted, just as the core itself is being reshaped in a responsive way. From this perspective, neofunctionalism is post-Parsonian. Its aim is to go beyond both the first and second phase of postwar sociology and to construct a new synthesis on the basis of the contributions of each.

It should not be surprising, then, that in contrast to the earlier phase of functionalist theorizing, generalized discourse has been central in the development of neofunctionalist work. Primarily, this has been in the service of reconstructive arguments about the core, but it has appeared also in the more affirmative practices of revisionism and even elaboration. Alexander's (1983b) work has explicitly attacked the idealist tendencies in Parsons' approach to action and argued that this reduction was responsible for many defects in Parsons' work, such as its tendency to see change in teleological terms and its relative slighting of economic rewards and political coercion. In a series of articles and working papers, Gould also sought to reemphasize material factors, in order similarly to reconstruct a more truly multidimensional tradition. His explicit challenge to Parsons remained reserved for his more specific and explanatory work (Gould 1987); in this more generalized do-

main, he chose revisionism (Gould, 1976), arguing that Parsons had issued an "urgent warning" against neglecting the material domain (Gould 1981).

In the initial period of neofunctionalism, the order issue seemed less salient. Here too, however, explicitly reconstructive discourse has strongly emerged. Recently, Alexander (1988c) has sharply criticized Parsons for his failure to bring contingency back into his theorizing of collective order. In response to this "black box" of individual action, Alexander has suggested formulations that are modeled on theories of individual exchange, interpretation, and pragmatic experience. In complementary efforts, Colomy (1982, 1985, 1990a, 1990b) has argued against the lack of attention to open-ended group processes in the functionalist understanding of change; in a series of theoretical and historical papers, he has developed systematic theories integrating work on collective behavior with structural approaches to social differentiation. Motivated by a similar interest to bring the individual back into functionalist work, Sciulli (1986, 1988) has argued that the early and the later Parsons himself understood voluntarism in a manner that emphasized its protean and individualistic qualities. Strongly criticizing Parsons' emphasis on socialization in his middle period work, Sciulli has argued for a convergence between Blumer's understanding of public negotiation and a neofunctionalist theory of public political life. Finally, though Munch's (1981, 1982) early articles on Parsons' neo-Kantian core were couched in the language of affirmative revision rather than reconstruction,<sup>14</sup> they, too, can be seen as a powerful attempt to bring effort and individual will back into the center of functionalist work.

There has also been an efflorescence of general and often polemical discussions about the model level of functional theory. Alexander (1983b) made a series of criticisms about the reification of functionalist and systems reasoning in Parsons' work. He also criticized the conflation between the AGIL divisions in the model and the empirical differentiation of contemporary society. Because these problematic applications of the model made it difficult to avoid the identification of functionalism with stasis and conflation, Alexander called for a return to the more concrete, group-oriented, early-middle phase of Parsons' work, in which the institutional content of a particular social system was clearly differentiated from its abstract mechanisms.

While in Germany it is actually the functionalized Weberianism of Schluchter and the Parsonian Marxism of Habermas that comes closest to this ideal, the German neofunctionalists have also altered Parsons' model in a revealing way.<sup>15</sup> Luhmann (1982), too, has criticized Parsons for reducing the dynamism of systems analysis by reifying it as a fourfold table; with his insistence on the tension between the internal

and external environments of systems, he has developed a more supple and dynamic model.<sup>16</sup> Munch (1987a, 1988) has also changed the model forcefully, renaming the four subsystems in a manner that emphasizes contingency and the ideological and cultural imperative of rational communication.

Powerful and complementary challenges to Parsons' systems model have come from Gould and Colomy. In an ambitious challenge to Parsons, Gould (1985) has argued that functional models, drawn from systems or organicist theories, are necessary but limited. Developmental models must also be employed: abstract sketches of phases through which particular historical societies must pass if specified levels of development are to be achieved. Finally, in an argument that parallels Alexander's criticism of conflation, Gould insists that neither of these models should be confused with the actual structure of historical societies. This is provided by a "structural" model of particular institutional and group relations in a given period. For his part, Colomy (1985) has directed his efforts at altering Parsons' differentiation theory in a neofunctionalist way. He has argued that differentiation should be treated as a sharply delimited model; it is a "master trend" rather than an actual empirical description, much less an explanation for change. Within this altered framework, Colomy has offered a series of specific models of the structure and process of social change.

In the realm of ideology, the most radical break with orthodox functionalism has simply been to make the ideological dimension of this tradition explicit. While arguing for the generally progressive and humanistic thrust of Parsons' work, Alexander has agreed with many of Parsons' critics about some of its conservative features. He himself has sought to politicize functionalism and tie it to the normative issues of the day. In his eulogy for Parsons in *The New Republic*, Alexander (1979b) described Parsons as providing "a sociology for liberals," stressing the normative and critical potential of Parsons' concepts of inclusion, differentiation, and value-generalization. Since that time he has tried to push neofunctionalism in a left-leaning but not radical direction. In an independent contribution to this effort, Colomy (1990c) has discussed this neofunctionalist orientation under the rubric of "critical modernism." Mayhew's (1982, 1984, 1990) work on the centrality of the public in democratic polities elaborates a similar normative-cum-empirical claim, as does Robertson's (1988) developing theory of globalization, which argues simultaneously for a new worldwide cosmopolitanism and for an increased tolerance for national variance, which, he suggests, Parsons' own modernization theory overlooked.

Sciulli and Gould have staked out more radical ideological claims. Operating in the space provided by his voluntaristic interpretation of



Parsons' macrosociology, Sciulli (1989a) has developed empirical criteria for evaluating democratization in his theory of "societal constitutionalism." Arguing that modern industrial societies are threatened by political and economic oligarchies, on the one hand, and by a pacified citizenry on the other, he finds a countervailing force in Parsons' understanding of the increasing importance of collegial, self-governing communities. Gould (1987, 1985) embraces an even more restrictive and critical conception of capitalist political economy, and he has reconstructed a model of contemporary societies whose strains can be alleviated only through the transformation of property relations.

The most ambitious effort to transform disciplinary understandings of the functionalist *Weltanschauung* can be found in Holton and Turner's (1986) work. Describing Parsons as the only major theorist rooted in a society that did not experience the damaging transition from feudalism to capitalism, they argue that he has been the only theorist to conceptualize the positive possibilities of a progressive and stable modernity. Compared to Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, Parsons escapes from nostalgia because he sees the moral and pluralistic possibilities of *Gesellschaft*.

An alternative option is to consider the possibility that *Gesellschaft* permits authentic expressions of values, rather than the "false," or "fetished" forms of consciousness as diagnosed by exponents of the Frankfurt school. In addition, value-pluralism under *Gesellschaft* need be considered neither as a series of narcissistic worlds, in retreat from the public domain, nor as an irreducible battle of Nietzschean wills. Rather it can be conceived as generating a normative basis for the orderly resolution of pluralism and diversity. (Holton and Turner 1986, 215-216)

In the second phase discourse of postwar work, Parsons was a conservative because he was not a radical. Arguing against the picture of Parsons as "an apologist for that kind of crass economic individualism that is often taken to underlie the capitalist economy," Holton and Turner portray Parsons' optimism, to the contrary, as reflecting "a profoundly moral and political identification with liberal democratic values" (216-217). In their view, it is Parsons, not his second phase critics, who now must be seen as occupying the higher moral ground.

Parsons emerges from most confrontations with his critics as both morally engaged and politically committed, not as an apologist for capitalism, but as an anti-elitist and anti-Utopian social theorist. This standpoint moves us beyond the ambivalence of the classical sociologists toward modernity. . . . In all these respects Parsons' social theory announces the end of the classical phase of sociological thought. (218)

Earlier in this paper we spoke of the significance of the new ideological and political environment in generating the contemporary, third phase of sociological work. For neofunctionalism, the effect of this altered environment has been most powerfully crystallized by Holton and Turner; indeed, they present an argument that simply could not have been made at any earlier point. While offered as an affirmative elaboration and revision of the original rather than its reconstruction, their argument can take this position only because it is neofunctionalism, not orthodoxy, that now provides the framework for discourse in the Parsonian mode.<sup>17</sup> The powerfully reconstructive effects of their Parsons' portrait helps to renew the kind of critical modernism that is necessary to reform and sustain a liberal and democratic society.

The interpretive mode of generalized discourse is intimately tied to the expository mode we have just discussed. We have earlier pointed to the affirmative quality of the orthodox Parsonians' elaborations and revisions of their founder's texts. More interesting, perhaps, was this group's approach to classical texts outside the home tradition. Parsons (1937) had set the tone in *The Structure of Social Action*, when he stressed convergence within the work of his "group of recent European writers." That Parsons had himself constructed this convergence through powerful interpretation was never acknowledged, nor was the crucial fact that what they converged with was Parsons' emergent social theory rather than their own. Parsons often "revisited" Durkheim, Weber, and Freud, as his theory continually evolved. He needed to incorporate new elements from their work, but he could do so only by presenting these elements as if they converge with the new elements in his own. Between those theorists admitted to the classical canon of sociology there could be no fundamental strains, nor could there be any unresolvable strains between these theories and Parsons' own. This affirmative approach to interpretation—its expression as elaboration and revision—reached its apogee in Parsons and his collaborators' *Theories of Societies* (1961). In its depiction of the convergence of the entire history of social thought with action theory, this work was either extraordinarily naive or disingenuous.

Still, interpretive discourse did not flourish in the orthodox phase of functionalism any more than did discourse in the expository mode. When Parsonians engaged in interpretation, moreover, they modeled their discussions on Parsons' convergence model. Bellah's (1959) penetrating early article on Durkheim as a differentiation theorist is a case in point. Smelser's (1973) edition of Marx, Eisenstadt's (1971) of Weber, and the Lidz brothers' (1976) treatment of Piaget are similarly powerful examples.

Interpretation in the contemporary phase has, by contrast, been much

more central and aggressively reconstructive. We have indicated above how Parsons' own work has been the object of several neofunctionalist critiques. In discussing classical works outside the home tradition, neofunctionalists have adopted a decidedly un-Parsonian line. They have stressed divergence rather than convergence, for they have need of theoretical resources beyond the home tradition itself.

We will take up the neofunctionalist dialogue with the classics of macrosociology first. Where Parsons not only neglected but in effect tried to repress Marx, Alexander (1982b) makes Marx paradigmatic of the material and instrumental theorizing that he criticizes Parsons for trying to ignore. He (1983a) sets Weber against Parsons in much the same way, arguing that Parsons underplayed the objectification that for Weber was the necessary underside of individuation. In a similar vein, Alexander (1988b) has stressed the symbolic and culturalistic elements in Durkheim, playing them off against the culturally reductionist tendencies in the orthodox functionalist concentration on "value." Gould (1987) has treated Marx, Hegel, Keynes, and Piaget in much the same way, stressing their distance from Parsons in the first instance, and the need to incorporate their "antifunctionalism" in the second. His theory of revolution and radical collective behavior has emerged from this reconstructed mix. For Sciulli (1985), the absence that interpretation must overcome is Habermas. While stressing in a revisionist mode the areas of convergence between Parsons and Habermas, he has also interpreted Habermas in a manner that exposes the self-limitations of Parsons' orthodox work. He has interpreted the legal theorist Lon Fuller in the same reconstructive way. Both Habermas and Fuller (Sciulli, 1989, 1990) provide critical resources for Sciulli's neofunctionalist theory of societal constitutionalism.

There has also emerged within neofunctionalist interpretation a significant dialogue with the central texts of the microsociological tradition. Because Parsons did not recognize the problem of contingent action, it is not surprising that his relation to these traditions never went beyond ceremonial remarks on their convergence with his own. For neofunctionalism, by contrast, it has become important to understand the divergence between microsociology and the orthodox tradition, in order to develop theoretical resources for opening neofunctionalism up to contingency in the ways we have discussed above.

Alexander (1985b, 1987c, 195-280) has emphasized, for example, a collective thrust in Mead, Peirce, and Goffman, and also in the phenomenological theory of Husserl, Schutz, and the early Garfinkel, arguing that such theoretical resources have been largely ignored by these traditions' contemporary interpreters. While Munch (1986, 1987b) and Sciulli (1988), by contrast, do not refer to this thrust in their interpre-

tations of interactionist theory, all three theorists agree that neofunctionalism must draw upon these traditions in order to incorporate considerations of contingency and voluntarism. These theoretical appropriations are openly presented as remedies to the acknowledged shortcomings of orthodoxy, and defended as a means by which the more original, creative, and synthesizing project of neofunctionalists can be advanced.

Within the new environments of the third postwar phase, and in response to the opportunities and provocations provided by the new generalized discourse, there has been an outpouring of neofunctionalist research that, if this term is taken in its broad rather than restricted sense, can be called a research program. Earlier functionalist research was guided by a reaffirmative strategy, envisioning a single, all-embracing conceptual scheme that tied areas of specialized research into a tightly wrought package. What neofunctionalist empirical work points to, by contrast, is a package loosely organized around a general logic and possessing a number of rather autonomous "proliferations" and "variations" at different levels and in different empirical domains (Wagner 1984; Wagner and Berger 1985).

## A NOTE ON RESEARCH PROGRAMS IN NEOFUNCTIONALISM

In the preceding sections we have described the emergence of neofunctionalism, treating it as a central feature of the third phase of postwar sociology and identifying the intellectual and socio-political grounds for its resurgence. Neofunctionalism's discursive elements—its presuppositions, ontology, epistemology, and ideological implications—have been outlined. But neofunctionalism is more than generalized discourse. It also seeks to explain particular facets of the social world.

The most developed neofunctionalist research programs have emerged in the areas of social change, cultural sociology, political sociology, mass communications, feminist studies, the professions, and economic sociology. While a detailed examination of these programs cannot be presented here, an overview highlighting the most prominent contours of this work is in order.<sup>18</sup>

Much of neofunctionalist research has charted a decidedly revisionist course. Studies of structural differentiation, for instance, revise orthodox functionalism's approach to change in four ways: 1) they supplement descriptions of the "master trend" toward increasingly specialized institutions by developing models of patterned departures

from that trend (e.g., Alexander 1981; Lechner 1984, 1985, 1990; Tiryakian 1985, 1990; Champagne 1990; Colomy 1982, 1985, 1990a, 1990b; Hondrich 1990; Surace 1982; Smelser 1985, 1990; Colomy and Tausig 1988); 2) they move beyond purely systemic and evolutionary explanations of differentiation toward accounts that stress contingency, concrete groups, conflict, and social movements and collective behavior (e.g., Eisenstadt 1980; Colomy 1985, 1990a, 1990b; Colomy and Rhoades 1988; Colomy and Tausig 1988; Rhoades 1990; Mayhew 1990; Alexander 1980; Smelser 1985); 3) they recognize that the orthodox emphasis on adaptive upgrading, inclusion, and value generalization represent but one configuration among a much broader array of the possible outcomes of social differentiation (e.g., Luhmann 1982, 1990a, 1990b; Alexander 1978, 1983b, 1984; Eder 1990; Rhoades 1990; Munch 1981, 1982, 1983, 1987a, 1988, 1990a, 1990b; Sciulli 1985, 1990b; Mayhew 1984, 1990); 4) they replace a complacent liberal optimism concerning the process and consequences of differentiation with a critical modernism that is more attuned to the dark sides that are ineluctably related to it (e.g., Sciulli 1990a, 1990b; Mayhew 1984, 1990; Munch 1987a, 1988; Colomy 1990c).<sup>19</sup>

Conventional functionalist research into the culture-society relation has also been critiqued and revised. The orthodox approach posited a cultural system neatly institutionalized in the social system through values that the personality internalized via socialization. Archer (1985, 1988) argues that this model is guilty of "downward conflation," for it holds that an integrated cultural system engulfs the social and personality systems. Alexander (1984) suggests that this conventional approach to institutionalization, which he calls the cultural specification model, represents only one form culture-society relations can assume. He proposes two additional modes. In cultural refraction, conflicting social groups and functions produce antagonistic subcultures that continue to draw upon a value system that is integrated at the cultural level. In cultural columnization, by contrast, there are fundamental antagonisms in both the social and cultural systems, interest groupings have no significant common beliefs, and genuinely antagonistic political cultural groupings emerge.<sup>20</sup>

In their effort to develop a broadly neofunctionalist feminist sociology, Miriam Johnson and her colleagues (Johnson 1975, 1977, 1981, 1982, 1988a, 1988b; Johnson et al. 1975, 1981; Gill et al. 1987; Stockard and Johnson 1979) reappropriate and revise elements of the Parsonian legacy others have left behind. They reconceptualize the traditional distinction between instrumentality and expressiveness, the structural differentiation model of the family, socialization, and Parsons' particular application of his culture, society and personality model to account

for the origins and reproduction of gender inequality. When considered in isolation, each of their reconceptualizations can be accurately characterized as revisionist. Taken together, however, it is readily apparent that this research program is animated by a reconstructionist thrust. It aims not at describing how the family "produces" human personalities capable of assuming adult roles in a complex, differentiated society—the orthodox Parsonian issue—but at explaining the radically different question of how a cultural and social system subordinates and distorts a particular class of personalities.

Johnson and her colleagues not only revise and reconstruct Parsons, they also wed their reconfiguration of orthodox functionalism to other intellectual traditions, especially psychoanalysis and feminist scholarship. Jeffrey Prager (1986) has extended and revised the functionalist treatment of political sociology in an analogous way. He draws on Parsons' discussion of a differentiated societal community to devise a neofunctionalist conception of the public sphere. He ties that structural concept to the more concrete and processual symbolic interactionist approach that emphasizes the content, dynamics and effects of actual public discourse. With the aid of this powerful theoretical link between functionalism and interactionism, Prager's investigation of Ireland's movement toward democracy demonstrates not only how democratic institutions operate, but also how they are created in the first place.

In addition to its reconstructionist and revisionist thrust, neofunctionalist research also contains an elaborationist current. For instance, Robertson's (1985, 1986, 1987, 1990; Robertson and Chirico 1985; Robertson and Lechner 1985) analyses of the relationship between globalization and cultural change carries the Parsonian theme of value generalization to the level of the world system. At the same time, because he is sensitive to the wide diversity of cultural responses engendered by globalization, Robertson revises Parsons by eschewing the notion that these changes amount merely to a global version of cultural specification and normative integration.

More recently, such elaborative research has occurred less against the backdrop of earlier orthodox functionalism, but in relation to the rapidly developing body of neofunctionalist theory itself. Rothenbuhler (1986a, 1986b, 1987, 1988a, 1988b, 1988c, 1988d, n.d.; Peters and Rothenbuhler 1988) draws on general statements of the neofunctionalist position as well as on neofunctionalist treatments of culture to fashion an impressive research program in mass communications. Drawing upon highly abstract neofunctionalist discussions of the micro-macro link, Colomy and Rhoades (1988) develop a series of ideal-typical models and causal hypotheses to explain educational change in the late nine-

teenth century United States. In a similar way, Lehman (1988) uses Alexander's analysis of presuppositions about action and order to generate a new and more complex empirical research program on political power and the state. Rambo's (1988) work in economic sociology elaborates neofunctionalist treatments of culture, while Edles (1988) draws on the same neofunctionalist literature to analyze Spain's civil religion and its recent transition to democracy.

In sum, while a central part of neofunctionalism has been carried out at the level of general theory, there is a complementary, and rapidly growing, body of more empirically oriented work. This work supplements the reconstructionist thrust of neofunctionalist metatheory with several significant revisions of orthodox functionalism and has even begun to elaborate neofunctionalist general theory itself.

## CONCLUSION

Our task in this paper has been to demonstrate that neofunctionalism is delivering on its promissory notes. Today, neofunctionalism is much more than a promise; it has become a field of intense theoretical discourse and growing empirical investigation. We have conducted this demonstration within the framework of a nascent model of social scientific knowledge. Because sociological knowledge is generated by traditions, the most compelling criteria for evaluating scientific progress is comparative, in terms of different phases in the life of a particular tradition and in terms of the relations between competing traditions. By making such comparisons we can measure social scientific progress, although, to be sure, this is progress in a postpositivist sense.

In this paper, we assessed neofunctionalism's advances primarily by comparing them to the older orthodoxy. Toward that end several terms—reconstruction, expropriation, revision, and elaboration—have been employed. Our thesis has been that, at both discursive and more empirical levels, neofunctionalism has produced significant advances relative to earlier renditions of the tradition. We have tried to show that the reconstructions, revisions, and elaborations that compose neofunctionalism have been directed precisely at those areas of the orthodox tradition that critics, both internal and external, earlier identified as theoretically or empirically suspect. If neofunctionalism represents theoretical progress—and we think it does—this reflects its ability to produce satisfactory reconstructions and revisions in response to critiques that once threatened to destroy the functionalist tradition altogether.

Of course, theoretical progress cannot be judged on internal grounds

alone. Comparisons must also be made with competing traditions. Certainly the "critics of functionalism" will respond with new kinds of ripostés. Some will try to ignore the vast changes that neofunctionalism has wrought. Others will recognize that fundamental shifts have occurred and will reformulate the nature of their critiques. We eagerly await these reformulations. The conventional debates have become stale and dry. We are in the midst of a sea change in sociological theory. Old alignments are dissolving; new configurations are being born. "Neofunctionalism" cannot be stuffed back into the old box.

## NOTES

1. Now that the second volume of Habermas' *Theory of Communicative Action* has been translated into English (Habermas 1987), the seriousness of his encounter with Parsons will clearly be seen. We would argue, in fact, that the framework Habermas employs in both volumes of this work can be seen as a neo-Marxist revision of Parsonian concepts.

2. But not revised enough, from our point of view. Ritzer, for example, simply places "neofunctionalism" as the concluding section to "functionalism," following it with sections on conflict theory and so forth. We will argue below that the vitality of neofunctionalism casts doubt on this conventional division of theory texts. Neofunctionalism has taken as its project to open itself up to social conflict and contingent interaction. Insofar as it does so, then certainly "conflict theory" and "ethnomethodology" cannot be presented as responses to contemporary functionalist work. These reified divisions were never theoretically accurate ones (Alexander 1982a), but they did represent at least the historical self-consciousness of the profession in what we will below call the second phase of postwar sociology. At this point, we believe, they do not even do that. Sociology is embarked upon a third phase of postwar development which is in the process of making these textbook divisions obsolete.

3. After making this claim, we want immediately to stress that neofunctionalism, while a genuine intellectual movement, is not an integrated theory. There is much disagreement between those who we would classify under this rubric, and some, in fact, do not welcome the general designation as such. We will talk more openly about this unformed and emergent character below.

4. We have limited our discussion only to developments within what American sociologists consider to be the matrix of their discipline. Outside of it, of course, there are also extremely important illustrations of this third phase. In France, for example, we would point to the poststructuralist movement, where cultural structures—discursive formations (Foucault 1984), cultural capital (Bourdieu), and political narratives (Lyotard 1984)—have replaced material ones.

5. We are drawing here from a work on sociological theory in preparation for the Prentice-Hall *Foundations of Sociology* series.

6. After Marx, there are the elaborations and revisions of writers like Engels, Kautsky, Otto Bauer, Labriola, and others. These specifications were interrupted, however, by the more radical reconstructionist efforts of the World War I generation, theorists like Lenin, Gramsci, Lukacs, Korsch, and others. Subsequent specification of Marxism often occurred within these reformulated Marxian traditions of Lenin-Marx, Gramsci-Marx, Lukacs-Marx, etc., whether or not the reconstruction was



explicitly recognized. Later in the history of the Marxian tradition, thinkers like Sartre, Althusser, E. P. Thompson, and those associated with the Frankfurt School introduced a new round of more radical reformulation.

7. Thus, theorists who created new traditions were at an earlier point usually important reconstructors of the traditions out of which their new theories were formed. Marx is a case in point. In the early 1840s he was a "Young Hegelian," which was a radical, quasi-religious movement of Hegel's last students to reopen the master's theory to critical strands of the Enlightenment and even to socialist thought. When Marx encountered political economy, he felt compelled to leave the Hegelian fold and created historical materialism. Interesting parallels can be drawn for Parsons. For the first ten years of his scholarly life, through the very publication of *The Structure of Social Action*, he seemed devoted to reconstructing the classical sociological traditions. He became more ambitious only at a later point in his career. One should be careful not to see the ideal-typical sequences—elaboration-revision-reconstruction-tradition creation—as a scale of theoretical contribution. Most of the greatest minds in social science, for example, never make the transition from reconstruction to tradition creation, and many who have made the transition were much the worse for it. The works of Von Wiese are long forgotten, but the writings of Gramsci, Lukacs, Mannheim, and Mauss continue to be intently pursued.

8. Vico's work represents just such an example from classical traditions, Spencer's from the sociological.

9. For an excellent discussion from a very similar point, see the detailed critiques Bryan Turner makes of the efforts at theoretical cumulation that comprise the collection of ASA miniconference papers Jonathan Turner (1989) has collected in *Theory Building in Sociology*. Bryan Turner (1989, 132) concludes: "In sociology, we appear to have more dispersal and fragmentation of approaches than cumulation and organized growth, and these theoretical fragmentations are products of institutional fragmentation and competition between intellectuals for audience and patronage. . . . Analytical rupture rather than theory cumulation is the decisive aspect of sociology's history in the twentieth century."

10. Think here of vulgar Marxism, which actually encompasses most of what has been accepted as legitimate Marxist work, or of the reductionistic and mechanistic applications of Durkheim and Weber, which have been offered by some of their most devoted followers. It need hardly be said that Parsonian functionalism had its own large share of simplifiers.

11. For a discussion that highlights the concept of "sensibility" in the investigation of the shifting commitments of a major contemporary theorist, see Alexander (1986).

12. This is by no means always true, however. Bernstein's empirical challenge to the reigning Marxist proposition about the falling rate of profit—an issue of research program rather than generalized discourse—struck at the core of the tradition and initiated the reconstruction that came to be called the "social democratic" tendency in Marxism. This tendency was accompanied, however, by a great deal of generalized discourse.

13. Bellah's essays for "symbolic realism" would have to be read as an exception in this regard, they were discursive, generalized arguments. Yet they remained revisionist. Rather than critically confronting Parsons' cultural theory, Bellah argued symbolic realism was one clear implication of it.

14. In this regard, Munch's articles of this period, and some of his later work as well, resemble Alexander's (1978) own earlier discursive defense of Parsons. Though clearly engaging in revision, Alexander did not choose to confront Parsons' theory in a reconstructive way. In the late 1970s, the second phase of postwar theorizing was still a vigorous rising tide, and those sympathetic to Parsons' tradition confronted

his critics in the polemical spirit of the time. It may have been Parsons' death in 1979 as well as the changing theoretical and political climate that allowed a less defensive and more reconstructive posture to be assumed.

15. It might be useful, in fact, to introduce the concept "expropriation" to refer to the incorporation by one tradition of key elements of an opposing tradition in order to elaborate, revise, and reconstruct the home tradition itself. Thus, while Schluchter and Habermas express a sharp antipathy to functionalism, in this third phase of theorizing they have expropriated Parsons' theory in creative and quite thorough-going ways. Expropriation is one sign of the expansionary phase of a tradition.

16. The problem for Luhmann is quite different: he has not developed a theory of institutions, groups, and concrete interaction. The differences between Luhmann's and Munch's work, on the one hand, and the American and English neofunctionalists', on the other, is a topic which must soon be taken up. The differences stem less from differences in national traditions, perhaps, than from the contrasts in the disciplinary environments within each emerged. In Germany, neither conflict nor micro sociology ever became as strongly institutionalized.

17. "Since the death of Talcott Parsons in Munich in 1979, it has become clear that a significant re-appraisal of Parsons' sociology and his impact on modern sociology is well underway. . . . This volume . . . may appropriately be regarded as part of this new wave of re-evaluation" (Holton and Turner 1986, 1). The movement beyond affirmative revision is demonstrated by the fact that in his review of Holton and Turner's book in the *American Journal of Sociology*, Lechner (1988)—himself an active theorist in the reconstructionist movement—offers the criticism that it is "too positive" about Parsons!

18. For a detailed discussion of these research programs, see Alexander and Colomy (forthcoming).

19. For a much more detailed analysis of recent developments in differentiation theory, see Colomy (1986, 1990c). For discussions that situate the emergence and development of differentiation theory in a broader historical and theoretical context see Giesen (1988, 1990) and Alexander (1988d).

20. Our discussion here has focused only on the primordial issue of culture-society boundary relations. Once the possible attenuation of this boundary relation has been acknowledged, however, a more internalist and less socially circumscribed understanding of the cultural system can begin to be developed. In his efforts to incorporate semiotic and hermeneutic models, and to elaborate the "late Durkheimian" approach to cultural studies, Alexander's research has recently moved in this direction (1988b). See also Edles (1988) and Rambo and Chan (1988).

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