

nal justice systems (we had insane criminals, too) corrupt as well as bureaucratically irrational. All the grand oppositions—hospital and community, biology and psychology, freedom and constraint, custodial staff and professionals, liberals and fascists—were turned round and recombined and ironized and undercut till one could have few “politics” other than a kind of personal loyalty to the people one knew at first hand to be humane people.

For me, then, the enormous agenda of issues formed in my college years was focused into this narrower task of understanding mental illness and society’s reaction to it. Here alone did I study politics, and the practical lesson I eventually drew was that coherent political positions—general categorizations of the kind Michael Burawoy used without a second thought—didn’t make sense. The papers I wrote on madness and mental hospitals in the mid-1970s all took a broadly humanistic and traditionally ethnographic stance: trying to understand, trying to reconcile, seeking a basis for a comprehensive view in a kind of rigorous common sense. They are filled with passion, but the passion of humanism, not of rigorous political analysis. Not until more than two decades later, in the last chapter of *Chaos of Disciplines*, did I attempt to turn this understanding into something like a general analysis. And it is quite significant that Michael—by then a much-admired old friend—liked the rest of the book but thought I was out of my depth in that chapter.

As the war faded, feminism loomed as the new issue. The public transformation of gender rules was echoed by private renegotiations all over America. And like most men of that era, I fought out an understanding of feminism on the intimate turf of a long-term relationship. But the evolutions of this private politics would take us far beyond the 1960s. Nonetheless, remembering feminism points to the useful closing insight that my experience of the 1960s was explicitly masculine. The draft was a man’s problem. Women could commiserate, support, ignore, despise. But they couldn’t live the draft experience, and they were, in any case, increasingly preoccupied with their own oppressions.

In the 1960s, I grew up. I was not happy about it.

The Sixties and Me

From Cultural Revolution to Cultural Theory

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There are currents that run through the affairs of men and women. They wash over us, cleanse us, and push us head over heels into some unknown place. They knock us over, wear us out, and sometimes almost kill us. They leave us gasping in their wake and grateful for being left alive.

The Sixties¹ marked one of those gigantic rebellions against this-worldly asceticism that can make you think twice about “modernity.” Even modernity’s greatest champions knew that the rationalization of the world comes at a price.

1. See the fascinating discussion by Eleanor Townsley, “The Sixties’ Trope,” *Theory, Culture, and Society* 18, no. 6 (2001): 99–123.

Max Weber heard the sirens of this-worldly mysticism, eroticism, aestheticism, and fundamentalism but thought they could be resisted. Karl Marx believed that communism would get the answers right and provide an alternative modern world. Émile Durkheim put his faith in the secular sacred. Georg Simmel looked to art. Talcott Parsons saw the other side of the pattern variables, and the strains modernity placed on men, but believed that balance could be preserved by hearth and home. Jürgen Habermas looked nostalgically at the life world but thought it could be insulated from instrumental rationality and segregated in the ethical sphere. Modernity's critics had an easier time. Friedrich Nietzsche condemned abstract morality, yearning for myth and Dionysus. While condemning the rational public as surveillance, Michel Foucault pursued the private cultivation of the self, finding release through ecstatic, transgressive experience.

These awarenesses of the doubleness of modernity have never been organized into a systematic theory of the emotional and moral contradictions that simultaneously fuel modernity and threaten to destroy it. But the contradictions are there, nonetheless, in the real life of modern societies for all to experience and sometimes even to see.

The cost of rationalization is a tumultuous unconscious. Individuals slip into the unconscious during dreams; they are motivated by it when they are unable to maintain logical control, and stick to the reality principle, when they are awake. The social unconscious is revealed in the fantasies and nightmares that propel popular symbolic life, in movies and television dramas about love and sex, death and violence; in painted and sculpted representations of primordial archetypes, transcendental tranquility, and chaotic passion; in novels about adventure beyond control, intimacy beyond conflict, and remorse without end; in music that is apocalyptic beyond imagination, ecstatic beyond reason, and sublime beyond our most luxuriant dreams.

The dreams of popular culture are the messengers of the social unconscious. They reveal the underside of the modern order. This underside is real. It may not take an institutionalized form, but it provides constant temptation, promising transcendence beyond good and evil. It fuels social and religious movements and hopes, not only for civil but personal repair, for social justice and love.

There are times in human history when the social unconscious breaks boldly into the light of day. Such outbreaks mark wars and revolution but, as well, the great public movements of moral compassion and religious awakening that try to set things right in a fundamental way. Inchoate and diffuse, these moments point to alternative social orders even if they do not clearly define them, much less in-

dicating how they can be achieved. For all their unrealism, these outbreaks provide the fuel that societies need to create and procreate. Rationalization can kill. Social life needs to be fed by the social unconscious to survive.

The Sixties marked a great outbreak of the social unconscious. In the last part of the nineteenth century, there had also been enormous waves of anxiety, utopia, and rebellion in response to the ratcheting up of economic rationalization in the bureaucracy-building age. In some national contexts, these outbreaks helped to humanize capitalism and create social democracy. In others, they unleashed the fanaticisms of communism, fascism, and militarism that threatened to destroy civilization, and almost succeeded. Yet, the frenzy of the Second World War created another surge of social rationalization. The postwar settlement upgraded and enlarged rational control. Should it have been surprising, two decades later, that surplus repression in the most modernized societies was becoming difficult to bear?

The Sixties were sparked by specific events and not by such fateful fits of the collective unconscious alone. The civil rights movement opened up dreams of interracial harmony. The horrendous war in Viet Nam polluted America, the vanguard of modern rationalization, and triggered a vast social movement for peace. There was also the emergence of a new kind of music, rock and roll, which fueled a youth culture and allowed private visions of love and violence to take on new public texture and economic might.

These secular rhythms and historically specific events entered the life cycle of my generation at a formative stage. Our socialization in the quiet 1950s and early 1960s had nurtured an ambition to fit in and to get ahead. We postwar baby boomers, like our parents, were models of this-worldly asceticism and disciplined self-control. Yet, as the popular culture of that time reveals, we also experienced the anxiety and the romantic yearning that marks the doubleness of modern life.

During the Sixties, the social unconscious reached up and grabbed us by our collective throat. It shook us violently and turned our world upside down.² Our parents had deceived us, our teachers were oppressors, our political leaders criminals, our criminals saints. The old world was dying, a new one was being born. My generation experienced the Sixties as a liminal state. Teetering at the edge of

2. Binary references to the dystopia of apocalypse and the utopia of salvation were continuous themes in contemporary efforts to understand the Sixties — e.g., Harold Hayes, ed., *Smiling through the Apocalypse: Esquire's History of the Sixties* (New York: Esquire, 1969); and Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

the old times, we lived in a *communitas* that adumbrated the new age, when the fragmented, isolated, and rationalized world of modernity would be left behind.

I was a Sixties communitard, a noncommissioned foot soldier in this new generational army of social and personal salvation, struggling with “my brothers and my sisters” to bring about the new world that was already being made. Fresh from the ascetics and romantics of Los Angeles public high school life, I arrived at Harvard in 1965, just in time to catch the generational tidal wave as it gathered strength. Experiencing drugs, sex, and rock and roll in real time, my modernist dreams of grace through achievement faded away. So did my once powerful sense of the realness of social reality, of the legitimacy of social power, of the reasoned basis for the social and cultural structures of modern American life. The abyss had opened up. Everything holy was profaned; all that was solid was melting into air. I experienced the social construction of reality. I became an intellectual to understand this experience in a more cognitive way.

Liminality ruled my sophomore year. My most rigorous education was provided by fellow editors at the *Harvard Crimson*, and my most coherent writing appeared in its feature pages. The year is frenetic in memory, an often unhappy, sometimes ecstatic blur. When spring came, I threw open my living room windows to blare Beatles and Stones songs into the Lowell House yard.

In my junior year I began to stick my head above the ether and breathe the intellectual air. With the bemused good will of my social studies tutor, Mark Roberts, I structured an individual tutorial around writings on social utopia. Paul Goodman, Herbert Marcuse, David Riesman, and Kenneth Keniston gave me my first sense of what social theory might try to be—utopian theory to match my liminal social and personal life, intellectual imagination stretching to connect with emotional and moral need.

In my senior year, I joined Students for a Democratic Society, or SDS as it is probably more commonly known, and sunk baby teeth into critical social thought. Disrupting a Harvard faculty meeting to protest the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC), we received a “disciplinary warning.” We threatened a “sleep in” against Harvard’s restrictive female visiting hours, but they were relaxed before we could try it out. We organized a New Left study group, which met in Michael Kazin’s room. We wondered whether there was a social theory that could tie things together, fold them into our angst and hope, and tell us how radical social change would make it all go away. In these intense, occasional meetings, I encountered the concepts of cultural contradiction and postindustrial society. Such

ideas seemed to explain our unhappy feelings and rebellious actions. We felt angry because we were fodder for the new class, which was being trained to produce commodities that nobody would need.

I experienced the aesthetic pleasure of an intellectual system. The same theory could explain the liberating qualities of the new world and the oppression of the old. This pleasure was so vivid that I became a lifelong theorist. It made me thirsty for even bigger things. I would eventually give up Marxism, and later Parsonianism, but I would remain nostalgic for a grand theory, the kind that C. Wright Mills, he of the pragmatic school of American radicalism, roundly despised.

That one could tie normative hope and empirical realism neatly together hooked me for life. Sociological theory became Sixties manqué. Intellectual ratiocination would provide an antidote to social rationalization. The commitment to intellectual play remained long after the commitment to a world organized by social play disappeared. Properly disciplined and rationalized, it would eventually provide a pathway from liminality to adulthood. Eventually, it would even pay.

The Sixties made me into a social theorist. It created the space not only to make the world anew but to think it anew as well, and to think about thinking it. I shared this experience with many others, not only in the United States but around the world. But my Sixties was not only representative. Distinctive experiences in my life course separated me from some of the influential themes of my intellectual generation, even as I remained deeply connected to others. This dialectic of separation and connection led me to cultural and democratic theory, which I continue to pursue today.

The cultural and political radicalism of the Sixties focused on emotions and morality, on the structure and restructuring of internal life. Subjectivity was everything, and “changing” or “raising” consciousness were the mantras of the day. When I became a Marxist, it was decidedly of the New Left kind.³ Materi-

3. For some representative texts of this very particular Marxism, see, e.g., Martin J. Sklar, “On the Proletarian Revolution and the End of Political-Economic Society,” *Radical America: An SDS Journal of American Radicalism* 3, no. 3 (1969): 1–41; The New Left Review, eds., *Western Marxism: A Critical Reader* (London: New Left Review Editions, 1977); Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975); Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Alex-

alism was our enemy not only in society but also in social theory. We associated orthodox, economic Marxism with Soviet communism, and we considered the latter to be an object lesson in social rationalization, not its alternative. Commodity fetishism was the force against which we fought, not the poverty of scarce commodities. Weber's iron cage and bureaucratic rationality were the main dangers, not a particular kind of distributive regime. This was "Western Marxism" with a vengeance, the very embodiment of the theoretical perspective at which Perry Anderson would later take aim but that he and his friends in the *New Left Review* had done so much to spawn.⁴

We conceived "interest" in qualitative terms. Making revolution meant engaging in intensive dialogue, passionate social drama, and radical reinterpretation. We could not rely on objective contradictions, on necessity produced by economic force. Georg Lukács had discovered reification, moving critical thought from Marx to Marcuse. Antonio Gramsci had discarded *Das Kapital*, replacing its economic laws with ideological hegemony. Jean-Paul Sartre connected Marxism with inner subjectivity. André Gorz linked consciousness to a new strategy for labor.⁵

New Left Marxism taught that the objective only seemed so. The economic and political were infused with subjectivity. If everything in bourgeois life were ideologically constructed, then everything was up for grabs. If it could be reinterpreted, then it could be redefined. If these new readings were dramatized, they could penetrate people's inner lives. If consciousness changed, there would be a new world of sentiment and feeling, and institutional transformation after that.

These foundational beliefs of the Sixties generation stayed with me. They were crystallized in different ways at different times. While the translation into New Left idioms disappeared, the general sensibility retained its feeling and form.

The political and intellectual axes of my personal life always cross cut. My intellectual life was defined by the tension between socialism and liberalism. My

politics revolved around the tension between revolutionary militancy and democratic social reform.

At Harvard, I was initiated into the intellectual culture of critical liberalism. Motivated by intense antagonism to the Viet Nam war and a personal commitment to civil rights, I audited Michael Walzer's lectures on democratic obligation and civil disobedience. Watching this deeply moral thinker use abstraction to grapple with the most pressing problems of my time made a deep impression on me. It introduced me to notions of mutual respect and solidarity that would later inform my work on civil society. I also closely followed H. Stuart Hughes's elegantly crafted lectures on twentieth-century intellectual history, which began with the discovery of intellectual cosmopolitanism in his *Consciousness and Society* (1958) and concluded with the claim that Marcuse embraced a primordialism that threatened to undermine it. At the time, I couldn't entertain the latter point, but I was nonetheless fascinated by the method. Hughes's books and lectures implanted in my mind a model of theoretically informed historical text interpretation that would later sustain my first book, *Theoretical Logic in Sociology*.

My most ardent academic enthusiasms at Harvard were reserved for the humanities, from the ancient Greeks to the Reformation and Renaissance, nineteenth-century novels, and the postwar avant-garde. The one big thing I had learned in public high school was New Criticism. Interpreting novels, plays, and paintings were what I enjoyed most during my college days. The continuity with my later interest in cultural methods is clear.

Under the influence of Walzer's and Hughes's lectures, my tutorial in utopian social theory, and my gradually increasing involvement in radical politics, I did begin to get some sense for social science. My undergraduate honors thesis in social studies, with Barrington Moore, focused on the American labor movement in the late nineteenth century, though I had yet hardly read Marx.

My argument was that labor radicalism had been muted at a critical juncture not by liberal cooptation but by the subjective impact of antilabor violence. This rather blunt, simplistic thesis was informed by an interpretation of inner life. The idea had come to me while reading Samuel Gompers's autobiography, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor* (1920). It struck me that the centerpiece of that bildungsroman was Gompers's vivid account of his narrow escape from horse-mounted militia during a labor strike in 1877, the "year of violence." If he had not leaped into a sewer and pulled a manhole cover over his head, Gompers believed, he would have been beaten, possibly even killed. This psychological trauma, generated by imminent violence, remained with Gompers for the rest of

ander Cockburn and Robin Blackburn, eds., *Student Power: Problems, Diagnosis, Action* (London: Penguin, 1969); Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1964); Albrecht Wellmer, *Critical Theory of Society* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1971).

4. Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: New Left Review Books, 1976).

5. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (1924; reprint, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1971); Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from "The Prison Notebooks"* (New York: International Publishers, 1971); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963); and André Gorz, *Strategy for Labor* (Boston: Beacon, 1967).

his life. It seemed to provide a subjective explanation for his commitment to nonpolitical, economic unionism. In *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, I formalized this early intellectual gut feeling in a more rigorous way.

During this last year at Harvard, my political experience became defined by the sharpening tension between revolutionary militancy and democratic reform. When I joined SDS, it was already deeply split between New Left and Progressive Labor Party (PLP) factions. Initiates into the New Left caucus, like me, still read the Port Huron statement, the animating and not very Marxist principle of which was that people had the right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. This political maximum defined the spirit of the Sixties' New Left activists. It was because we were animated by this spirit that we would spend hours talking things through at meetings. Our politics were a passionate commitment to discursive and disruptive engagement with the community outside. By contrast, PLP students viewed themselves as labor militants, and created an organization called the Worker Student Alliance. Rather than following the early Marx, they emulated bolshevism. They were a cadre, following policies decided by a central committee in secret meetings. We idolized Marcuse and Sartre; their gods were Lenin, Stalin, and Mao.

During a tense and chaotic meeting that stretched long into a night in April 1969, members of Harvard SDS struggled over the question of whether taking over a Harvard administration building would help to stop the war. The majority voted against initiating such a militant confrontation. A few hours later, in the darkness of dawn, PLP militants who had lost the vote stormed Harvard's central administration building. They pulled the deans from their offices and threw them violently down the stairs. Fearing the revolution would pass us by, the New Left caucus sucked in their pride and joined the occupation. Administrative missteps, police brutality, and a restive youth culture transformed this political misadventure into an act of liberation. The rest of the academic year became political carnival. Silk-screened poetry festooned the Harvard yard. We experienced our own Prague spring. It was Sixties' liminality for the last time.

That summer, after graduation, these impulses were pushed aside. With other communards, I traveled to Chicago for the convention that split SDS. New Left and PLP factions postured militancy in what was considered a "prerevolutionary" time. Crude slogans were created, and scripts chanted in competitive counterpoint by militants on both sides. The PLP faction kept time by waving Mao's little red books. Mirroring their sectarian militancy, the Weathermen emerged

on the New Left side. "Days of rage" followed. Militants trashed the streets and clashed with police at Chicago's Democratic convention the year before.

Meanwhile, I had returned to Boston to participate in the Roxbury collective. We would provide collateral support to the Black Panthers in Boston's most impoverished neighborhood. These feelings of good will were not reciprocated. Our summer commune suffered several break-ins, one at gunpoint, when I was away. My friends postponed graduate school for the sake of the imminent revolution. Some went underground. The spirit of the Sixties took a dive. I decided not to stay.

Was it social conformity, good sense, or an increasing hunger for intellectual life that convinced me not to dismiss Berkeley's offer to train me in sociology? When I traveled out West to join the program, it was in some disarray. Even as I attended Neil Smelser's year-long lecture course in sociological theory, which was at once inspiring and intimidating, I began a countereducation in Marxist analysis. We formed a radical study group to explore alternative perspectives and to steel ourselves to raise critical points in class. I enthusiastically attended Richard Lichtman's courses in Marxist philosophy, which powerfully presented the Hegelian reading. I joined the junior wing of James Weinstein's radical new journal *Socialist Revolution*. Under the tutelage of John Judas and Eli Zaretsky, we studied *Kapital* intensely in the sweltering summer of 1970.

This radical intellectual education did not neatly articulate with the fragmentation and polarization of political life. Our sociology collective certainly did its part during street demonstrations, the rousing performances that unfolded inside tear-gas clouds. But we held back from the window breaking and systematic "trashing." We felt increasingly separated from the hardened members of the revolutionary vanguard. Driven by its own internal dynamics, but also by frustration with the triumph of backlash politics and Richard Nixon, the once New Left had become old. It was increasingly polluted by Stalinism and sectarianism. Desperate forms of militancy and acts of revolutionary terrorism displaced politics.

I watched this transformation with horror and fear. It drove me to try radical politics of a different kind. We engaged in more traditional organizing projects on our own. Our sociology collective traveled to Los Angeles to offer our services to the workers striking the Goodyear Tire plant. We confronted their trade union leadership and produced a wall poster that provided an alternative intellectual framework for their struggle.

We did not find any converts, and the first doubts about our radical criticism began to form in my mind. There were still some good days ahead. When President Nixon and Henry Kissinger ordered the bombing of Cambodia, in spring 1970, student groups organized massive demonstrations and a national strike. Berkeley was effectively shut down. Fred Bloch and I organized about one hundred sociology undergraduates, graduate students, and even a few scattered members of the faculty into the Fremont Project. For three months we canvassed this working-class community of General Motors workers. Our goal was to organize them against the war and to show them its connection to capitalism, whose exploitation they would be naturally against. While an hour's drive from Berkeley, Fremont was actually a universe away. The workers' evident and mystifying satisfaction with the American way of life deeply impressed me. Was commodification as alienating as the good book said? Or had capitalist culture brainwashed the workers in a hegemonic way?

I began to think more about culture during my second graduate-school year. Even as I continued to sophisticate my Marxist self, particularly with Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser, I exposed myself to the seduction of the classics of "bourgeois" social science. Leo Lowenthal's course on Durkheim raised big questions for me. I drew strained analogies between hegemony and conscience collective, but I began to worry about how collective culture could actually be. Was it plausible to link its origins, much less its effects, only to class interests and control? Was culture not more autonomous? Did it not have symbolic processes that exerted their own, specifically cultural effect? Robert Bellah's seminar on Weber sharpened these questions. Weber seemed the daring antidote for Marx. He suggested that the cultural superstructure of capitalism actually had preceded the base and that deep and abiding concerns about the meaning of life exerted far-reaching effects not only on culture but on social structure as well.

I spent the summer after that second year with *The Structure of Social Action*. I understood Parsons's great early work as providing an analytic framework that clarified the issues classical thinkers had raised in a more substantive and historical way. It was the idea of "voluntarism" that still compelled me. New Left Marxism had understood but hedged its bets with notions of ideology, false consciousness, and economic determinism "in the last instance." Parsons showed that you couldn't go home again. He was the bridge over which I walked from Marxism to sociology.

Such concepts as actor, movement, institution, and role had taken their initial meanings in terms of New Left Marxism. What I now understood was that clas-

sical and modern sociology could allow for their subjectivity but explain it in a more sophisticated way. My last piece of Marxist work, written during my third year, expressed this transition. It was called "Reproduction or Socialization?" I came down on the sociological not on the Marxist side. Faruk Birtek, editor of the *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, decided not to publish this earnest confrontation of Marxism and sociology. I remain grateful to him for that.

I experienced the crisis of faith. I could no longer believe in the narrative of revolutionary salvation. The capitalism/socialism split seemed like a simplistic lie. Mao's cultural revolution now looked repulsive. Stalinism was something I began to understand generically for the first time. I became fascinated by Fabianism and social democracy. On election day in 1968 I had marched down Massachusetts Avenue in Cambridge to "vote with my feet" against formal democracy. On election day in 1972, I spent the chilly afternoon and the cold hours of dusk canvassing for McGovern. I was immensely disappointed at the scale of his defeat.

Which made Nixon's fall during Watergate that much more satisfying. It was also instructive in a theoretical way. This evil-doing, polarizing conservative, elected by a record landslide, was forced from power because he had acted like a political radical. He had stepped outside the rules of civil society, secretly deployed political cadre, and personalized power in an antidemocratic way. Public opinion forced him from office, fearful that the author of the "Saturday Night Massacre" threatened to pollute American democracy's sacred core. The discourse of American civil society had most powerfully expressed itself in a vivid secular ritual, the Senate Watergate Hearings in the summer of 1973. It was not material interest but civil interest "rightly understood" that, in the year following, fueled the massive but peaceful transfer of power to congressional Democrats, and to the Democratic presidential candidate two years later.

It took years of reading and thinking to find a way to articulate what I experienced during those critical years — more Parsons and Weber, the late Durkheim, semiotics, cultural anthropology, poststructuralism, and democratic theory. But social performance, civil society, and cultural sociology have remained my interests ever since those times. These ideas were planted by the seeds of the Sixties. The Sixties had to end before the plants could grow and bear fruit.